The Role of Women in Politics in Indonesia: Critical Review of Islamic Law

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Abstract: The role of women in politics in Indonesia continues to be a relevant topic in social and religious discourse. Although women's participation in politics has increased since the reform era, their representation is still far from the ideal proportions. This phenomenon raises various questions about the obstacles faced by women, especially in the context of a strong patriarchal culture and religious interpretations that often limit women's space for movement. This study aims to analyze the role of women in Indonesian politics through a critical review of Islamic Law. This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected through literature studies involving classical and contemporary Islamic literature, relevant laws, and empirical data related to women's participation in Indonesian politics. The results of the study show that normatively, Islam provides space for women to contribute in the public sphere, including politics, by emphasizing the principles of justice and equality. However, its implementation in the Indonesian context is still influenced by conservative religious interpretations and unsupportive social structures. In addition, factors such as lack of access to political education, gender stigma, and lack of institutional support also reinforce these barriers. This study recommends a more inclusive reinterpretation of religious texts and the strengthening of affirmative policies to increase the role of women in politics. With this effort, it is hoped that a fairer and more participatory political ecosystem will be created, in line with Islamic and democratic values.
Keywords: Women, Politics, Indonesia, Islamic Law, Participation

Abstrak: *Peran perempuan dalam politik di Indonesia terus menjadi topik yang relevan dalam diskursus sosial dan agama. Meskipun partisipasi perempuan di ranah politik telah meningkat sejak era reformasi, representasi mereka masih jauh dari proporsi yang ideal. Fenomena ini memunculkan berbagai pertanyaan tentang kendala yang dihadapi perempuan, terutama dalam konteks budaya patriarki yang masih kuat dan interpretasi agama yang kerap membatasi ruang gerak perempuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran perempuan dalam politik Indonesia melalui tinjauan kritis terhadap Hukum Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis. Data dikumpulkan melalui studi kepustakaan yang melibatkan literatur keislaman klasik dan kontemporer, undang-undang yang relevan, serta data empiris terkait partisipasi perempuan dalam politik Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara normatif, Islam memberikan ruang bagi perempuan untuk berkontribusi di ruang publik, termasuk politik, dengan menekankan prinsip keadilan dan kesetaraan. Namun, implementasinya dalam konteks Indonesia masih dipengaruhi oleh interpretasi agama yang konservatif dan struktur sosial yang tidak mendukung. Selain itu, faktor-faktor seperti kurangnya akses pendidikan politik, stigma gender, dan minimnya dukungan institusional turut memperkuat hambatan tersebut. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan reinterpretasi teks keagamaan yang lebih inklusif serta penguatan kebijakan afirmatif untuk meningkatkan peran perempuan dalam politik. Dengan upaya ini, diharapkan tercipta ekosistem politik yang lebih adil dan partisipatif, sejalan dengan nilai-nilai Islam dan demokrasi.*
Kata Kunci: *Perempuan, Politik, Indonesia, Hukum Islam, Partisipasi*

Introduction

In recent decades, the position of women in Indonesian politics has become a subject of intense discussion. Although tremendous progress has been made in empowering women to participate in politics actively, several difficulties remain that prevent them from fully participating. This raises crucial considerations about how the Islamic legal perspective views the role of women in politics and whether these beliefs may synergize with modern democratic norms. Indonesian women have traditionally played a significant part in the struggle for independence and national development.[1] Figures including Kartini, Dewi Sartika, and Fatmawati represent women's struggles for their rights. However, social facts suggest that women's engagement in modern politics remains limited. According to General Elections Commission (KPU) data from 2019, women make up just about 20.8% of the total members of the Indonesian

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[1]Lily Zubaidah Rahim, *Muslim Secular Democracy: Voices from Within* (New York: Springer, 2013), p. 122–45.

House of Representatives, even though Law Number 10 of 2008 concerning Elections mandates a 30% female representation ratio.[2] This figure depicts a disparity between expectations and reality on the ground.

The public's reaction to the growing role of women in politics has been divided. Most people support women's participation in politics, but some are suspicious, believing that politics is a man's domain.[3] This viewpoint is frequently influenced by the patriarchal culture that remains prevalent in certain regions of Indonesia. According to the results of an Indonesian Survey Institute survey, as reported by Kompas.Com, 45% of male respondents felt that women should focus on household issues rather than pursue a career in politics. Meanwhile, 60% of female respondents believe that females are equally capable of leading and contributing to political decision-making.[4]

Experts have varying perspectives on this issue. According to M. Yogi Riyantama et al.'s research, Sarah Silaban, an academic in the field of politics and gender, believes that the primary barriers faced by women in politics in Indonesia are gender stereotypes, a lack of structural support, and limited access to political education. She underlined that affirmative policies, such as quotas for women's representation, must be complemented with efforts to strengthen women's political capacity and empowerment.[5] Meanwhile, Azyumardi Azra believes that women's roles in politics are compatible with Islamic teachings as long as they do their tasks properly and responsibly.[6]

Feminist and social justice theories offer a useful framework for understanding these processes. Liberal feminism, for example, emphasizes the significance of providing equal opportunities for men and women, particularly in politics.[7] In this perspective, the battle to increase women's representation in politics is consistent with social justice, which requires equal distribution of

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[2]Siti Nurhayati, "Perempuan dalam Pemilu 2019, Antara Harapan dan Kenyataan," https://www.kpu.go.id/berita/baca/7829/Sebanyak-575-anggota-DPR-RI-2019-2024-terpilih-resmi-dilantik-dan-diambil-sumpahnya-pada-1-Oktober-2019-lalu.-Dari-jumlah-itu-sebanyak-463-orang-80-52-persen--adalah-laki-laki-dan-112-orang--19-48-persen-perempuan.

[3]Admin, "KemenPPPA Dorong Keterwakilan Perempuan Dalam Politik Melalui Seminar Nasional 'Suksesi Suara Pemilih Pemula Untuk Pemilu 2024,'" Keterwakilan Perempuan dalam Politik, 2023, https://www.kemenpppa.go.id/index.php/page/view/NDgzOQ=.

[4]Kompas Cyber Media, "Survei: Perempuan Ingin Ikut Partisipasi Politik Demi Generasi Penerus," KOMPAS.com, March 2, 2023, https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/03/02/23593111/survei-perempuan-ingin-ikut-partisipasi-politik-demi-generasi-penerus.

[5]M. Yogi Riyantama Isjoni et al., "Kesetaraan Gender Mendorong Wanita Sebagai Pemimpin Yang Berpengaruh Dan Berdaya Saing," *Aspirasi : Publikasi Hasil Pengabdian Dan Kegiatan Masyarakat* 1, no. 6 (November 15, 2023), p. 135–44.

[6]Azyumardi Azra, *Membongkar Peranan Perempuan Dalam Bidang Keilmuan* (Jakarta: JPPR, 1990), p. 70.

[7]Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 33–50.

rights. Hanna Pitkin's theory of political representation is also pertinent, as it distinguishes between descriptive representation (based on attributes like gender) and substantive representation (based on interests and ambitions).[8]

Women's political roles have a solid foundation in Islamic law. The Qur'an and Hadith offer numerous signs of women's ability to contribute to the public realm. One commonly cited argument is Surah At-Taubah verse 71, *"The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong establish prayer give zakāh and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise."*

This verse highlights that men and women share equal duties in creating a good society. Furthermore, women in Islamic history have displayed leadership and decision-making qualities. For example, Queen Balqis, mentioned in Surah An-Naml, was a smart leader who could make strategic judgments for the benefit of her people. The Prophet Muhammad SAW's hadith also includes respect for women, as related by Aisha RA on women's involvement in all facets of social life. However, cultural and societal conditions frequently influence how Islamic law is interpreted. In numerous Muslim nations, like Indonesia, there is disagreement over the extent to which women can participate in politics. Some ulama claims that women should not take certain positions, while others argue that there is no Islamic prohibition against women entering political office if they meet the criteria of ability and integrity.[9]

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of women in Indonesian politics using a critical Islamic law approach. This study examines how Islamic law might empower women in politics while maintaining ideas of justice and equality. This study will also emphasize the structural barriers that women confront in politics and provide strategies to boost their participation. In reality, this research has significant consequences for policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations. First, policymakers must increase the execution of the 30% quota for women's representation by providing training and resources to help women enter politics. Second, political parties must take an active role in recruiting and developing female cadres for key positions. Third, civil society organizations must continue to push for gender equality and educate the public to dispel harmful perceptions about women.

In the global context, boosting women's presence in politics is a component of the Sustainable Development Agenda (SDGs), particularly Objective 5, which focuses on gender equality. Indonesia, being the world's biggest Muslim population, bears a moral responsibility to serve as a role model

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[8]Hanna F. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (California: University of California Press, 2023), p. 8–25.

[9]Imam al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam al-Sulthaniyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1996), p. 54–55.

in promoting women's participation in politics based on inclusive and progressive Islamic principles.[10] Women's political participation in Indonesia reflects social progress and promotes Islamic values of justice and equality.[11] This requires collaboration between Islamic law, public policy, and public awareness. This work is not merely women's responsibility, but also a collective responsibility to establish a more just and inclusive society.

The Concept of Leadership in Islamic Law

Leadership in Islamic law has emerged as an intriguing topic of research in the fields of Islamic jurisprudence and current Islamic thinking. One frequently disputed term is wilayah (authority), which is historically considered as men's right to take leadership positions.[12] This view is based on Qur'anic and Hadith writings, as well as interpretations of ancient ulama who lived in a certain socio-cultural environment. However, this meaning is not fixed. Within the framework of Islamic law, there is leeway for reinterpretation that considers the context of the times and societal realities.[13]

One of the traditional arguments about the exclusivity of male leadership refers to the verses of the Qur'an, such as Surah An-Nisa verse 34, *"Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them [lightly]. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand."*

This verse is often used as a basis that men have greater responsibility in leading, both in the family and in society. In addition, a hadith narrated by Abu Bakrah states that:

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى عَنْ عُيَيْنَةَ حَدَّثَنِي أَبِي عَنْ أَبِي بَكْرَةَعَنْ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ لَنْ يُفْلِحَ قَوْمٌ أَسْنَدُوا أَمْرَهُمْ إِلَى امْرَأَةٍ

"A people who hand over their affairs to a woman will not be lucky " (HR. Bukhari, No. 4425).

[10]Bandy X. Lee et al., "Transforming Our World: Implementing the 2030 Agenda Through Sustainable Development Goal Indicators," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 37, no. 1 (September 1, 2016), p. 13–31.

[11]Amina Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam," *Praktyka teoretyczna*, no. 08 (2013), p. 249–62.

[12]Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Quran: Tafsir Al-Quran bagi orang-orang yang berpikir* (Bandung: Mizan, 2017), p. 83.

[13]Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Literal interpretations of this hadith are frequently used to justify limiting women's leadership roles, particularly in the public domain. However, contemporary academics offer a fresh perspective that emphasizes the significance of comprehending religious texts in their context.[14] Muhammad Abduh, for example, stated that the Qur'an promotes the values of justice and human equality. He believes that texts about leadership should not be viewed in isolation, but rather in light of Islamic universal principles such as justice and welfare. Abduh highlighted in his view that women have the same intellectual and spiritual abilities as males, and so have the right to participate in leadership.[15] Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, a well-known professor of current Islamic law, contends that women's leadership roles are limited by ijtihad rather than qat'i. He claimed that the hadith about the failure of a people led by women must be interpreted in context, specifically the political circumstances in Persia at the time. According to him, the hadith was not intended to be a blanket restriction on women becoming leaders, but rather a critique of an unequal leadership system. In his book, Fiqh al-Dawlah, Al-Qaradawi states that Islam does not differentiate between the rights of women and men in the political field as long as they have competence and meet the criteria for leadership.[16]

Riffat Hassan, a Muslim feminist researcher, contends that many traditional conceptions of leadership and women's responsibilities are founded on patriarchal readings of religious scriptures. She emphasizes the necessity of deconstructing narratives that limit women's roles by returning to the Qur'an's fundamental concepts, such as tawhid (God's oneness) and Khilafah (human leadership on earth), which apply to all humankind, regardless of gender.[17] She believes that women have the same right to lead as men as long as they match the competency standards. This viewpoint is even more pertinent when considered in light of modern society's demands for the active engagement of all individuals, including women, in politics and leadership roles. Modern fatwas from institutions such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) acknowledge that women can hold public office if they meet the conditions and contribute positively to society.

Leadership in Islamic law is not a fixed idea but can change depending on the demands of the period. Traditional interpretations that limit women's leadership positions are based on unique settings, but recent ulama demonstrates

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[14]Ahlan Ahlan, "Reinterpretasi Hadis Kepemimpin Perempuan (Kritik Hermeneutika Amina Wadud)," *Ushuluna: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 8, no. 1 (December 27, 2022), p. 62–76.

[15]Muhammad Abduh and M. Rasyid Ridha, *Tafsir Al-Manar* (Mesir: Dar Al-Manar, 1954), p. 193.

[16]Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, *Fiqih Dawlah dalam Perspektif al-Qur'an dan Sunnah* (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 1997), p. 135–40.

[17]R. Hassan, "Women in Islam: Qur'anic Ideals versus Muslim Realities," *Planned Parenthood Challenges* 15, no. 2 (1995), p. 5–9.

that Islam's universal principles promote women's equality and involvement in the public sphere. Understanding religious scriptures holistically and contextually leads to the conclusion that women have equal rights to participate in political and social leadership.

Constitution and Positive Law of Indonesia

Indonesia as a democratic country provides a strong legal basis for women's involvement in politics, as mandated in Article 27 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution (UUD). This article guarantees equal rights for every citizen without discrimination to participate in government.[18] In this context, women's involvement in politics is not only a matter of gender justice but also part of an effort to create inclusive and representative governance. Women's involvement in the political sphere is often faced with deep-rooted cultural and structural challenges.[19] The traditional view that women belong in the home remains a significant barrier to many women's political participation. According to Bourdieu, habitus refers to how dominant societal norms and structures impact individual behavior. In the framework of Indonesian politics, patriarchal norms have generated inequity, preventing women from obtaining leadership positions.[20]

To overcome these impediments, the Indonesian government has implemented affirmative action laws such as female quotas in political parties and parliament. Law Number 2 of 2008, regulating Political Parties, compels political parties to provide at least 30% female representation on their parliamentary candidate lists. This strategy tries to establish more equitable conditions by allowing women to enter the political arena, which has traditionally been controlled by men.[21] However, the effectiveness of this program is determined not only by the quantity but also by the quality of women's political participation.

Pitkin's theory of political representation distinguishes three types of representation: descriptive, substantive, and symbolic. Women's representation in politics is frequently limited to descriptive measures, such as the presence of women in numbers or quotas. However, substantive representation, i.e., women's active participation in policymaking that advocates for gender

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[18]Yerobeam Saribu, "Tinjauan Konstitusional Pasal 27 Ayat (1) UUD 1945 Tentang Persamaan Kedudukan Di Depan Hukum Pada Proses Penangkapan Bagi Seseorang Yang Diduga Melakukan Tindak Pidana," *Lex Administratum* 6, no. 1 (2018).

[19]Ahlan, "Reinterpretasi Hadis Kepemimpin Perempuan (Kritik Hermeneutika Amina Wadud)."

[20]Pierre Bourdieu, "Distinction A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste," in *Inequality* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 170–72.

[21]Aziza Aulya, Andi Pangerang Moenta, and Hamzah Halim, "Perempuan Dan Politik: Menakar Kebijakan Affirmative Action Dalam Sistem Kepartaian," *Amanna Gappa*, November 23, 2022, p. 126–36.

concerns, requires further strengthening. In this scenario, individual capacity and political institutional support are critical to boosting the effectiveness of women's positions in parliament. Criticism of the implementation of affirmative action policies shows that women who are elected through gender quotas are often less politically empowered.[22] They face pressure from political parties that are still dominated by patriarchal structures. In a study conducted by Rai and Spary, it was found that although affirmative action policies were able to increase women's participation in politics, non-inclusive party structures often limited their influence in decision-making.[23] Therefore, internal reform of political parties is needed to ensure that women are not only tools for fulfilling quotas but also strategic actors in politics.

Furthermore, political education for women is an essential component in raising knowledge of their rights and obligations as citizens. This education must be carried out methodically and continuously, beginning at the community level and progressing to official institutions.[24] Leadership training programs for women can also be an effective way to boost their capacity and confidence in entering the political arena. As a democratic country, Indonesia has taken steps toward establishing a legislative framework for women's political participation.[25] However, structural and cultural hurdles remain, requiring additional work to ensure that women play an ideal role in developing fairer and more inclusive policies. This transformation requires not only affirmative policies but also cultural change and increasing the capacity of women to be able to compete equally on the national political stage.[26]

Critical Review of Islamic Law on the Role of Women in Politics

Islamic law is frequently invoked to justify restricting women's political participation. However, a contextual view sees the verse as pertinent to Arab socioeconomic realities at the time. Modern interpretations stress Islam's support for justice and equality, allowing women to fully participate in politics.

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[22]Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, p. 60–62.

[23]Shirin M. Rai et al., *Performing Representation: Women Members in the Indian Parliament* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 112–38.

[24]Jumni Nelli, "Eksistensi Perempuan Pada Lembaga Politik Formal Dalam Mewujudkan Kesetaraan Gender," *Marwah: Jurnal Perempuan, Agama Dan Jender* 14, no. 2 (2015), p. 254–76.

[25]Anne Phillips, "Seven Dealing with Difference: A Politics of Ideas, or a Politics of Presence?," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Amerika Serikat: Princeton University Press, 2021), p. 142.

[26]Wery Gusmansyah, "Dinamika Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Kehidupan Politik di Indonesia," *Jurnal Hawa : Studi Pengarus Utamaan Gender Dan Anak* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 2019).

1. Textual and Contextual Perspectives

The textual approach to the verses of the Qur'an is often used to understand religious provisions literally, including QS. An-Nisa: 34, which states that men are leaders (*qawwam*) over women. This approach is often used as a basis for limiting women's space for movement, including in the political realm. This verse reads, *"Men are leaders of women …"*. From a textual perspective, this understanding is translated as a universal provision that men have full authority in leadership, while women are in a subordinate position. However, this interpretation often ignores the historical and social context in which the verse was revealed.

The contextual approach is present to complement the textual perspective by considering the social conditions of Arab society at the time the verse was revealed. At that time, Arab society was a patriarchal community where men held dominance in various aspects of life, including economics, politics, and family.[27] This verse, in its social context, functions more as a response to the social realities of the time, rather than as an absolute prohibition for women to lead or be involved in politics. This approach emphasizes that the verses of the Qur'an often provide guidance that is relevant to the context of time and place so their interpretation needs to be adjusted to changes in the times and more inclusive human values.[28]

Contemporary commentators, such as Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman, emphasize the necessity of considering maqasid al-shariah (the primary goal of sharia) while reading Qur'anic passages. The primary goal of Sharia is to create justice, welfare, and equality. In today's world, limiting women's political participation goes against the concepts of justice and gender equality that are central to Islamic teachings. Muhammad Abduh, for example, claimed that QS. An-Nisa: 34 speaks more about men's economic obligation to women in familial ties than about men's complete power over women in other parts of life. Fazlur Rahman has criticized literal readings that disregard historical context. According to him, the Qur'an is a divine document that provides universal moral principles, but its application must be adjusted to the dynamics of society. He emphasized that verses that talk about gender relations must be seen in the framework of improving social inequality, not to strengthen the patriarchal system.[29]

Modern gender studies theories emphasize how patriarchal societal systems have influenced religious interpretation. Amina Wadud, a feminist

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[27]Imam Syamsuddin Al-Qurthubi, *Al-Jami' Li-Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 1994), p. 217; Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2008), p. 112.

[28]Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 89.

[29]Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 70–85.

Muslim ulama, stresses reading the Qur'an through an inclusive perspective that honors women's roles in numerous fields, including politics.[30] According to Wadud, women have the same potential to lead because Islam bases leadership capacity on individuals' moral characteristics and abilities rather than their gender.[31] This contextual approach has been used practically in Indonesia. Many Indonesian Muslim women have successfully participated in politics, including Megawati Soekarnoputri, the first female president, who demonstrated that women can govern without breaking Islamic principles. This shows that interpretations that limit women's roles are more cultural than theological.

This contextual approach is also in line with the values of modern democracy, where women's participation in politics is not only a right but also a necessity to create a more just and representative system. Therefore, understanding Qur'an. An-Nisa verse 34 Through a contextual approach opens up wider space for women to contribute to politics and leadership, in accordance with the spirit of the Qur'an which supports justice and equality.[32]

2. Women as Leaders in Islamic History

Islamic history records several female figures who played significant roles in politics, showing that Islam does not limit women's contributions to leadership and public affairs. In the Qur'an, the story of Queen Balqis is recorded in Qur'an. An-Naml verse 23-44, is concrete evidence. Queen Balqis was the leader of the Saba kingdom who was known for her wisdom. When Prophet Solomon AS sent a letter to her, she did not immediately make a decision alone. Instead, she discussed it with the leaders of the kingdom to ensure that her decision was right and supported by consensus. This step reflects wise, collaborative, and inclusive leadership. The Qur'an does not criticize her leadership as a woman, but rather appreciates her wisdom which ultimately led her people to believe in Allah SWT.[33]

Another significant figure in Islamic history is Aisha ra., Prophet Muhammad SAW's wife. She played a crucial political role, particularly during the Battle of Jamal. Aisha RA is a notable ulama and one of the most prolific hadith narrators. Although her decision to fight in the Battle of Jamal is still being discussed by experts, her action demonstrates that women may be involved in difficult political and social concerns. Aisha RA's recognition as one

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[30]Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 74.

[31]Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad."

[32]Liky Faizal, "Perempuan Dalam Politik (Kepemimpinan Perempuan Perspektif Al-Qur'an)," *Jurnal Tapis: Jurnal Teropong Aspirasi Politik Islam* 12, no. 1 (2016), p. 93–110.

[33]Syafieh Syafieh and Nurbaiti Nurbaiti, "Potret Karakteristik Kepemimpinan Perempuan (Analisis Semiotika Surat Al-Naml: 23-44)," *Jurnal At-Tibyan: Jurnal Ilmu Alqur'an Dan Tafsir* 3, no. 1 (2018), p. 42–55.

of the most prominent individuals of her period demonstrates that women may participate in public affairs.[34]

Ulama and Islamic ulama have various views on the role of women in politics. Ibn Hazm, for example, stated that women can be leaders in various fields, as long as they meet the qualifications and justice. He based his view on the absence of explicit prohibitions in the Qur'an or hadith that limit women from leading, except in certain contexts, such as leading prayers for men.[35] In contrast, other views such as those put forward by Al-Mawardi in *Al-Nukat wa al-Uyun* tend to limit women from holding the position of head of state, although this view is based more on socio-cultural interpretations than explicit religious texts.[36]

In the present era, gender and Islamic law specialists such as Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud question traditional interpretations that are thought to limit women's duties. They claim that Islam genuinely allows women to participate in politics, as long as the values of justice and public welfare are upheld.[37] According to Maqasid Syariah, women's roles in politics can be interpreted as an effort to safeguard religion, life, reason, lineage, and property, as taught in Islam.[38] If women can help safeguard and fight for these values, there is no reason to prevent them from participating in politics.[39] The role of women in politics can also be viewed through the lens of Islamic feminist theory, which emphasizes gender equality in Islam as a basic principle. Islamic feminism rejects the patriarchal views that are often used to limit women, and instead proposes a reinterpretation of religious texts that are more inclusive and in accordance with the context of the times.[40]

Thus, the emergence of personalities like Queen Balqis and Aisyah RA demonstrates that Islam does not prohibit women from participating in politics. Restrictions on women's political participation are frequently attributable to cultural and patriarchal interpretations rather than Islamic teachings themselves. Women can make major contributions to politics while adhering to Sharia principles by using a fair, authentic text-based, and contextualized approach.

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[34]Ibn Katsir, *Al-Bidayah Wa Al-Nihayah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2005), p. 45–50.

[35]Ibn Katsir, p. 144–45.

[36]Al-Mawardi, *Al-Nukat Wa al-Uyun,* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2007), p. 150–55.

[37]Ahlan Ahlan et al., "Islamic Perspective Gender Concept and Its Relevance to Social Resilience," *Jurnal Pendidikan IPS* 14, no. 1 (2024), p. 197–204.

[38]Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "'Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah': The Objectives of Islamic Law," *Islamic Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999), p. 193–208.

[39]Ibrahim ibn Musa Shaṭibi, *Al-Muwafaqat Fi Usul al-Shariah* (Garnet Publishing, 2011), p. 89.

[40]Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2013), p. 30–40.

This demonstrates that Islam is an inclusive religion that values the potential of all individuals, men and women.

3. Fatwas and Views of Modern Ulama

Islam is a religion that values and respects women's roles and positions in all parts of life, including politics. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi's view, which emphasizes that women have equal political rights as long as they follow scientific and moral conditions, reflects a vision of Islam that is adaptable to changing circumstances.[41] This viewpoint challenges traditional beliefs that limit women's freedom of movement and opens up possibilities for women to participate in creating a more inclusive society.

In Islam, women's participation in politics is nothing new. History records the active role of women in various aspects of public life, such as Sayyidah Aisyah who was not only the wife of the Prophet Muhammad SAW but also an ulama who was an expert in the science of hadith. In addition, Khadijah, the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, was known as a successful businesswoman who supported the Prophet's struggle to spread Islam. This role shows that Islam, from the beginning, did not limit women from contributing to society as long as they had adequate scientific capacity and moral integrity.[42]

Al-Qaradawi's opinions are also consistent with the notion of maqasid sharia, which seeks to preserve five fundamental parts of human life: religion, soul, mind, descendants, and property. In a political setting, women's participation can be viewed as part of a larger endeavor to protect and preserve public interests.[43] This is backed by the perspectives of various contemporary ulama, such as Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridha, who emphasize the significance of reading sharia in a modern context to remain relevant. Furthermore, the theory of Islamic feminism also provides a basis for emphasizing the importance of gender equality in politics. Islamic feminism, developed by figures such as Fatima Mernissi and Asma Barlas, argues that gender inequality often stems from male-biased textual interpretations, rather than from the sacred texts themselves. In this regard, an inclusive and gender-sensitive reading of the Qur'an and Hadith is necessary to ensure that women have equal rights, including in political participation.[44]

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[41]Yusuf Qardhawi, *Min Huda Al-Islam: Fatawa Mu'asira* (Kuwait: Darul Kalam, 2005), p. 438–40.

[42]Fatima Barkatulla, *Khadijah Story of Islam's First Lady* (London: Learning Roots, 2023), p. 32.

[43]Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (Selangor: The Other Press, 2013).

[44]Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil And The Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation Of Women's Rights In Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in*

Challenges for Women in Politics in Indonesia

1. Structural Barriers

Women's lack of access to political education and training, as well as the prevalence of patriarchal culture in political parties, are two major barriers to women obtaining strategic roles in politics. Women's special requirements are frequently overlooked when designing political education and training, making active participation difficult.[45] Women are frequently hampered by the dual responsibility of being workers and housekeepers, which limits their time and energy for participation in training programs. This is worsened by political parties' patriarchal structures, which favor men in crucial responsibilities while relegating women to symbolic roles.[46]

This view is reinforced by Mansbridge, who states that the inclusion of women in politics requires efforts to overcome existing structural and cultural barriers.[47] In a patriarchal context, women are often considered not to have the same capacity as men in leading or making strategic decisions. Meanwhile, institutional feminist theory explains that political institutions often maintain gender-biased norms and practices, which hinder women's access to equal participation. Norris and Inglehart show that an egalitarian political culture is essential to encouraging women's participation.[48]

Furthermore, patriarchal control in political organizations frequently manifests itself in the form of male-dominated choices, with women serving as mere complements to achieve gender quota requirements. This practice fails to recognize women's potential and ability to make meaningful contributions. To address this issue, structural reforms must place women in crucial roles while also guaranteeing inclusive political training that is responsive to women's interests.[49] Thus, removing these systemic and cultural impediments will not only boost women's involvement but also improve the overall quality of democracy.

2. Social Barriers

The perception that politics is a man's domain is based on long-standing social and cultural constructs. In many civilizations, politics is regarded as a

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Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2019).

[45]Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[46]Michael S. Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[47]Jane Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes,'" *The Journal of Politics* 61, no. 3 (August 1999), p. 628–57.

[48]Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Barriers to Women's Leadership: A Worldwide Comparison* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 668–705.

[49]Musdah Mulia, *Perempuan Dan Politik* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2005), p. 57–65.

masculine public domain, while women are assigned to domestic tasks. This viewpoint is supported by gender-biased interpretations of religion, in which religious scriptures are frequently read patriarchally to denigrate women in politics.[50] This reinforces the myth that women lack the skill, ability, and legitimacy to lead.

Simone de Beauvoir, in The Second Sex, revealed that women are often reduced to "the other", so they are not seen as the main subjects in society, including in politics. Meanwhile, Islamic feminists, such as Amina Wadud, emphasize that many religious interpretations of women are based on a patriarchal context that is not in accordance with the spirit of Islamic justice. For example, verses that talk about leadership are often interpreted to exclude women, even though Islam does not explicitly limit women's political roles.[51]

Max Weber's theory of authority also contributes to understanding how conventional authority is frequently exploited to preserve an oppressive status quo for women. Politics is viewed as a domain of power that necessitates "strong" attributes traditionally associated with men, such as boldness and assertiveness, whereas women's "soft" traits are regarded as flaws.[52] However, there is considerable evidence that women have significant political potential. Women's engagement in politics raises the quality of decision-making, particularly on social concerns. Deconstructing this stigma and reinterpreting religious texts are critical to building a more inclusive political arena in which women can contribute fully and without discrimination.[53]

3. Representation Gap

Women's representation in parliament remains a major problem, even after affirmative action legislation has been adopted. In the 2019 election, just 20.87% of lawmakers were women, well short of the 30% threshold set under affirmative action legislation. This demonstrates that affirmative action has not been effective in removing structural, cultural, and political impediments to women's equal participation in politics.[54] According to Mansbridge, women's representation is about more than just numbers; it's about the quality of representation and the diversity of perspectives in decision-making.[55] However, the patriarchal culture that is still deeply rooted in society is often a major

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[50]Partini Partini, "Politik Adil Gender : Sebuah Paradoks," *Jurnal Pemikiran Sosiologi* 1, no. 2 (December 14, 2015), p. 39.

[51]Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 69.

[52]Max Weber, *Economy, and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (California: Univ of California Press, 1978), p. 77.

[53]Zaitunah Subhan, *Al-Qur'an dan Perempuan* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2015), p. 112–18.

[54]Dewi Anggraini et al., "Analyzing The Effectiveness of 30% Gender Affirmative Action Policy in Indonesia," *KnE Social Sciences* 9, no. 23 (July 30, 2024), p. 305–15.

[55]Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women?"

obstacle. Traditional views that place women in the domestic sphere limit their participation in public spaces, including politics.[56] This is exacerbated by the lack of political party support for female candidates, both in terms of finance and campaigning.[57]

Political feminist theory emphasizes the need for women's representation in parliament in order to more accurately reflect women's interests and concerns. Phillips contends that the participation of women in legislative bodies can provide new insights into policy, particularly on reproductive health, education, and gender equality.[58] However, in the Indonesian context, the open proportional election system frequently presents extra obstacles because it favors candidates with significant financial means, many of whom are not women.[59] Efforts to improve women's representation require a comprehensive approach. Political education, economic empowerment, and changes in social norms must be integrated to create an environment that supports women. In addition, political parties need to be more proactive in providing space for women, not only as symbolic candidates but also as leaders to be reckoned with.[60] With these steps, it is believed that women's representation in parliament will achieve the required level, while simultaneously improving the quality of Indonesian democracy.

Strategic Steps in Increasing the Role of Women in Modern Politics
1. Improving Political Education

Gender-based political education and training for women, particularly in rural regions, is a crucial step toward empowering women and strengthening democracy. In this setting, women in rural areas frequently confront structural challenges such as limited access to education, gender stereotypes, and low political representation. Gender-based political education seeks to empower women by raising their awareness of political rights, encouraging active engagement in decision-making, and combating gender-based prejudice that prevents them from participating in the public domain.[61]

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[56] Marsyifa Novia Fauziah, Mochamad Faizal Rizki, and Rachmat Ramdani, "Tantangan Keterwakilan Perempuan Dalam Politik Formal," *Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan Widya Praja* 49, no. 1 (2023), p. 12–22.

[57] Herinto Sidik Iriansyah, "Tantangan Dan Peluang Perempuan dalam Berpolitik di Indonesia : Masyarakat Patriarki," *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan (JIP) STKIP Kusuma Negara* 8, no. 2 (January 15, 2017), p. 1–14.

[58] Phillips, "Seven Dealing with Difference."

[59] Karmanis Karmanis, "Partisipasi Politik Dan Keterwakilan Perempuan di Parlemen," *Mimbar Administrasi Fisip UNTAG Semarang* 19, no. 1 (April 22, 2022), p. 01–15.

[60] Revian Jedha Arhansyah et al., "Analisis Sistem Pemilu Proporsional dan Dampaknya Terhadap Representasi Politik Perempuan di Indonesia," *Aktivisme: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, Politik Dan Sosial Indonesia* 1, no. 3 (June 13, 2024), p. 226–34.

[61] Mulia, *Perempuan Dan Politik*, p. 88–94.

According to Mansbridge, women's political representation is not only important for justice but also to ensure that women's interests are accommodated in public policy. However, this is difficult to achieve without structured political education, especially in rural communities that are often dominated by patriarchal norms.[62] Gender-based political education must be designed inclusively, taking into account the local cultural context, to build women's confidence and skills in understanding the political process and participating in it.

Paulo Freire's theory of social transformation is relevant in this context, where education becomes a tool to free individuals from oppressive structures. Political training for women can be a medium to create critical awareness, helping them understand the relationship between gender injustice and public policy.[63] Having this awareness, women may play an active role in promoting more inclusive legislation.

Furthermore, community-based initiatives, as described by Cornwall and Brock, demonstrate that women's empowerment is more effective when they participate actively in the collective learning process. Rural women can learn how to form networks, organize groups, and fight for their rights through conversations, simulations, and advocacy techniques.[64] Thus, gender-based political education is critical for fostering a more equal and inclusive society.

2. Revitalization of Islamic Legal Interpretation

Reviewing the gender-biased interpretation of Islamic law is an urgent need to realize justice, which is one of the cores of maqasid sharia. Maqasid sharia aims to protect five main aspects: religion, soul, mind, descendants, and property, which include all of humanity without gender discrimination. However, in practice, the interpretation of Islamic law is often influenced by the patriarchal socio-cultural context that gives rise to gender bias, thus harming the noble goals of Sharia.

The maqasid sharia approach offers a theological basis for reinterpreting Islamic law contextually, taking into account contemporary social realities. For example, *Auda in Maqasid al-Shariah* as Philosophy of Islamic Law emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to understanding Sharia texts, namely by looking at the ultimate goal of the law, not just its textuality. This allows for a more inclusive interpretation of women's rights in the areas of

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[62]Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women?" p. 629–31.

[63]Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), p. 43–45.

[64]Andrea Cornwall and Karen Brock, "What Do Buzzwords Do for Development Policy? A Critical Look at 'Participation', 'Empowerment' and 'Poverty Reduction,'" *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 7 (October 1, 2005), p. 1043–60.

family, education, and work.[65] Progressive ulama, such as Asghar Ali Engineer and Fatima Mernissi, assert that many texts of the Qur'an are actually oriented towards women's empowerment, but are often misunderstood due to literal and ahistorical readings.[66] For example, the passage on male leadership (qawwamah) is sometimes misinterpreted as male superiority over women, whereas in reality, the context is financial duty and protection. Reinterpretation based on maqasid results in a more just understanding, with gender relations based on equality and cooperation.

Furthermore, the implementation of maqasid sharia supports the eradication of regulations that are no longer applicable to modern culture. Discrimination in inheritance distribution can be reinterpreted through social justice principles while remaining true to Islam's fundamental ideals. Thus, the maqasid sharia approach becomes an important tool for presenting Islamic law that is responsive, humanistic and promotes gender equality.

3.   Collaboration with Women's Organizations

Increasing collaboration among the government, women's organizations, and religious institutions to foster an inclusive political environment is a critical step toward achieving gender justice and equality in politics.[67] This collaboration is required because these three factors have a critical role in formulating policies and generating room for equal political involvement for women.[68] The government must develop and implement policies that promote gender equality, such as laws that provide women more opportunities to participate in politics and decision-making.[69]

Women's organizations, with their extensive networks and experience in women's empowerment, can provide a rich and critical perspective on existing policies. They have the ability to advocate for women's rights and ensure that women's voices are heard in the political process. According to Martha Nussbaum in the Capabilities Approach theory, women's empowerment is not only about giving them opportunities but also ensuring that they have the

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[65]Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah as Philosophy of Islamic Law* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2022), p. 57–63.

[66]Asgharali Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women, and Modern Society* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2005), 52; Mernissi, *The Veil And The Male Elite*, p. 29.

[67]José Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited," in *Christentum Und Solidarität*, ed. Christian Spieß, Hermann-Josef Große-Kracht, and Hermann-Josef Große Kracht (Switzerland: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008).

[68]Donna J. Sullivan, "Gender Equality and Religious Freedom: Toward a Framework for Conflict Resolution," *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 24 (1992 1991), p. 795.

[69]Ahlan et al., "Islamic Perspective Gender Concept and Its Relevance to Social Resilience."

ability to access and utilize existing opportunities.[70] Thus, women's organizations can play a vital role in promoting equality and advocating for policies that benefit women.

On the other hand, religious organizations play an important influence in shaping society's attitudes about women in politics. Many religions, including Islam, preach gender equality, however, fundamentalist interpretations frequently limit women's responsibilities in society. However, religious organizations can be change agents if they can interpret their teachings progressively, as evidenced by the ideas of personalities such as Amina Wadud, who pushes for an inclusive interpretation of religious scriptures. The combination of these three factors has the potential to produce a more inclusive and equitable political environment in which women may play an active role, not just as participants but also as decision-makers.[71] Through an inclusive approach founded on the notion of social justice, a more equitable and balanced political environment can be formed, promoting the development of a more prosperous and sustainable society.

Conclusion

Normatively, Islam allows women to participate in the public domain, including politics, by emphasizing the concepts of justice and equality. This can be observed in teachings that emphasize women's roles as change agents and decision-makers, as evidenced by Islam's early history, which placed women in diverse positions of leadership and social engagement. However, the practical application of these concepts in Indonesia is frequently complicated by conservative religious interpretations and social structures that continue to limit women's roles. Religious views that emphasize gender roles often discourage women from becoming more involved in politics. Furthermore, structural issues contribute significantly to women's limited access to the political sphere. One of the most significant challenges is a lack of access to political education, particularly in communities with strong patriarchal traditions. The gender stigma connected to women interested in politics exacerbates the situation, thus many women are hesitant to participate actively. These barriers, combined with a lack of institutional support that can assist women in obtaining prominent posts, serve to entrench gender disparity in politics. This study suggests reinterpreting religious texts to create a more inclusive space for women by reinforcing Islamic values that promote equality in all aspects of life, including politics. Furthermore, establishing positive measures that promote women's political engagement, such as quotas in the legislature, and developing more equal political education are critical steps toward overcoming these barriers. These

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[70]Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 43.
[71]Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 75.

efforts are projected to result in a more just and participatory political ecosystem that is consistent with Islamic and democratic ideals, ultimately strengthening women's ability to make more inclusive and equitable policies.

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