

## REPRESENTATION AND SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE 2024 PILKADA CITY OF PALU

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### *Abstract*

*This research aims to analyze the representation and substantive representation of women in local political contests, especially in the 2024 Regional Elections in Palu City. Women's representation in politics has been dominated by quantitative approaches, while the substantive dimension the extent to which women are able to fight for strategic issues and gender needs in public policy is often overlooked. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and analysis of campaign documents and political party policies. The results of the study show that women's representation in the 2024 Regional Elections is still numerically low, with only a few female candidates appearing in the regional head nomination exchange. The main inhibiting factors for women's political participation include economic barriers, patriarchal cultural stereotypes, lack of support from political institutions, and the burden of domestic roles. However, the study also found that there is a form of substantive representation that is beginning to develop, characterized by women's involvement in community-based campaigns, organizing social issues, and non-traditional electoral strategies rooted in local social networks. This study recommends the importance of internal political party reforms, strengthening women's political capacity, and gender-based political education at the grassroots level to encourage women's meaningful involvement in local political processes.*

**Keywords:** *Political Representation, Women, Substantive Representation, Regional Elections.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Women's involvement in politics is one of the important indicators in assessing the quality of democracy and the inclusiveness of a country's political system.<sup>1</sup> In Indonesia, despite progress in women's regulation and political participation since the reform era, women's representation in the legislature and the

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<sup>1</sup>Suharto, *Women and Politics in Aceh: A Study of Women's Representation after the 2014 Elections*, Jurnal As-Salam, Vol. 1 No. 2, 2016, 105–107.

executive still shows striking inequalities. Normatively, Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning Elections has stipulated that political parties are obliged to meet the quota of 30% female representation in the list of legislative candidates. However, in practice, these quotas are often not substantially met and are only treated as a mere administrative obligation. This condition is reflected in Palu City, the capital of Central Sulawesi Province. Based on the data of the last legislative election, out of the 35 seats of the Palu City DPRD, only 4 seats were filled by women. This means that women's representation is only about 11%, well below the minimum quota threshold. In the context of the 2024 Regional Elections, the portrait of women's involvement as candidates for regional heads and deputy regional heads also shows alarming figures. The lack of women who are advancing in this contest indicates that there are still strong structural and cultural obstacles in the process of political recruitment and electoral participation. More than just descriptive representation, it is important to evaluate the extent to which women involved in politics are also able to bring and fight for issues that touch on gender interests, social justice, and the welfare of society at large. This concept is known as substantive representation, namely the existence of women who are not only a symbol of presence, but also have an influence in the process of formulating public policies that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of citizens, especially vulnerable groups.<sup>2</sup> Various factors also affect the low representation and substantive representation of women in Palu. Among them are economic barriers, patriarchal cultural dominance, gender stereotypes, lack of institutional support from political parties for female candidates, and lack of education and political literacy. In addition, the double burden of women in domestic and social affairs is also a barrier to their active participation in the public and political spheres.<sup>3</sup>

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze in depth the portrait of women's representation and substantive representation in the 2024 Regional Elections in Palu City, as well as identify the social, cultural, and economic factors

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<sup>2</sup>Childs, S., & Krook, M. L., "Critical Mass Theory and Women's Political Representation", *Political Studies*, Vol. 56 No. 3, 2008, 726–728.

<sup>3</sup>Wulandari, L., Rahmawati, R., & Rosdiana, H., "Hambatan Keterwakilan Politik Perempuan di Indonesia", *Parapolitika*, Vol. 4 No. 2, 2023, 169–171.

that affect the dynamics of women's political involvement at the local level. By using a qualitative approach and theory of women's political representation.<sup>4</sup> This research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution in efforts to strengthen women's political participation in Indonesia.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design.<sup>5</sup> This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon of women's representation and substantive representation in the context of the 2024 Regional Elections in Palu City.<sup>6</sup> Case studies allow researchers to explore social and political processes holistically, in real-life contexts, and based on the experiences and perceptions of the actors involved.<sup>7</sup>

This research was carried out in Palu City, Central Sulawesi, which was chosen purposively because it reflects the complex local political dynamics and the low level of women's representation. The subjects of the study include: Candidates for regional heads and deputy regional heads of women, Political party administrators (especially women's divisions), Women activists and civil society organization activists, Women voters from various social backgrounds, community leaders and traditional leaders who are influential in shaping public opinion.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Portrait of Women's Representation in the 2024 Palu Regional Election**

Women's representation in the 2024 Regional Election contest in Palu City shows a tendency that is still far from normative expectations as mandated by Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections which targets a quota of female

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<sup>4</sup>O'Brien, D. Z. *Women, parties, and politics: A party-based theory of substantive representation*. Paper presented at the Western Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, 2012.

<sup>5</sup>Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, (London: Sage, 2014), 16–18

<sup>6</sup>Moleong, *Qualitative Research Methodology*, (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2017), 186–190.

<sup>7</sup>John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013), 47–48

representation of 30%. Based on the results of the initial monitoring and documentation of the provisional list of candidates for regional heads and deputy regional heads who appeared in the political party selection process, there were only 1-2 names of women who were mentioned as potential candidates. This indicates that quantitatively, women's participation in the regional election arena is still very limited.

Furthermore, from the results of in-depth interviews with several women leaders in Palu, both from elements of political parties, community organizations, as well as traditional and religious leaders, it was found that the lack of female candidates was not caused by a lack of capacity or interest, but by a number of structural and cultural inhibiting factors. Among them are the recruitment process of political parties which is still very centralistic and masculine, as well as the lack of adequate financial support for women to participate in electoral competitions.

Based on the results of participatory observations in several political socialization activities and public discussions ahead of the Regional Elections, it can be seen that women's representation issues have not become mainstream in local political discourse. In official forums, women's voices are often present as a complement, not as the main force. This is strengthened by historical data that in the previous Palu Regional Elections (2015 and 2020), there has never been a female candidate who has succeeded in becoming Mayor or Deputy Mayor.

This phenomenon is in line with the findings that women's representation is not just about numbers, but also about the structure of opportunities and access to political space. Many political parties in Palu City still use women as a tool to fulfill the administrative quota of candidacy, not as a strategic subject in the local political agenda.<sup>8</sup> As a result, despite being formally registered in the structure, women are rarely promoted in strategic positions as prime candidates.

Another thing that emerged from the interview results was the low public trust in female leaders, which was largely influenced by gender stereotypes and patriarchal cultural dominance. Some of the speakers even mentioned that the

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<sup>8</sup>Priandi, R., & Roisah, K., "Efforts to Increase Women's Political Participation in General Elections in Indonesia", *Indonesian Journal of Legal Development*, Vol. 1 No. 1, 2019, 110–112.

community still associates leadership with masculine traits, such as firm, courageous, and strong which are still rarely attached to female figures socially.<sup>9</sup>

This finding confirms that women's representation in the 2024 Palu Regional Election is not only problematic in numbers, but also in quality. This portrait illustrates the inequality that needs to be addressed immediately through strategies to strengthen the capacity of women politicians, internal advocacy within political party bodies, and community-based political education.

### **Factors Inhibiting Women's Political Participation**

Women's political participation in Palu City in the 2024 Regional Elections still faces various structural, cultural, and individual obstacles.<sup>10</sup> Based on the results of in-depth interviews with female candidates, activists of women's organizations, academics, and political party administrators, it was found that several dominant inhibiting factors are intertwined and have a direct impact on the low substantive representation of women in the electoral process at the local level.

#### **a. Economic Barriers and Access to Political Resources**

Most respondents stated that the high cost of politics is the main barrier for women to run as candidates. Campaign costs, logistics, and contributions to the party often exceed women's financial capacity, especially those who do not have the support of business networks or local political elites. In addition, economic inequality between women and men makes women relatively inadequate access to political resources such as donors, political consultants, or professional volunteer teams.

#### **b. Gender Stereotypes and Patriarchal Culture**

Cultural factors are also a significant obstacle. Many people in Palu City still hold to patriarchal values, which consider that political leadership is the domain of men.<sup>11</sup> Women are often perceived as not firm enough, less daring to take risks,

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<sup>9</sup>Burlian Senjaya & Santoso, "Portrait of Women's Political Representatives as Legislators in Jambi Province", *Journal of Government Science Widya Praja*, Vol. 49 No. 2, 2023, 145–147.

<sup>10</sup>Tokan, F. B., & Gai, A., "Women's Political Participation", *Journal of Caraka Prabu*, Vol. 4 No. 2, 2020, 218–220.

<sup>11</sup>Sweinstani, M. K. D., "Islamic Party, Religious Interpretation, and Women's Representation", *Politika*, Vol. 10 No. 2, 2019, 174–176.

and inappropriate to be on the political stage. This is exacerbated by conservatively interpreted religious or customary narratives, which are often used as a pretext to reject women's leadership.

**c. Lack of Support from Political Parties**

Although the Election Law has set a 30% quota for women's representation, implementation at the local level is still weak.<sup>12</sup> Political parties tend to place women as a complement to the list of candidates, not as the main candidate who is seriously fought. Some respondents stated that the candidate recruitment process is still elitist and highly dependent on proximity to party elites, not on merit or political capacity.

**d. Lack of Women's Education and Political Literacy**

In many cases, women do not fully have adequate political literacy to understand the electoral system, campaign strategies, and party regulations. This causes them to not be confident to compete in political contests. Lack of leadership training, political education, and access to information are also barriers to meaningful participation.

**e. The Double Burden of Domestic Roles**

Many women experience a double burden between domestic roles as wives and mothers, as well as public roles as potential leaders. The absence of a support system, both from family and community, makes their involvement in politics often considered "neglecting domestic obligations." This burden becomes a psychological pressure that hinders women's intention and readiness to enter politics.

These findings show that women's political participation in Palu City in the 2024 Regional Elections is hampered by the complexity of economic, socio-cultural, party institutions, and personal conditions. Therefore, the approach to increasing women's representation in local politics is not enough with formal

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<sup>12</sup>Aula, M. R., "Gender Issues in Indonesian Political Representation", *Aufklärung*, Vol. 3 No. 3, 2023, 194–196.

regulations such as quotas, but also needs to be accompanied by structural reform of the party, gender-based political education, and strengthening social support for women prospective leaders.

### **Substantive Representation of Women**

The substantive representation of women in the 2024 Regional Elections in Palu City shows interesting dynamics, although it does not yet reflect the proportional presence of women in the local political power structure. Substantive representation, as defined by O'Brien<sup>13</sup> and Childs & Krook<sup>14</sup>, refers not only to numerical representation, but also to women's ability to effectively champion issues relevant to the interests of gender and marginalized communities in the political decision-making process.

Based on the results of the analysis of documents in the form of campaign materials, the candidates' visions and missions, and observations of public forums involving women figures, it can be seen that issues that touch the interests of women have begun to be discussed, even though they have not yet become mainstream. Issues such as strengthening protection for victims of violence, women's economic empowerment, and access to reproductive health services emerged in the discourse of some of the candidates, both from female and male progressive candidates. However, in general, there has been no consolidation of women's agendas in a clear and systematic political platform. Female candidates tend to talk about these issues on a microscale and narrative of personal experience, rather than as part of a structured policy agenda. This suggests that substantive representation has not been fully integrated in the construction of local politics.

### **Women's Electoral Strategy**

Women's electoral strategies in the 2024 Palu City Regional Elections show a diversity of approaches, both through formal political party channels and community-based non-electoral initiatives. In the context of substantive

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<sup>13</sup>O'Brien, D. Z., *Women, Parties, and Politics*, Western Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 2012.

<sup>14</sup>Childs, S., & Krook, M. L. Critical mass theory and women's political representation. *Political Studies*, 56(3) 2008, 725–736. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00712.x>

representation, this strategy not only reflects efforts to gain electoral support, but also becomes a means for women to negotiate the power space that has been dominated by men.<sup>15</sup>

The results of the research through in-depth interviews and campaign observations show that women candidates for regional heads and women's success teams use two main approaches, namely formal electoral strategies and socio- and cultural-based non-electoral strategies.

Women's electoral strategies in the 2024 Palu City Regional Elections display the dynamics between adaptation to the dominant political system and resistance through a community-based approach. Although the structure of women's campaigns is not as strong as that of male candidates, strategies that prioritize grassroots communication and social closeness actually contribute to a form of substantive representation that is more relevant to the needs of society. In the future, this strategy needs to be strengthened with logistical support, political communication training, and the expansion of digital literacy to increase women's electoral capacity in local politics.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that women's substantive representation and representation in the 2024 Regional Elections in Palu City still faces serious challenges both structurally and culturally. Women's representation quantitatively is still far from the ideal figure of 30% as mandated in election regulations. Field data shows that of all the candidates who appeared in the Palu City Regional Election market, only a small number came from women, and even few actually received strong support from political parties.

Substantively, women have not been fully involved in decision-making or strategic policy-making at the local level. Although there are female candidates who bring important issues such as women's protection, economic empowerment, and

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<sup>15</sup>Sari, D. R., & Subono, N. I., "Substantive Representation of AMAN Women's Organizations", *Inada Journal*, Vol. 5 No. 1, 2022, 21–23.

social justice, these political articulations are still personal and have not been able to be consolidated in party agendas and public policies systemically.

Some of the main factors that hinder women's involvement in the political process in Palu City include: (1) economic barriers and limited access to political resources; (2) the dominance of patriarchal culture and gender stereotypes; (3) lack of internal support from political parties; and (4) the double burden of domestic roles that are still strongly attached to women. On the other hand, women's participation remains present in the form of community-based campaign strategies, personal approaches, and informal social networks that show the great potential of substantive representation outside of formal mechanisms.

Overall, it can be concluded that the existence of women in Palu City local politics is not only a matter of quantity, but also the quality of representation. Systemic interventions are needed in the form of internal reforms of political parties, strengthening women's leadership capacity, and expanding community-based political education so that women's involvement in politics is not only symbolic, but truly has an impact on inclusive social and policy change.

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