

# The Dynamics of Women's Representation in Legislative Elections 2014–2024 in West Lombok Regency

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## Abstract

*Women's representation in legislative institutions is a crucial indicator of democratic quality and gender equality. The Indonesian state has adopted affirmative action policies mandating a minimum quota of 30 percent women in legislative candidate lists. However, the implementation of this policy has not fully translated into an increased number of women elected to legislative bodies. This article aims to analyze the dynamics of women's representation in legislative elections in West Lombok Regency during the 2014–2024 period and to identify the factors influencing these dynamics. This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and official documentation from the West Lombok Regency General Election Commission. The findings indicate that women's representation in the West Lombok Regional House of Representatives has fluctuated and shows a gradual quantitative increase, yet remains far below the ideal level of representation. Major obstacles include the persistence of patriarchal culture, weak political party cadre formation and recruitment, limited economic and political resources among female candidates, and social as well as religious stigma that frames politics as a masculine domain. This article argues that fulfilling candidate quota requirements does not automatically ensure substantive representation of women in legislative institutions.*

**Keywords:** *women's representation, legislative elections, gender politics, West Lombok*

## A. INTRODUCTION

The issue of women's representation in electoral politics has become a central concern in contemporary democratic studies. Democracy is no longer assessed solely by the existence of free and fair elections, but also through the inclusiveness of political institutions which is signed by the extent to which all social groups to have equal access to political decision-making processes, including women. In this regard, women's representation in legislative institutions holds strategic significance, as parliaments serve as the primary arena for the formulation of public policies that directly affect citizens' lives. Therefore, Legislative bodies, as key sites of policy-making, play a critical role in determining whether women's interests are adequately represented.<sup>1</sup>

Globally, the trend toward increasing women's representation in parliaments has shown relatively positive developments, particularly in countries that consistently implement affirmative action policies. Nordic countries and Rwanda are frequently cited as successful examples of gender quota implementation that has significantly boosted women's political

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1–12.



participation.<sup>2</sup> However, in many developing countries, including Indonesia, quota policies often remain administrative in nature and have not effectively addressed the root causes of gender inequality in politics.

In Indonesia, the state's commitment to enhancing women's political participation is reflected in various electoral regulations, including Law No. 31 of 2002 on Political Parties and Law No. 12 of 2003 on General Elections, which mandate a minimum of 30 percent women's representation in legislative candidate lists. These provisions have been reinforced in subsequent electoral laws. Nevertheless, electoral outcomes demonstrate that the number of women elected to legislative bodies, both at the national and local levels, remains below the stipulated threshold.

This phenomenon is also evident in West Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province. Although the number of female legislative candidates has increased across successive elections, the number of women successfully elected to the West Lombok Regional House of Representatives has remained low and fluctuating. This condition reveals a significant gap between formal regulatory frameworks and political realities at the local level.

This article is motivated by academic concern regarding the persistent underrepresentation of women in local legislative institutions, particularly in West Lombok. The study focuses on the dynamics of women's representation across three legislative election cycles—2014, 2019, and 2024—and examines the structural, cultural, and institutional factors influencing women's success or failure in electoral competition.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Scholarly discussions on women's political representation have expanded significantly within political science and gender studies. Most studies agree that women's underrepresentation is not merely a matter of individual capacity, but is deeply embedded in social structures, cultural norms, and political systems that are predominantly masculine.

Hanna Pitkin, in her seminal work *The Concept of Representation*, conceptualizes political representation into four main forms: formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive representation.<sup>3</sup> Formalistic representation refers to the legal relationship between representatives and the represented, established through electoral mechanisms. Descriptive representation emphasizes the similarity of identity—such as gender or ethnicity—between representatives and their constituents. Symbolic representation concerns the meanings and psychological values attached to representatives, while

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<sup>2</sup> See Suwa Lal Jangu, "Women in Politics: A Comparative Study Across Continents". *Global Insight Journal*. Vol: 03, Issue 04, December 2023, as well as mentioned by Citra Dewi Agustin & Dyah Ayu Nurhayati Asih, "Dinamika Keterwakilan Perempuan dalam Politik." *Transgenera: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Politik dan Humaniora*. Vol. 2 No. 1 (2025)

<sup>3</sup> Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 60–91.



substantive representation focuses on the actual actions taken by representatives in advancing the interests of those they represent.

In the context of women's political representation, descriptive representation often serves as the initial entry point through gender quota policies. However, an increase in the number of women in parliament does not necessarily lead to stronger substantive representation. In other words, descriptive representation is a necessary but insufficient condition for substantive change.<sup>4</sup> Female legislators frequently face limited political space due to marginal positions within parliamentary structures, as well as cultural and political pressures that constrain their ability to advance women-centered agendas. Without institutional support and political power, women legislators risk being reduced to symbolic figures rather than effective political actors. Research on gender quotas further shows that their success depends on political party commitment, electoral system design, and broader gender norms.<sup>5</sup> Previous studies in Indonesia reveal that women's underrepresentation is influenced by multiple factors, including entrenched patriarchal culture, weak political party cadre development, limited access to financial resources, and insufficient party support for female candidates.<sup>6</sup> These findings are particularly relevant for understanding women's political representation in West Lombok, a region characterized by strong religious and cultural values.

### C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a case study method. This approach is chosen to enable an in-depth understanding of women's representation within the specific socio-political context of West Lombok Regency. The research focuses on legislative elections and the composition of the Regional House of Representatives during the 2014–2024 period. Primary data were collected through interviews with officials of the West Lombok Regency General Election Commission and relevant political actors. Secondary data were obtained from official electoral documents, election result reports, legal regulations, and academic literature related to gender politics and women's representation.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.<sup>7</sup> Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and theoretical triangulation to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings.

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<sup>4</sup> Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence*, 25–54.

<sup>5</sup> Drude Dahlerup and Lenita Freidenvall, "Quotas as a 'Fast Track' to Equal Representation for Women," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 7, no. 1 (2005): 26–48.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesian Politics in 2019," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 55, no. 2 (2019): 171–195

<sup>7</sup> Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 31–33



## D. DISCUSSION

### 1. DYNAMICS OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION (2014–2024)

Empirical findings indicate that women's representation in the West Lombok Regional House of Representatives has fluctuated across three election cycles. In 2014, women held approximately 15.56 percent of legislative seats. In 2019, this figure declined sharply, despite an increase in female candidates. The 2024 election showed modest improvement, yet women's representation remained below the 30 percent benchmark.<sup>8</sup> These patterns suggest that numerical increases in female candidacy do not automatically translate into electoral success. Instead, women's representation is shaped by broader political and socio-economic dynamics.

### 2. DESCRIPTIVE INCLUSION AND STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that women's representation in the West Lombok Regional House of Representatives during the 2014–2024 period remains largely confined to the level of descriptive representation, rather than advancing toward substantive political representation. Although electoral regulations in Indonesia mandate a minimum quota of 30 percent women in legislative candidate lists, this formal mechanism has not translated into a proportional or stable presence of women in elected legislative positions.

From a theoretical perspective, this condition confirms Hanna Pitkin's argument that descriptive representation—defined as numerical similarity between representatives and the represented—does not automatically produce substantive representation, which refers to representatives' capacity and willingness to act in the interests of the represented group.<sup>9</sup> In West Lombok, women's candidacy is institutionally guaranteed, yet their electoral success remains contingent upon socio-cultural and political structures that systematically privilege male candidates.

#### a. Quota Politics and the Limits of Formal Representation

The West Lombok case illustrates a broader pattern observed in many democracies in the Global South, where gender quotas are implemented primarily as procedural and symbolic compliance mechanisms rather than as instruments of structural transformation.<sup>10</sup> Political parties tend to treat women's candidacy as an administrative obligation, fulfilling the quota requirement without ensuring meaningful political preparation, strategic placement on party lists, or long-term cadre development. As a result, women candidates often occupy less competitive

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<sup>8</sup> West Lombok Regency General Election Commission, *Legislative Election Results 2014–2024*.

<sup>9</sup> Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, 209–240

<sup>10</sup> Fiona Mackay, Meryl Kenny, and Louise Chappell, "New Institutionalism through a Gender Lens," *Politics & Gender* 6, no. 4 (2010): 573–599.



electoral districts or lower positions within party hierarchies. This reflects broader weaknesses in party institutionalization within Indonesia's democratic system.<sup>11</sup>

Comparatively, studies on women's political representation in Indonesia at the national level reveal similar tendencies. Although the proportion of female candidates has steadily increased since the post-Reformasi era, women's representation in the national parliament has stagnated below the 30 percent threshold.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that the Indonesian quota system operates largely at the level of symbolic inclusion, reinforcing the appearance of gender equality without fundamentally altering power relations within political institutions.

In contrast, countries such as Rwanda and several Nordic states demonstrate that quota effectiveness depends on the integration of institutional design with political commitment. In Rwanda, for example, constitutional quotas are supported by reserved seats and strong party discipline, ensuring that women's representation is not merely nominal but structurally embedded within the political system.<sup>13</sup> The absence of comparable institutional safeguards in Indonesia, particularly at the local level, renders quota policies vulnerable to elite manipulation.

### **b. Patriarchy as a Structural Constraint on Political Agency**

Beyond institutional limitations, this study highlights the enduring influence of patriarchal culture as a structural constraint on women's political agency in West Lombok. Patriarchy operates not only as a set of social norms but also as a political logic that defines leadership, authority, and public legitimacy as inherently masculine. Within this framework, women's participation in politics is often perceived as deviant from their socially prescribed domestic roles.

This finding aligns with feminist institutionalist perspectives, which argue that political institutions are deeply gendered and reproduce masculine norms through both formal rules and informal practices.<sup>14</sup> In West Lombok, informal norms—such as community expectations, religious interpretations, and family obligations—significantly shape electoral behavior and candidate viability. Female candidates frequently encounter skepticism regarding their leadership capacity, moral authority, and commitment to family responsibilities, challenges rarely imposed on

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<sup>11</sup> Marcus Mietzner, "Political Parties and the State in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 40, no. 3 (2018): 359–386

<sup>12</sup> Marcus Mietzner, "Political Parties and the State in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 40, no. 3 (2018): 359–386.

<sup>13</sup> Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 89–120.

<sup>14</sup> Fiona Mackay, Meryl Kenny, and Louise Chappell, "New Institutionalism through a Gender Lens," *Politics & Gender* 6, no. 4 (2010): 573–599



male candidates. Comparative research in other Indonesian regions, including Java and Sulawesi, indicates that patriarchal constraints on women's political participation are particularly pronounced in areas with strong religious and customary authority structures.<sup>15</sup> However, the West Lombok case underscores how these constraints are intensified at the local level, where personal networks, kinship ties, and moral reputation play a decisive role in electoral outcomes.

### **c. Political Parties and the Failure of Gender-Sensitive Recruitment**

Political parties emerge in this study as pivotal yet underperforming actors in advancing women's political representation. Despite being legally mandated to include women in candidate lists, parties in West Lombok largely fail to provide sustained political training, financial support, or strategic mentorship for female candidates. This confirms broader critiques of party institutionalization in Indonesia, which describe parties as electoral vehicles rather than programmatic organizations committed to ideological or social transformation.<sup>16</sup> From a comparative standpoint, successful cases of women's political advancement demonstrate that party commitment is essential for converting descriptive inclusion into substantive influence. In South Africa, for instance, the African National Congress (ANC) adopted internal party quotas accompanied by leadership training and resource allocation, significantly improving women's electoral success and policy influence.<sup>17</sup> The absence of similar mechanisms in Indonesian local parties contributes to the persistent marginalization of women candidates.

### **d. Economic Capital and the Gendered Cost of Politics**

Another critical factor shaping women's electoral outcomes in West Lombok is the gendered nature of campaign financing. Legislative elections in Indonesia are characterized by high campaign costs, informal patronage networks, and vote-buying practices. Women candidates, who generally possess less access to economic capital and elite networks, face structural disadvantages in this competitive environment. This pattern reflects what political economists describe as the "monetization of democracy," where electoral success increasingly depends on financial capacity rather than political competence or public service commitment.<sup>18</sup> In such contexts, gender inequality in economic resources translates directly into political exclusion. Comparative evidence from Southeast Asia further suggests that

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<sup>15</sup> Siti Musdah Mulia, *Muslimah Reformis: Perempuan Pembaru Keagamaan* (Jakarta: Mizan, 2005), 112–130

<sup>16</sup> Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesian Politics in 2019: Democracy Derailed," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 55, no. 2 (2019): 171–195.

<sup>17</sup> Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 89–120.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas B. Pepinsky, "Money Politics and Democratic Accountability in Indonesia," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014): 223–249



without public campaign financing or spending limits, women's representation is unlikely to improve significantly.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Implications for Substantive Representation

Taken together, these findings suggest that women's political representation in West Lombok remains trapped within a procedural-democratic framework, where inclusion is measured numerically rather than substantively. Even when women succeed in entering legislative institutions, their capacity to influence policy agendas related to gender equality, social welfare, and community development remains constrained by institutional marginalization and political power asymmetries. This condition reinforces feminist critiques of liberal democracy, which argue that formal equality does not necessarily yield substantive justice.<sup>20</sup> Without addressing the underlying gendered power structures within political institutions, quota policies risk reproducing tokenism rather than empowerment.

### E. Conclusion

This article demonstrates that women's representation in legislative elections in West Lombok Regency during the 2014–2024 period remains below the ideal level, despite a slight upward trend in the most recent election. The persistence of patriarchal culture, weak political party support, limited candidate resources, and gendered social expectations continue to hinder women's political advancement. The findings suggest that the 30 percent quota policy in candidate nomination has not been sufficient to generate substantive representation of women. Efforts to enhance women's representation must therefore extend beyond formal regulations and address deeper structural and cultural barriers. These efforts should include strengthening women's political cadre development, expanding gender-sensitive political education, and fostering a more inclusive and egalitarian political culture at the local level.

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<sup>19</sup> Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and Politics in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 45–68.

<sup>20</sup> Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 25–54



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