



# Gendered Political Exclusion and Democratic Inequality: Reframing Women's Leadership through a *Mubādalah* Perspective

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**Abstract:** The underrepresentation of women in politics continues to reflect the enduring influence of patriarchal culture, which shapes gendered political exclusion and undermines the quality of inclusive democracy. This article aims to analyze the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that contribute to the low representation of women in parliament and government while reconstructing women's leadership through the perspective of *Mubādalah* as an ethical-reciprocal approach to democratic equality. This study employed a qualitative method using a socio-legal research design based on library research and was supported by empirical data obtained through interviews, observations, policy documentation, and reports from national and international institutions. The research adopted the perspectives of political feminism, gender-based power relations theory, and the *Mubādalah* framework. Data sources were derived from state regulations, political reports, election results, and interviews with female political actors in Lampung. The findings indicate that cultural bias, weak support from political parties, and stereotypes concerning competence reinforce the marginalization of women within political spaces. This article recommends strengthening affirmative policies, implementing internal party reforms, promoting gender-sensitive political education, and integrating the values of *Mubādalah* into democratic governance. These findings affirm that democratic inequality is not a natural phenomenon; rather, it is produced through patriarchal power relations that are institutionally legitimized both socially and politically.

**Keywords:** Gender Bias, *Mubādalah*, Political Representation, Women's Leadership.

**Abstrak:** Ketimpangan representasi perempuan dalam politik masih menunjukkan kuatnya budaya patriarki yang membentuk *gendered political exclusion* dan memperlemah kualitas demokrasi yang inklusif. Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis hambatan struktural, kultural, dan institusional yang menyebabkan rendahnya keterwakilan perempuan dalam parlemen dan pemerintahan, sekaligus merekonstruksi kepemimpinan perempuan melalui perspektif *Mubādalah* sebagai pendekatan etik-resiprokal terhadap demokrasi yang setara. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian sosiolegal berbasis studi kepustakaan dan didukung data empiris melalui wawancara, observasi, dokumentasi kebijakan, serta laporan lembaga nasional dan internasional. Pendekatan penelitian menggunakan perspektif feminisme politik, teori relasi kuasa berbasis gender, dan kerangka *Mubādalah*. Sumber data diperoleh dari regulasi negara, laporan politik, hasil pemilu, dan wawancara dengan aktor politik perempuan di Lampung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bias budaya, lemahnya dukungan partai politik, serta stereotype kompetensi memperkuat marginalisasi perempuan dalam ruang politik. Artikel ini merekomendasikan penguatan kebijakan afirmatif, reformasi internal partai, pendidikan politik sensitif gender, dan integrasi nilai *Mubādalah* dalam tata kelola demokrasi. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa ketimpangan demokrasi tidak bersifat alamiah, melainkan diproduksi melalui relasi kuasa patriarkal yang dilegitimasi secara sosial dan politik secara institusional.

**Kata Kunci:** Bias Gender, Kepemimpinan Perempuan, *Mubādalah*, Representasi Politik.

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## Introduction

Social inequality in political leadership remains a global concern that continues to be debated in scholarly studies and international reports (Inter-Parliamentary Union & UN Women, 2025, p. 1). A growing body of research indicates that women continue to encounter structural and cultural barriers in accessing positions of power, both in parliament and in government (Aspinall et al., 2021, pp. 3–7). The limited representation of women is frequently rooted in patriarchal social norms that position men as more legitimate leaders, whereas women are perceived as less competent to participate in political processes (Schneider & Bos, 2014, pp. 245–266). Such stereotypes are reinforced by biased political recruitment practices, limited party support, and affirmative policies that have not been implemented effectively (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, pp. 791–809). Academic studies have further confirmed that these barriers do not originate solely from political systems, but also from social constructions that shape public perceptions of women's leadership (Faralita, E. 2023).

This issue is closely connected to normative values such as gender justice, equality of opportunity, and inclusive political participation (Young, 2000, p. 141). These principles constitute a core dimension of democratic commitment, which affirms the equal right of every citizen to participate in public decision-making (Walby, 2011, p. 94). Women's representation is therefore not merely a quantitative matter; it also reflects respect for human rights and universally recognized values of equality (Childs & Krook, 2009, p. 128). Accordingly, the underrepresentation of women and the stereotype of women's political incapacity should be understood not only as social issues, but also as ethical and normative problems that require serious attention from the state, political institutions, and society at large (Faralita, E. 2023).

In global academic debates, the low representation of women in politics is no longer understood merely as a matter of numerical representation; rather, it is increasingly viewed as a form of democratic exclusion that reveals how democratic systems continue to operate within social structures that are not fully egalitarian (Phillips, 1995, p. 12). Contemporary studies on gendered citizenship demonstrate that women are frequently positioned as second-class citizens within political arenas because access to power, leadership legitimacy, and decision-making processes remains largely dominated by masculine perspectives (Lister, 2003, p. 71). In this context, the presence of women in parliament often remains confined to the level of symbolic representation, serving primarily to fulfill the administrative requirements of democracy without being accompanied by sufficient substantive power to influence the direction of public policy (Pitkin, 1967, p. 92). Consequently, substantive representation, which should ensure that women's interests are adequately reflected in legislative processes and state governance, has not yet been fully realized (Celis et al., 2008, p. 103). This condition suggests that women's political inequality is rooted in the practice of patriarchal democracy, a democratic system that formally promises equality while socially and institutionally continuing to reproduce male dominance within structures of power (Pateman, 1988, p. 3). Therefore, discussions concerning women's leadership cannot be separated from the need to reconstruct a more inclusive, egalitarian, and gender-just democracy through the perspective of *Mubādalah*, which positions men and women as equal political subjects within both social and state relations (Kodir, 2019, p. 85; Kodir, 2022, p. 114).

The case examined in Lampung Province illustrates the persistence of social inequality in political leadership, particularly through the limited representation of women in parliament and government (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008, p. 398). In this regional context, women remain significantly underrepresented in political institutions, both as legislative candidates and as holders of structural positions in government. Moreover, certain segments of society and political elites continue to assume that women are less capable of participating in politics (Mackay et al., 2010, p. 580). This phenomenon is reflected in public narratives that frequently question women's leadership capacity and in party policies that indirectly restrict women's

political involvement through limited internal support and unequal access to political resources (Politik et al., 2024).

Normatively, national regulations require a minimum quota of 30% women's representation in legislative candidacy. Empirically, however, women's representation in Lampung Province remains far below this benchmark. Interview data involving women activists indicate the persistence of structural barriers, including patriarchal culture, unequal power relations, and limited access to political education. Quantitative data from regional electoral institutions also suggest that the proportion of women candidates remains far from the expected level. This situation indicates that the inequality is not merely a matter of perception, but a recurring systemic reality. Although the 30% affirmative action policy is intended to improve women's representation in Indonesia, political parties often treat the requirement as an administrative prerequisite rather than as a substantive commitment to gender equality. In practice, women candidates may be included to fulfil formal requirements, while their political viability remains constrained by party structures and, in some cases, by dynastic political networks (Arawi et al., 2022).

The social symptoms of this problem can be observed in the lack of policy responsiveness toward women, the limited integration of gender perspectives in regional development planning, and the persistence of gender-based discrimination in both public and private spheres. One of the most critical consequences is the weakening of local democratic quality (Ardhanariswari et al., 2021, pp. 1–19). When women are not adequately represented in decision-making, their needs and aspirations are frequently overlooked. Furthermore, this inequality perpetuates a cycle of stigma that discourages women from entering politics or reduces their confidence to do so. The research problem of this study therefore concerns how social inequality, limited political representation, and gender stereotypes intersect to produce a significant gap between ideal regulations and empirical realities in the context of women's political leadership in Lampung Province (Alieva, 2025, pp. 29–46).

Investigating inequality in political leadership is important because the underrepresentation of women in parliament and government, compounded by the belief that women are politically incompetent, has direct implications for democracy, public policy, and social justice (Childs & Krook, 2009, pp. 125–145). The absence of women from decision-making arenas suggests that political systems have not fully ensured inclusivity. It may also produce gender-biased policies that fail to address the needs of half of the population. This research is urgent because a gap remains between legal frameworks that guarantee women's representation and empirical realities that continue to reveal male dominance, structural obstacles, and repeated cultural discrimination. By examining this issue, the study contributes to mapping the causal factors of inequality, opening space for advocacy on affirmative policy reform, and strengthening the academic argument that women's representation is not merely a matter of numbers, but a fundamental prerequisite for democratic and just governance (Hessami & da Fonseca, 2020)

The literature on women's political representation in Indonesia has extensively addressed structural and cultural barriers. Nursyifa, Tamala, Zakiah, Rachamani, and Mutmainah, for instance, found that women's political participation continues to be constrained by patriarchal culture and traditional views that regard women as "inappropriate" actors in political competition (Nursyifa et al., 2023). Kadji and Wahyuni's study of women's leadership dynamics in Islamic political parties in Gorontalo Regency also identified internal party barriers and gendered relations embedded in party structures (Kadji & Wahyuni, 2024). Similarly, Ginting et al. highlighted male dominance in Indonesian national politics and demonstrated that formal quota measures, including the 30% quota, have not guaranteed substantive representation for women in parliament (Ginting et al., 2025).

Both the present study and previous research acknowledge that women face substantial challenges in participating in politics on an equal basis. These challenges derive from structural barriers, such as party quotas and electoral mechanisms, as well as ideological and cultural barriers, including patriarchal stereotypes. The existing studies also emphasize that women's representation should not be understood solely in quantitative terms. Rather, it must also be assessed qualitatively, namely by examining the extent to which women are able to make substantive contributions to policymaking through articulation, aggregation, and decision-making processes.

The distinctive contribution of this article lies in its more comprehensive and integrated analytical focus. Previous studies often examined specific aspects separately, such as structural barriers within political parties, the effectiveness of the 30% quota policy, or patriarchal culture as an obstacle to women's political participation. In contrast, this article conceptualizes inequality in women's leadership as a multilayered and interconnected phenomenon. It identifies patriarchal culture, structural barriers, and stereotypes regarding women's competence as mutually reinforcing factors that contribute to lower levels of women's representation in parliament and government. In other words, the study does not merely describe obstacles; it also argues that the stereotype that "women are not competent in politics" functions as a cultural foundation that legitimizes and sustains other barriers. This perspective has not been addressed sufficiently in previous scholarship.

Although studies on women's political representation have expanded considerably, most previous research has primarily focused on quantitative dimensions, such as the percentage of women represented in parliament, the effectiveness of affirmative quotas, or administrative barriers within political recruitment processes. Such approaches have not fully explained how patriarchal democracy operates at cultural and institutional levels in normalizing women's political exclusion through stereotypes of competence, symbolic marginalization, and unequal distributions of power. Moreover, many earlier studies tend to position women merely as objects of representation rather than as political subjects who are actively constrained by social constructions of leadership and the legitimacy of power. Consequently, democratic inequality is often understood in procedural terms rather than as a structural problem rooted in gender-based power relations.

In contrast to previous studies, this article does not merely address the low representation of women as a matter of political statistics; it also analyzes how stereotypes concerning women's alleged incapacity in politics are produced and reproduced through patriarchal culture, party structures, and masculinized democratic practices. This article offers a more integrative theoretical approach by employing the perspective of *Mubādalāh* to reconstruct women's leadership as an integral component of democratic relations that are egalitarian, reciprocal, and just. Accordingly, this study seeks to expand academic debates beyond the issue of representation itself toward a critical analysis of gendered political exclusion and democratic inequality within contemporary political systems.

In addition, many previous studies have largely stopped at identifying the causes of women's low representation. They have not explicitly framed the gap between the ideal condition (*das Sollen*) and the actual condition (*das Sein*) as a central analytical framework. This article is therefore significant because it systematically demonstrates the discrepancy between inclusive policies, such as affirmative action and the 30% quota, and field realities that continue to show male dominance and the marginalization of women's voices. This approach is analytically useful because it examines not only the phenomenon itself, but also the implementation gap between legal norms and social practice. Another point of distinction is that the article shifts the focus from "women's representation" to "social inequality in leadership." It does not merely count how many women enter political spaces, but also analyzes how social structures and public perceptions shape women's opportunities to

exercise influence and leadership. Consequently, the study offers broader theoretical and practical benefits by emphasizing that political representation must be understood through the relationship between power, socially constructed competence, and the role of stereotypes as mechanisms that reproduce gender inequality (Wiraguna, 2024).

This article examines how and why women remain insufficiently represented in parliament and government despite the existence of policies and regulations that support women's political participation. It also analyzes how stereotypes portraying women as politically incapable deepen this inequality. The central questions addressed in this article concern the factors that marginalize women within political leadership structures, the ways in which stereotypes of women's incapacity shape their opportunities to participate and be recognized in strategic positions, and how such inequalities affect democratic quality and public policy. The study aims to identify the structural, cultural, and social foundations of women's low representation and to examine how social constructions of women's capacity sustain unequal conditions within political spaces.

The perspective of *Mubādalah* is positioned in this article as the primary theoretical framework for analyzing inequalities in women's representation within political leadership. Conceptually, *Mubādalah* denotes mutuality and reciprocal relations between men and women in social life. This concept was developed by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir as an Islamic interpretive approach that positions men and women as equal subjects in obtaining rights, responsibilities, and social participation (Kodir, 2019). Within the context of democracy, *Mubādalah* emphasizes the principles of reciprocity and equality, asserting that public leadership should not be determined by gender but rather by capacity, integrity, and contributions to the common good. This perspective is particularly relevant for explaining that the marginalization of women in politics is not merely a matter of low electoral representation but constitutes a form of democratic inequality produced through patriarchal culture, competence-based stereotypes, and masculine domination within structures of power. Accordingly, *Mubādalah* offers an ethical framework that integrates the values of Islam, democracy, and gender justice in fostering political participation that is both inclusive and egalitarian.

The significance of this study lies in its effort to respond to the urgent need to address democratic inequalities that continue to manifest in the political exclusion of women within modern constitutional and political systems. This research emerged from an academic concern regarding the persistence of patriarchal democratic practices that position women merely as administrative complements to democracy without granting them substantive influence in public policymaking processes. In the Indonesian context, this issue becomes even more significant because it is directly related to the implementation of constitutional principles that guarantee equal citizenship rights, political participation, and social justice. This article not only identifies the structural and cultural barriers that constrain women's leadership but also analyzes how a more inclusive democratic paradigm should be developed through the reconstruction of political relations based on the principles of *Mubādalah*. Therefore, this study contributes to expanding scholarly discourse on democracy, gender equality, and public participation as integral components of a transformation toward a more just, participatory, and human-centered constitutional order.

## Method

This study employed an empirical socio-legal qualitative research design combined with a feminist qualitative inquiry approach to analyze inequalities in women's representation within political leadership in Lampung Province. This design was selected because the issue of women's representation is not merely related to the normative dimensions of law and political policy but also involves power relations, patriarchal culture, social constructions, and democratic practices that influence the legitimacy of women's leadership in the public sphere.

The study focused on how political structures, gender stereotypes, and patriarchal culture operate in shaping gendered political exclusion against women within local democratic processes. Methodologically, the research integrated library research, policy document analysis, empirical interviews, and limited field responses as complementary data collection techniques to strengthen analytical depth and facilitate the triangulation of research findings.

The research was conducted in Lampung Province because the region presents a relevant political paradox characterized by an increasing number of women participating in political contests while the level of women's electoral success in regional legislative institutions remains relatively low. Data from the 2024 General Election indicate that women's representation in the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) of Lampung Province reached only 21.17% of the total available legislative seats, remaining below the national affirmative target of 30%. This condition makes Lampung an important empirical setting for examining how local democracy, patriarchal culture, and the electoral political system interact in limiting women's substantive political participation.

The sources of research data consisted of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with female members of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD), gender activists, political party officials, and several local political actors involved in the 2024 General Election in Lampung. In addition, the study employed limited qualitative field responses to obtain supplementary perspectives regarding the barriers faced by women in local democratic practices. Secondary data were collected through the analysis of legal documents, reports issued by national and international institutions, election results, scholarly articles, and gender-related political statistics. The principal documents analyzed included Law Number 2 of 2011 concerning Political Parties, Government Regulation Number 20 of 2018 concerning Gender Mainstreaming, the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, UNDP reports on the Gender Development Index, as well as statistical data published by Statistics Indonesia (BPS) and the General Elections Commission (KPU).

Data collection was conducted through several stages. The first stage involved literature mapping to identify developments in studies concerning women's political representation, patriarchal democracy, and gender inequality in public leadership. The second stage consisted of analyzing policy documents and state regulations to assess the gap between affirmative norms and political implementation at the local level. The third stage involved empirical interviews aimed at obtaining subjective experiences and contextual explanations regarding the obstacles encountered by women in politics. All collected data were subsequently classified according to major themes, including competence stereotypes, political party support, access to political resources, patriarchal culture, and practices of women's marginalization within local democratic systems.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis through a gradual coding process applied to interview data, policy documents, and empirical reports. The analytical process began with open coding to identify key issues, followed by axial coding to uncover relationships among themes, and concluded with selective coding to construct a critical argument concerning democratic inequality and women's political exclusion. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation and methodological triangulation by comparing interview findings, legal documents, statistical data, and reports from international institutions to ensure the consistency and reliability of the research findings.

The interpretive framework of this study employed the perspective of *Mubādalāh* in conjunction with political feminist theory and gender-based power relations perspectives. The *Mubādalāh* perspective was utilized to assess how the principles of mutuality, justice, and equality can be reconstructed within a political system that remains dominated by patriarchal culture. Through this approach, the study not only describes the low representation of women

in politics but also analyzes how modern democratic practices continue to reproduce gender-based inequalities of power through both structural and cultural mechanisms. Accordingly, this research is directed toward generating a critical analysis of the need for a democratic transformation that is more inclusive, substantive, and grounded in gender justice.

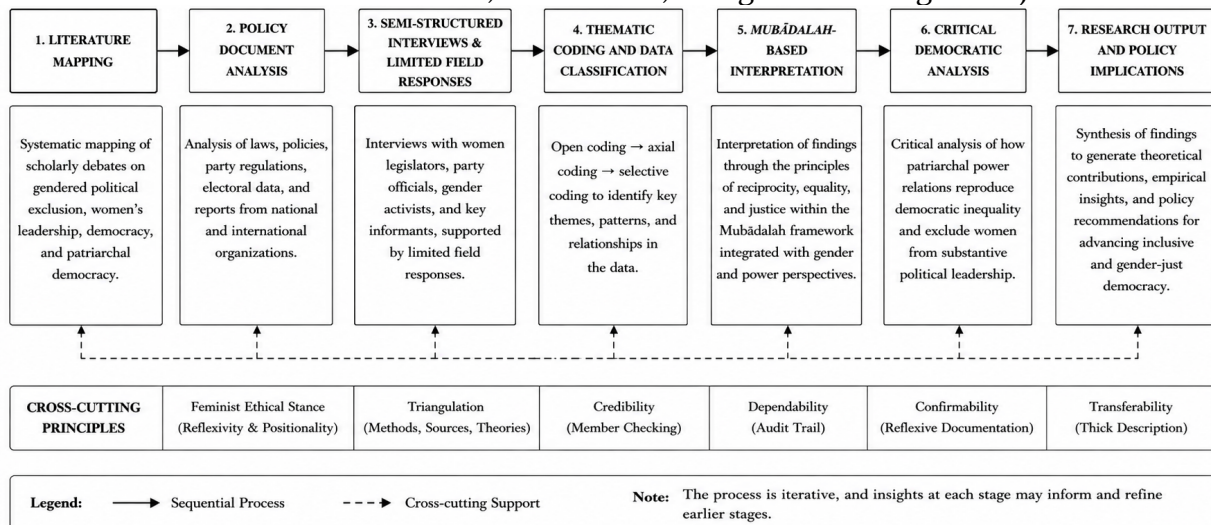


Figure 1: Methodology Framework

## Results

### Women’s Political Representation and Electoral Inequality in Lampung

The findings of this study indicate that women’s low representation in parliament is not merely a matter of limited numerical participation, but reflects a broader pattern of *gendered political exclusion* operating within democratic institutions. The underrepresentation of women in political decision-making has direct implications for the quality of democracy because women’s interests, experiences, and policy priorities are frequently marginalized within legislative processes. In practice, male dominance in political institutions continues to reinforce patriarchal norms that position politics as a masculine arena of power. Consequently, women are often included only symbolically without possessing substantial influence in policy formulation and strategic decision-making. This condition demonstrates that democratic procedures do not automatically produce democratic equality, particularly when political structures continue to reproduce unequal gender relations (Ginting et al., 2025).

Based on field survey data involving women legislative candidates and voters in Lampung during the 2024 election, as well as reports issued by the Lampung General Election Commission (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum/KPU*), women’s representation in the Lampung Provincial DPRD before the 2024 election remained at only 18.2% out of 85 legislative members. The survey findings further indicate that merely 22% of women candidates were successfully elected. The most dominant barriers identified by respondents included socio-cultural bias (70%), limited support from political parties (55%), and the weak implementation of affirmative policies (40%). These findings suggest that the barriers experienced by women are not incidental or individual in nature, but are deeply rooted in structural, institutional, and cultural mechanisms that continuously disadvantage women in electoral competition.

Table 1. Percentage of Women Candidates and Electoral Success Rate in the Lampung Provincial DPRD (Field Survey Data, 2024)

| Political Party | Number of Women Candidates | Percentage Elected (%) | Main Barriers (Respondent Frequency)             |
|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| PDI-P           | 15                         | 20                     | Cultural Bias (12), Limited Party Support (10)   |
| Golkar          | 12                         | 17                     | Suboptimal Affirmative Policy Implementation (8) |

|          |    |    |   |
|----------|----|----|---|
| PKB      | 10 | 30 | Cultural Bias (9)   |
| Demokrat | 8  | 13 | Limited Party Support (7)   |
| Average  | -  | 22 | Cultural Bias (70%), Limited Support (55%),<br>Affirmative Policy (40%) |

The data presented in Table 1 reveal significant variations in women's electoral success across political parties. PKB recorded the highest percentage of elected women candidates at 30%, whereas Demokrat recorded the lowest percentage at only 13%. However, these differences cannot be interpreted solely as variations in electoral strategy. Rather, they illustrate how internal party commitment, institutional culture, and political support systems significantly shape women's opportunities for political participation. The findings demonstrate that cultural bias continues to function as a mechanism of democratic exclusion by constructing political competence as a masculine attribute. Women are frequently perceived as less capable of leadership, less assertive in political negotiations, and less suitable for strategic decision-making compared to male politicians. As a result, women candidates must overcome not only electoral competition, but also social legitimacy barriers that are rarely experienced by men.

These findings are closely aligned with political feminism theory, which explains that patriarchal political structures systematically restrict women's access to leadership positions and strategic political networks. In Lampung, patriarchal culture remains particularly influential in rural and coastal areas, where political parties often prioritize male candidates who possess stronger economic resources, broader patronage networks, and higher social legitimacy. This situation reinforces competence-based stereotypes that marginalize women from substantive political participation. Although affirmative policies formally require political parties to accommodate women candidates, their implementation often remains administrative rather than transformative. Consequently, women's political participation tends to be symbolic rather than substantive (Bos, Schneider, & Utz, 2022, p. 7).

The interview findings strengthen this analysis. Ibu Siti, a woman legislative candidate from PDI-P interviewed on 14 September 2025, explained that although the party publicly described her as competent, logistical and political support for her candidacy remained significantly lower than that provided to male candidates. Similarly, Pak Ahmad, a Golkar chairperson interviewed on 15 September 2025, acknowledged that affirmative mechanisms formally existed within the party structure, but their implementation was often weakened due to concerns about electoral competitiveness and political pragmatism. Meanwhile, Bu Rina, a PKB gender activist interviewed on 18 September 2025, stated that PKB tended to be relatively more open toward women's participation because of its moderate Islamic orientation, although patriarchal attitudes among voters still remained influential. These interview findings demonstrate that women's political marginalization is maintained not only through formal institutional barriers, but also through deeply embedded socio-cultural perceptions regarding gender and leadership (Krook, 2020, p. 41).

Beyond cultural factors, this study also finds that the electoral system itself contributes to the persistence of gender inequality in politics. The open-list proportional system intensifies political competition based on financial capital, political networks, and mobilization capacity, all of which are generally more accessible to male politicians. In this context, women candidates are required to exert significantly greater effort to obtain equal political legitimacy (Bauer, 2015, p. 695). Furthermore, women frequently experience a dual burden between domestic responsibilities and political participation, thereby limiting their capacity to engage fully in political activities that demand extensive time, mobility, and organizational resources (O'Brien, 2015, p. 103). Consequently, women's political exclusion cannot be understood merely as the result of weak legal regulation, but must also be viewed as the product of broader patriarchal social relations operating within democratic institutions.

The findings further reveal that affirmative policies have not yet succeeded in producing substantive democratic transformation. The 30% quota policy is often treated merely as a procedural requirement for electoral participation rather than as a mechanism for long-term political empowerment and leadership development. In many cases, women are recruited shortly before elections without sufficient political training, cadre formation, or institutional preparation (Verge & De la Fuente, [2014](#), p. 73). This condition reflects the persistence of *patriarchal democracy*, namely a democratic system that formally recognizes equality while simultaneously maintaining male domination within structures of political power distribution (Lawless & Fox, [2010](#), p. 58). As a result, women's presence in parliament does not necessarily translate into substantive influence over policymaking processes (Okimoto & Brescoll, [2010](#), p. 923).

### Cultural Bias and Gendered Political Exclusion

Cultural bias constitutes one of the most dominant factors contributing to the low representation of women in politics in Lampung Province. The findings indicate that women face not only administrative barriers within electoral processes but also social constructions that position politics as a masculine domain (Bjarnegård, [2013](#), p. 27). In many instances, political leadership continues to be perceived as synonymous with assertive, aggressive, competitive, and dominant characteristics that are socially associated with men (Eagly & Karau, [2002](#), p. 576). Meanwhile, women are frequently associated with domestic roles, emotionality, and limitations in public decision-making (Sapiro, [1983](#), p. 23). Such cultural constructions indirectly generate perceptions that women possess less legitimacy to occupy strategic political positions. Consequently, women must exert greater effort to obtain political recognition that is generally more readily granted to men (Schwindt-Bayer, [2011](#), p. 9).

This finding is further reinforced by an interview with NA, a female legislative candidate in Lampung, who stated:

*"The public still tends to place greater trust in men as leaders because they are perceived as being more courageous and as having stronger political networks"* (Interview with NA, January 12, [2026](#)).

This study found that cultural bias does not operate openly through formal prohibitions against women's political participation; rather, it functions subtly through social practices that continuously reproduce gender inequalities within democratic systems (Acker, [1990](#), p. 146; Chappell & Waylen, [2013](#), p. 603). Women are often accepted as political candidates merely to satisfy administrative party requirements, while substantive support in the form of political networks, logistical resources, and access to decision-making processes remains limited (Murray, [2014](#), p. 530). This situation demonstrates that women are more frequently positioned as a form of symbolic representation than as political actors who genuinely influence legislative processes and public policymaking (Lovenduski, [2005](#), p. 49; Dahlerup, [2006](#), p. 516). This condition indicates that procedural democracy has not fully generated substantive democracy because structures of power remain dominated by patriarchal political relations (Waylen, 2014, p. 214; Rai, [2017](#), p. 87).

One of the research informants, AF, a regional-level political party official, acknowledged that:

*"Political parties often face a dilemma when selecting female candidates because some voters continue to perceive men as more suitable to lead certain political constituencies"* (Interview with AF, January 12, [2026](#)).

The practice of gendered political exclusion is also evident in the manner by which women's political competence is evaluated according to standards different from those applied to men. Interview findings reveal that women politicians frequently have to demonstrate their capabilities more intensively in order to be considered worthy of leadership positions (Holman, Merolla, & Zechmeister, [2016](#), p. 489). In many situations, minor mistakes

made by women are more readily used as grounds for questioning their political abilities, whereas men tend to receive greater social tolerance (Rudman & Glick, 2001, p. 763). This condition demonstrates that women's political exclusion is not merely the result of low electoral participation but is also sustained by social mechanisms that continuously reproduce inequalities in gender-based political legitimacy (Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008, p. 372; Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006, p. 234). Accordingly, cultural bias functions as a social instrument that preserves male dominance within political power structures (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995, p. 14).

The dominance of patriarchal culture in local politics is further reinforced by patterns of political party relations that remain oriented toward patronage and oligarchic power structures (Krook & Norris, 2014, p. 12). Political parties tend to prioritize candidates who possess strong economic capital, extensive political networks, and close ties to party elites, most of whom continue to be men (Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2016, p. 379). Consequently, women frequently encounter limited access to political resources that are crucial for electoral success (Piscopo, 2016, p. 124). In this context, democratic systems are not entirely gender-neutral because existing institutional structures actually exacerbate inequalities in political access between men and women (Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010, p. 576). This condition demonstrates that the issue of women's representation cannot be understood merely as an individual failure but rather as part of a structural problem rooted in patriarchal political culture (Htun, 2016, p. 41; Waylen, 2017, p. 58).

From the perspective of *Mubādalāh*, the practice of political exclusion against women is contrary to the principles of mutuality, justice, and equal participation in public life (Kodir, 2021, p. 67; Mas'udi, 1997, p. 112). *Mubādalāh* positions men and women as social subjects who possess equal rights and responsibilities in building an inclusive democratic order (Kodir, 2021, p. 81). Therefore, women's leadership should not be perceived as a threat to either social order or religious values; rather, it should be understood as part of broader efforts to realize social justice and a more substantive form of democracy (Wadud, 2006, p. 178). This perspective emphasizes that eliminating cultural bias and transforming political structures constitute essential steps toward constructing power relations that are more egalitarian, participatory, and oriented toward the universal respect for human dignity (Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 640).

### Political Parties, Electoral Systems, and Patriarchal Democracy

Political parties and electoral systems play a decisive role in shaping patterns of women's representation within Indonesian democracy (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 327). The findings indicate that the low representation of women in parliament is influenced not only by patriarchal cultural factors but also by political recruitment mechanisms, the distribution of party resources, and the characteristics of a highly competitive electoral system (Caul, 1999, p. 89). The open-list proportional system employed in legislative elections encourages political competition that is heavily dependent on economic capital, patronage networks, and the capacity for mass mobilization (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016, p. 5). Such conditions tend to favor male candidates, who socially possess broader access to political resources and networks of power (Shvedova, 2005, p. 42). In practice, women face unequal competition because, in addition to demonstrating political competence, they must also confront social constructions that continue to question the legitimacy of women's leadership in the public sphere (Paxton & Hughes, 2017, p. 184)

This study found that political parties have not fully carried out their functions of cadre development and the sustained strengthening of women's political capacity. In many cases, the affirmative policy requiring a minimum quota of 30 percent women candidates in legislative elections is understood merely as an administrative obligation to satisfy electoral requirements (Krook, 2009, p. 19). As a result, some parties recruit women shortly before the

nomination period without providing adequate political training and development (Baldez, 2004, p. 237). This condition leaves many female candidates without sufficient logistical support, political networks, or strategic positions within party structures. The situation indicates that affirmative policies have not been fully directed toward building substantive representation but remain oriented toward fulfilling the formal procedures of electoral democracy (Childs & Webb, 2012, p. 53).

*“Political parties have formally fulfilled the women’s quota requirement; however, in practice, not all female candidates receive equal political support. Male candidates continue to be prioritized because they are perceived as having greater electoral prospects and stronger political networks.”* (Interview with Dedi Prasetyo, Regional Political Party Official in Lampung, 12 January 2026).

The findings further demonstrate that the local political system continues to be influenced by patterns of patriarchal democracy, namely a democratic system that formally guarantees equality while structurally maintaining male dominance in the distribution of political power (Lovenduski, 2014, p. 29). In this context, women are often positioned as symbolic complements to representation without being provided sufficient opportunities to participate in strategic party decision-making processes (Grey, 2006, p. 495). Strong patronage structures result in access to candidacy and electoral support being determined largely by proximity to party elites and financial capacity (Hicken, 2011, p. 300; Berenschot, 2018, p. 238). This situation demonstrates that procedural democracy does not automatically produce inclusive democracy because political power relations continue to operate through a masculine logic that tends to exclude women (Goetz, 2003, p. 33)

*“Many women actually possess strong political capacities, yet they struggle to compete because they lack sufficient political capital and internal party networks. The current electoral system makes political competition extremely costly and difficult for most women to access.”* (Interview with Siti Rahmawati, Gender Activist and Women’s Political Mentor in Lampung, 12 January 2026).

From the perspective of *Mubādalah*, this condition demonstrates that democratic systems and political parties have not yet been fully constructed upon the principles of mutuality, justice, and equal participation between men and women (Kodir, 2023, p. 122). *Mubādalah* conceptualizes political leadership as a social responsibility that should be entrusted to individuals on the basis of their capacity and integrity rather than their gender or their position within particular power relations (Kodir, 2023, p. 138). Therefore, the reform of political parties and electoral systems constitutes an essential step toward creating a more inclusive and gender-just democracy (Lijphart, 2012, p. 275). Strengthening women’s political cadre development, ensuring the equitable distribution of political support, promoting gender-sensitive political education, and transforming party culture have become urgent necessities so that affirmative policies do not remain confined to the administrative level but instead generate substantive changes in democratic governance and women’s political leadership in Indonesia (Piscopo & Kenny, 2020, p. 718).

### National Trends in Women’s Parliamentary Representation

**Table 2.** Women’s Representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI), 2004–2024

| DPR / Election Period | Number of Women Members | Percentage of Women’s Seats (%) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2004–2009             | 61 members              | 11.8%                           |
| 2009–2014             | 103 members             | 18.1%                           |
| 2014–2019             | 97 members              | 17.3%                           |
| 2019–2024             | 120 members             | 20.5%                           |
| 2024–2029             | 127 members             | 22.1%                           |

Source: DPR RI, 2024.

At the national level, Table 2 demonstrates that women's parliamentary representation in Indonesia has gradually increased over the last two decades. Nevertheless, the percentage remains significantly below the ideal threshold for substantive representation. Although the number of women legislators increased from 11.8% in 2004–2009 to 22.1% in 2024–2029, this increase has not automatically transformed political structures that continue to privilege masculine forms of leadership and decision-making. The persistence of this gap indicates that numerical representation alone is insufficient to dismantle structural inequalities embedded within democratic institutions. Accordingly, the issue of women's representation should not be reduced to quantitative participation alone, but must also address broader questions concerning political access, institutional legitimacy, and democratic justice (Mansbridge, 1999, p. 643)

From the perspective of *Mubādah*, these findings demonstrate that political inequality fundamentally contradicts the principles of reciprocity, justice, and equal participation between men and women. *Mubādah* conceptualizes leadership not as a gender-based privilege, but as a social responsibility grounded in integrity, competence, and commitment to public welfare (Barlas, 2002, p. 189). Therefore, women's marginalization in politics constitutes not merely a failure of representation, but also a form of democratic injustice that restricts inclusive governance and equal citizenship. Through this perspective, the study argues that substantive democracy requires the reconstruction of political relations based on equality, reciprocity, and shared participation in public decision-making (Phillips, 2018, p. 54).

More broadly, the findings of this study contribute to global scholarly debates concerning *democratic inequality*, *gendered citizenship*, and the crisis of representation in modern democracies (Dean, 2017, p. 98). The exclusion of women from substantive political leadership is not exclusively an Indonesian or cultural problem, but reflects structural weaknesses within democratic systems that continue to privilege masculine political norms (Sachedina, 2009, p. 132). Consequently, strengthening women's political representation cannot rely solely on electoral quotas or procedural reforms. Instead, it requires broader transformation through internal party reform, gender-sensitive political education, institutional restructuring, and the reconstruction of democratic culture based on justice and reciprocity as articulated within the framework of *Mubādah* (Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2020, p. 783).

### ***Mubādah* and the Reconstruction of Democratic Equality**

The findings indicate that the low representation of women in politics is not merely related to the weak implementation of affirmative policies or the persistence of patriarchal culture, but also reflects inequalities in democratic relations that have not yet fully positioned men and women as equal political subjects (Fraser, 2009, p. 117). Within local political practices in Lampung, women continue to encounter structural and social barriers that render their political participation more symbolic than substantive (Celis, 2018, p. 267). This condition demonstrates that procedural democracy does not automatically generate a just democracy because the distribution of political power continues to operate through unequal relational structures (Young, 2002, p. 36; Tilly, 2007, p. 112). In this context, the perspective of *Mubādah* becomes particularly relevant for reconstructing a more inclusive democracy by positioning the principles of mutuality, justice, and equal participation as the foundational basis of political relations (Kodir, 2023, p. 144)

This study found that the practice of political exclusion against women frequently occurs through social mechanisms that appear normal within democratic life. Women are permitted to be present in political spaces; however, access to strategic decision-making, the distribution of party support, and leadership legitimacy continues to be dominated by men (Sawer, 2020, p. 95). This situation indicates that democracy has not yet fully provided equal opportunities for women's participation (Lombardo & Meier, 2016, p. 12). The *Mubādah* perspective views

this condition as a form of unequal social relations that contradicts the principle of reciprocity between men and women (Kodir, 2023, p. 151) Within the *Mubādalah* framework, political leadership is not determined by gender but by competence, integrity, and social responsibility in advancing the public good (Esposito & Voll, 2001, p. 214). Therefore, women's involvement in politics should be understood as an integral component of equal citizenship rights within modern democratic systems (Lister, 2007, p. 52)

The research data further indicate that women politicians are frequently placed in less strategic positions despite possessing adequate political capacities. In many cases, political party support for women remains administrative in nature and has not been directed toward developing women's leadership in a sustainable manner (Murray, 2018, p. 241; Evans & Kenny, 2022, p. 76). This condition demonstrates that local democratic structures continue to be influenced by patterns of patriarchal democracy that maintain male dominance in the distribution of political power (Walby, 2015, p. 29). The *Mubādalah* perspective offers an alternative approach by positioning political relations as a sphere of cooperation and shared responsibility between men and women (Kodir, 2023, p. 158). This approach rejects views that position women as subordinate actors in public leadership and affirms that democratic justice can only be achieved when all citizens are granted equal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes (Benhabib, 2004, p. 176)

The findings demonstrate that strengthening substantive democracy requires transformation not only at the level of regulation but also within political culture and patterns of power relations in political parties (Gould, 2004, p. 204). A democratic system that is oriented solely toward electoral procedures risks producing representation that is merely symbolic without generating substantive transformation toward gender equality (Hassan, 2011, p. 91). From the perspective of *Mubādalah*, an inclusive democracy must be built upon the principle of reciprocity, namely political relations characterized by mutual support, mutual respect, and the provision of equitable opportunities for participation by both men and women (Chappell & Mackay, 2020, p. 305). This principle affirms that women's leadership does not constitute a threat to democracy; rather, it represents an essential component of efforts to strengthen the quality of governance by making it more participatory and responsive to societal needs (Kenny, 2013, p. 167).

More broadly, the findings of this study indicate that the perspective of *Mubādalah* offers an important contribution to the development of a more egalitarian model of democracy grounded in respect for human dignity (Ramadan, 2009, p. 175). This approach is not only relevant within the context of gender relations in the family or domestic sphere but also possesses significant relevance for political practice and contemporary constitutional governance (Mackay, 2014, p. 554). A reconstruction of democracy based on *Mubādalah* positions women and men as equal partners in formulating public policies, strengthening political participation, and creating a more just system of governance. Accordingly, the findings of this study affirm that eliminating the political exclusion of women requires a democratic transformation that is not merely procedural but also substantive, inclusive, and founded upon the comprehensive principles of social justice (Kamali, 2019, p. 211).

### **Global Implications of Democratic Inequality**

The findings of this study indicate that inequalities in women's political representation in Lampung Province are not merely a local issue associated with patriarchal culture or the weak implementation of affirmative policies, but also reflect a broader global problem concerning democratic inequality within contemporary political systems (Childs, 2020, p. 84). The low representation of women in legislative institutions demonstrates that procedural democracy in many countries has not yet been fully capable of ensuring equal political participation (An-Na'im, 2008, p. 56). This condition suggests that the success of democracy

cannot be measured solely by the conduct of free and open elections, but also by the extent to which political systems provide equitable access, legitimacy, and distribution of power for all citizens without gender-based discrimination (UN Women, 2023, p. 11). In this context, the experiences of women in Lampung reveal patterns similar to those found in many other developing countries, namely the continued dominance of masculine political power within formal democratic structures (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024, p. 22).

The research data demonstrate that women encounter political barriers that are not only administrative in nature but also structural and cultural. This situation reinforces the findings of numerous international studies indicating that women frequently experience gendered political exclusion through competence stereotypes, limited access to political networks, and male dominance within political parties and legislative institutions (Rai, 2008, p. 78). Such inequalities reveal that modern democracy, in many cases, continues to operate within the framework of patriarchal democracy, namely a democratic system that normatively promises equality while practically maintaining unequal power relations (Childs, 2008, p. 148). The findings of this study indicate that the problem of democratic inequality is not solely related to the low number of women in parliament but also concerns the insufficient recognition of women as political subjects possessing equal legitimacy in public policymaking processes.

This study further finds that affirmative policies in the form of women's quotas have not yet fully generated substantive democratic transformation. This condition demonstrates that regulatory reforms without corresponding changes in political culture and institutional structures will only produce symbolic representation (Sen, 1999, p. 189). These findings carry global implications because many countries face similar challenges in strengthening women's political participation (Celis & Childs, 2012, p. 216). A number of countries have succeeded in increasing the number of women in parliament through quota policies, yet they continue to encounter difficulties in ensuring women's meaningful involvement in strategic decision-making processes. This situation indicates that inclusive democracy requires a deeper transformation, not only at the level of law and public policy but also in patterns of social relations, the distribution of political power, and institutional cultures that remain affected by gender bias (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2013, p. 490).

From a global perspective, the findings of this study possess strong relevance to international agendas concerning gender equality and inclusive democratic governance. Through the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5, the United Nations emphasizes the importance of gender equality and women's participation in public decision-making processes (United Nations, 2015, p. 18). The findings indicate that strengthening substantive democracy should be directed toward eliminating structural barriers that restrict women's political participation (OECD, 2023, p. 37). A democratic system that fails to ensure equal participation risks producing policy inequalities and neglecting the needs of particular social groups, including women (Dahl, 1998, p. 98). Therefore, the issue of women's representation cannot be understood merely as a domestic political concern but must be viewed as part of a broader global challenge in constructing a democratic order that is just, participatory, and grounded in respect for human rights (UNDP, 2023, p. 54; CEDAW Committee, 2017, p. 7).

## Discussion

### Democratic Inequality and the Persistence of Gendered Political Exclusion

The analysis of this study indicates that formal democracy in Indonesia continues to face serious challenges in providing substantive political equality for women (Clayton, O'Brien, & Piscopo, 2019, p. 452). Democratic institutions have created avenues for participation through open elections, affirmative policies, and the constitutional recognition of citizens' political

rights. However, these mechanisms have not been fully effective in eliminating gender-based inequalities in power relations. Women remain in marginal positions because democratic structures continue to operate through standards of political legitimacy that tend to be masculinized (Dahlerup, [2018](#), p. 24). This condition demonstrates that democratic inequality is not merely concerned with the distribution of political seats but also with how access to political influence, recognition, and authority is unequally constructed within modern democratic systems.

The concept of gendered citizenship is crucial for explaining how women's citizenship rights in politics continue to be constrained by social constructions and patriarchal culture. Although democracy formally recognizes women as citizens with equal political rights, in practice women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining the same leadership legitimacy as men. Politics is commonly perceived as a public sphere that requires dominant, aggressive, and competitive characteristics, attributes that are socially associated more closely with men (Childs & Lovenduski, [2013](#), p. 492). Consequently, women must continually prove their political capabilities in order to be considered worthy of leadership positions. This situation demonstrates that procedural democracy has not yet been fully capable of eliminating political exclusion that operates through social and cultural mechanisms.

Another issue identified in this study is the persistence of symbolic exclusion against women within the political system. In many cases, the presence of women in political parties and legislative institutions is positioned merely as a complement to administrative representation. Women are included to satisfy quota requirements and to project an image of inclusive democracy, yet they are not provided with adequate opportunities to participate in strategic decision-making processes (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, [2022](#), p. 884). This condition prevents women's representation from generating a substantive redistribution of power. Democracy therefore functions formally without ensuring genuine equality of participation (Franceschet & Piscopo, [2014](#), p. 363). This phenomenon demonstrates that procedural democracy may continue to reproduce social inequalities when it is not accompanied by transformations in political culture and institutional structures that are more inclusive.

The dominance of masculine political legitimacy further reinforces the marginalization of women in politics. Political legitimacy is more readily granted to men because society continues to perceive leadership as a masculine attribute. Such perceptions make women more vulnerable to political delegitimization, even when they possess adequate competence and experience (O'Brien & Rickne, [2016](#), p. 714). In this context, democracy no longer functions as a neutral arena of competition but instead becomes a social space that reproduces patriarchal power relations. Therefore, strengthening substantive democracy requires transformation not only in political regulations but also in the social and cultural norms that shape public perceptions of women's leadership (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor-Robinson, [2014](#), p. 119).

One possible response to these conditions is the development of public campaigns aimed at transforming political culture and promoting gender-sensitive democratic education (Schwindt-Bayer, [2010](#), p. 164). Public campaigns should be directed toward fostering awareness that political leadership is determined not by gender but by capacity, integrity, and the ability to advance the public interest. Political education grounded in gender equality should also be strengthened through political parties, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and social media platforms (Fung & Wright, [2003](#), p. 27). Such an approach is essential for reducing stereotypes against women while simultaneously expanding social acceptance of women's leadership within modern democratic systems.

### **Limits of Affirmative Policies in Substantive Representation**

Affirmative policies in the form of a minimum 30 percent quota for women's representation in legislative candidacies constitute a progressive measure aimed at expanding

women's political participation within Indonesian democracy (Franceschet, Krook, & Tan, 2012, p. 5). However, this study demonstrates that such policies have not yet fully generated substantive representation in political practice (Meier, 2018, p. 226). Although women's representation has increased numerically, this increase has not been accompanied by an equitable distribution of political influence in policymaking processes (Lühiste & Kenny, 2016, p. 689). This condition indicates that procedural equality does not necessarily produce substantive equality when reforms focus solely on administrative measures without addressing transformations in political structures and democratic culture (Molyneux, 1985, p. 232).

In many cases, the implementation of affirmative action continues to be understood merely as an administrative obligation for political parties to satisfy electoral nomination requirements (Verge & Pastor, 2018, p. 69). Women are recruited to fulfill quota provisions without being supported through adequate cadre development, capacity building, and the distribution of political resources (Bush, 2011, p. 106). This situation results in many women being present in politics as a form of tokenistic inclusion, namely symbolic participation without substantive influence over the direction of public policy (Kanter, 1977, p. 965). The presence of women in parliament has not yet produced significant changes in gender-responsive policymaking because strategic positions and decision-making processes remain dominated by men (Leston-Bandeira, 2016, p. 432).

Another weakness of affirmative policies lies in the absence of evaluation mechanisms capable of ensuring that women's representation genuinely contributes to improvements in the quality of democracy (Weldon, 2011, p. 52). Political parties tend to focus on meeting numerical targets for female candidates without creating political environments that sustainably support women's leadership (Krook & Nugent, 2016, p. 151). Consequently, women continue to face structural barriers, including limited access to political networks, logistical support, and social legitimacy (Johnson, 2016, p. 378). This situation demonstrates that affirmative policies have not yet transformed the underlying power relations that constitute the root causes of inequality in women's political representation (Mackay & Waylen, 2014, p. 490)

These findings indicate that procedural democracy requires more substantive reforms so that women's representation does not remain confined to the symbolic level (Htun & Weldon, 2018, p. 41). Strengthening women's representation should be directed toward enhancing political capacity, expanding access to strategic party positions, and increasing involvement in public policymaking processes (Sawer, Tremblay, & Trimble, 2006, p. 17). An inclusive democracy is not sufficiently achieved by merely providing formal opportunities for participation; it must also ensure that women possess equal political power in determining the direction of public policy (Phillips, 1998, p. 41)

Strategic measures that can be undertaken include strengthening oversight mechanisms for the implementation of affirmative policies, developing sustainable women's political cadre programs, and expanding public campaigns concerning the importance of substantive representation (Bauer & Burnet, 2013, p. 118). Political parties should be required not only to fulfill administrative quotas but also to ensure that women occupy strategic positions within party structures and legislative institutions (Norris & Inglehart, 2003, p. 137). Such an approach is essential for ensuring that affirmative policies function as genuine instruments of democratic transformation that are more egalitarian and gender-responsive (Goetz & Hassim, 2003, p. 9)

### ***Mubādalāh* and the Reconstruction of Inclusive Democratic Leadership**

The perspective of *Mubādalāh* serves as an important analytical framework in this study for reconstructing a more inclusive and gender-just model of democratic leadership (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2010, p. 414). The findings indicate that inequalities in women's

political representation are not solely caused by weak regulations or administrative barriers, but also by patterns of power relations that continue to be structured upon patriarchal paradigms. In many cases, politics is still understood as a sphere of masculine domination that positions men as the primary actors in public decision-making processes (Dahlerup, 2006, 23). Such conditions frequently place women in the role of democratic complements without granting them equal opportunities for participation (Thomas & Wilcox, 2005, p. 12). In this context, *Mubādalah* offers an alternative approach that positions men and women as equal partners in social and political life through the principles of *reciprocity*, justice, and shared responsibility in building inclusive democratic governance. This perspective possesses a strong normative foundation in the Qur'an, particularly in QS. *al-Hujurat* [49]: 13 (Kodir, 2024, p. 97).

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

This verse affirms that all human beings are created equal and that the only distinguishing factor among them is the quality of their piety rather than gender or social status. The verse demonstrates that Islam places respect for human dignity and social equality as fundamental principles governing both social and political life (Wadud, 1999, p. 68). The concept of *Mubādalah* regards leadership not as the exclusive right of a particular group but as a social trust that should be exercised on the basis of capacity, integrity, and commitment to the public good (Tripp & Kang, 2008, p. 342).

This perspective is important for dismantling political constructions that have historically restricted the legitimacy of women's leadership through masculine standards of power. The findings of this study indicate that women with adequate political capacities frequently continue to encounter obstacles because social and cultural systems have not yet fully accepted women as legitimate political leaders. This situation demonstrates that the primary challenge facing democracy is not the absence of women from political spaces but rather the unequal power relations that restrict women's access to equal political authority. Through the *Mubādalah* approach, leadership is understood as a complementary relationship of cooperation between men and women in promoting public welfare. This principle is consistent with QS. *at-Taubah* [9]: 71 (Mulia, 2021, p. 143).

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

This verse affirms that men and women are *awliya'* of one another in carrying out social responsibilities aimed at promoting good and preventing wrongdoing. It demonstrates that social participation and public leadership in Islam are not restricted by gender but are directed toward a collective responsibility to realize social justice (Lamrabet, 2018, p. 87). The values of *equality* and *relational justice* embedded within *Mubādalah* provide a strong ethical foundation for constructing a more participatory democracy. An inclusive democracy should not merely grant women formal rights to vote and to stand for election; it must also ensure an equitable distribution of opportunities, access to resources, and political legitimacy. The findings of this study reveal that women continue to face limitations in accessing strategic party positions, political logistical support, and decision-making spaces. Such conditions cause democracy to function procedurally without producing substantive participation. The perspective of *Mubādalah* emphasizes that democratic justice must be built upon political relations characterized by mutual respect and recognition of women's capacities as full political subjects (Mietzner, 2019, p. 142). Accordingly, democracy should no longer be understood as an exclusive arena of competition but rather as a space for social collaboration oriented toward the common good. This principle is consistent with QS. *an-Nahl* [16]: 90 (Abou El Fadl, 2023, p. 214).

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ ۗ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

This verse further emphasizes the importance of upholding justice, benevolence, and respect for fellow human beings as the foundation of a dignified social order (An-Na'im, 2010, p. 184). This study also demonstrates that the *Mubādalah* approach possesses significant relevance in reconciling Islamic values with the principles of modern democracy. For a considerable period, certain religious interpretations have been employed to restrict women's leadership within the public sphere. However, the fundamental principle of *Mubādalah* positions men and women as individuals who share equal social responsibilities in building a just society (Matland, 2005, p. 97).

This perspective illustrates that Islam fundamentally supports women's political participation insofar as it is oriented toward public welfare and social justice. Therefore, *Mubādalah* can serve as an alternative to the practice of *patriarchal politics*, which has historically marginalized women through gender-biased social and cultural interpretations (Esack, 1997, p. 103). At the same time, this approach strengthens the argument that inclusive democracy is not incompatible with Islamic values but can instead be constructed through the principles of mutuality and respect for human dignity. This normative foundation is further reinforced by QS. *ash-Shūrā* [42]: 38 (Bensaid, 2021, p. 67).

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

Furthermore, this verse emphasizes the importance of *shūrā* (consultation) in public decision-making as a form of egalitarian collective participation in social and political life. Transformative measures that may be undertaken to strengthen an inclusive democracy grounded in *Mubādalah* include the enhancement of gender-sensitive political education, the reform of political party culture, and the development of *public campaigns* that promote social acceptance of women's leadership. Such public campaigns should be directed toward fostering awareness that women's leadership does not constitute a threat to religious or cultural values but rather represents an essential component of efforts to improve democratic quality and governance (Badran, 2009, p. 243).

The media, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and religious leaders all possess important roles in constructing social narratives that support women's equal political participation. This approach offers an important lesson that democratic transformation cannot be achieved solely through formal regulations but also requires changes in societal perceptions regarding leadership relations, social justice, and political participation within modern democratic life. In this context, Qur'anic values concerning justice, mutuality, and respect for human dignity provide an essential ethical foundation for building a democracy that is more inclusive, equitable, and oriented toward universal humanity (March, 2019, p. 231).

### Reframing Women's Leadership Beyond *Symbolic Representation*

This study demonstrates that women's leadership within Indonesian democracy continues to be understood largely in symbolic terms and has not yet been fully positioned as an essential component of substantive political governance transformation. In many cases, the presence of women in parliament and political parties is treated merely as an administrative indicator of democratic success without being accompanied by an equitable distribution of power in decision-making processes (Engineer, 2004, p. 95).

This condition reveals that women are still perceived as complements to political representation rather than as principal actors possessing full legitimacy to shape the direction of public policy. Such circumstances necessitate a reframing of the concept of women's leadership so that it is no longer understood merely as a symbol of democratic inclusiveness but rather as a fundamental requirement for building a political system that is more just, participatory, and responsive to the broader interests of society (Franceschet, Krook, & Piscopo, 2012, p. 16).

The redefinition of women's leadership is crucial because the structures of modern democracy continue to be influenced by standards of political legitimacy that are largely masculinized. Leadership is frequently evaluated according to dominant, aggressive, and competitive characteristics that are socially associated more closely with men. Consequently, women who engage in politics are often compelled to adapt to masculine leadership patterns in order to gain political recognition (Bjarnegård & Kenny, [2016](#), pp. 370–392). This study demonstrates that such conditions actually constrain the emergence of alternative leadership models that are more participatory, dialogical, and oriented toward social justice. In this context, *leadership legitimacy* should not be constructed on the basis of gender stereotypes but rather on the basis of capacity, integrity, and the ability to advance collective public interests.

The concept of *political agency* employed in this study emphasizes that women must be recognized as full political subjects who possess the capacity to influence democratic processes and public policymaking. Women do not merely function as symbolic representatives of particular groups; rather, they serve as substantive political actors whose social experiences, policy perspectives, and sensitivities constitute important contributions to governance. The findings indicate that women's participation in politics has the potential to strengthen issues that have historically received insufficient attention, including social protection, education, women's and children's health, and policies grounded in social justice. Therefore, efforts to strengthen women's participation should not be limited to increasing numerical representation but should also be directed toward expanding women's influence within legislative processes and strategic decision-making (Krook & Norris, [2014](#), pp. 2–20).

The process of reframing *women's leadership* also requires changes in the political culture that has historically positioned women as secondary actors within democratic systems. An inclusive democracy must be capable of creating participatory spaces that enable women to develop as political leaders without being constrained by gender stereotypes and structural barriers. Such conditions require internal reforms within political parties, the strengthening of women's political cadre development, and a more equitable distribution of political opportunities. This study shows that women frequently encounter limited access to political networks, economic resources, and institutional support, all of which are critical factors in electoral competition. Therefore, political system reform must be accompanied by changes in public perceptions of women's leadership as a normal and legitimate component of modern democratic practice (Bligh et al., [2012](#), pp. 560–597).

A strategic measure for strengthening this transformation is the development of *public campaigns* that emphasize the importance of women's leadership in enhancing the quality of democracy and governance. Public campaigns should be designed to cultivate social awareness that women are not merely complements to democracy but are essential contributors to policymaking and state decision-making processes. The media, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and religious institutions all possess significant roles in shaping social narratives that support the acceptance of women's leadership. This approach offers an important lesson that strengthening substantive democracy requires not only political regulatory reform but also the transformation of social culture capable of recognizing women as equal political subjects who possess leadership authority and the right to participate fully in democratic life (White et al., [2024](#), pp. 391–393).

### **Global Implications for Gender Equality and Democratic Governance**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the issue of women's low political representation cannot be understood merely as a local or national concern; rather, it constitutes part of a broader global challenge in realizing a democracy that is both inclusive and gender-just. Inequalities in women's representation within political institutions reveal that modern democracies across many countries continue to face serious difficulties in

ensuring the equitable distribution of access to political power. This condition confirms that the success of democracy cannot be measured solely through electoral procedures but must also be assessed through the capacity of political systems to guarantee the participation of all citizens without gender-based discrimination. In this context, research on women's leadership in Indonesia possesses global relevance because it demonstrates how patriarchal culture, political party structures, and procedural democratic practices may continue to produce political exclusion against women even when principles of equality have been formally recognized.

The findings of this study are directly connected to the global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 concerning gender equality and Goal 16 concerning the development of inclusive, participatory, and just institutions. The results indicate that women's involvement in politics is not merely a matter of symbolic representation but is closely related to the quality of democratic governance and the broader protection of social rights. The limited participation of women in public decision-making processes has the potential to generate policies that are less responsive to the needs of vulnerable groups, including women and children. Therefore, strengthening inclusive democracy must be directed toward transforming political structures in ways that expand equal opportunities for participation and eliminate social barriers that restrict women's engagement in the public sphere.

The contribution of this study to *gender studies* lies in its effort to demonstrate that women's political exclusion is not solely the result of cultural factors but is also produced through democratic structures and masculinized political power relations. The study shows that procedural democracy may function effectively without producing substantive justice when the distribution of political legitimacy continues to be shaped by gender stereotypes. Within the field of *democratic studies*, this article argues that the quality of democracy should be evaluated not only through political openness and competitive elections but also through the ability of political systems to create inclusive and participatory distributions of power. Accordingly, this research expands scholarly discussions on *democratic inequality* through an approach that simultaneously connects gender relations, political structures, and democratic culture.

This study also makes an important contribution to *Islamic studies* through its use of the perspective of *Mubādalāh* as an analytical framework for developing a more egalitarian model of democracy. For a long time, discussions concerning women's leadership in Muslim societies have frequently been framed within normative perspectives that tend to confine women to the domestic sphere. The perspective of *Mubādalāh* offers an alternative approach by positioning men and women as equal partners in social and political life based on the principles of mutuality, justice, and shared responsibility. This approach demonstrates that Islamic values can serve as an ethical foundation for strengthening inclusive democracy and promoting respect for women's political participation. Within the context of *human rights discourse*, this study affirms that women's political rights constitute an essential component of respect for human dignity and the principle of equality within modern democratic systems.

Strategic measures that can be undertaken to strengthen inclusive democracy at the global level include the development of *public campaigns* oriented toward gender-sensitive political education, the enhancement of democratic literacy, and the promotion of public awareness regarding the importance of women's leadership in governance. Such campaigns should involve educational institutions, civil society organizations, media outlets, and religious leaders in order to construct social narratives that support women's equal political participation. Strengthening international cooperation on issues of gender equality and democracy is also essential for facilitating the exchange of experiences and best practices among countries in building more inclusive political systems. Accordingly, this study not only

contributes to the advancement of academic knowledge but also offers a direction for social and political transformation that is relevant to strengthening democracy and gender justice in the global context.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the low representation of women in political leadership in Lampung Province is not merely the result of weak implementation of affirmative policies but is also produced through patriarchal power relations that generate *gendered political exclusion* within democratic systems. Although procedural democracy formally guarantees political participation, it has not yet produced substantive equality because leadership legitimacy continues to be constructed through masculinized political standards. As a result, women are frequently positioned within symbolic forms of representation without obtaining equal access to and influence over public policymaking processes. The findings reveal that patriarchal culture, competence stereotypes, insufficient support from political parties, and competitive electoral structures constitute the principal factors sustaining democratic inequality and the marginalization of women within political spaces. This article further demonstrates that the perspective of *Mubādalāh* makes a significant contribution to reconstructing a more inclusive, egalitarian, and just model of democratic leadership. The principles of *reciprocity*, *mutuality*, and *relational justice* embedded within *Mubādalāh* illustrate that political leadership is not determined by gender but by capacity, integrity, and social responsibility in advancing the public good.

The findings expand contemporary discussions on democracy, gender, and politics by positioning women not merely as complements to political representation but as full political subjects possessing substantive legitimacy within governance processes. Accordingly, this study contributes to the development of *gender studies*, *Islamic studies*, *democratic studies*, and *human rights discourse* through an approach that integrates the values of justice, human dignity, and inclusive democracy within the framework of *Mubādalāh*. From a global perspective, this study carries important implications for strengthening gender equality and democratic governance across different countries, particularly in responding to the persistence of *patriarchal democracy* that continues to restrict women's participation in public life. The findings indicate that increasing the number of women in political institutions does not automatically result in inclusive democracy when power structures, political culture, and standards of leadership legitimacy remain masculinized. Therefore, modern democracy requires a transformation that extends beyond electoral procedures to encompass the equitable distribution of power, respect for women's political rights, and the strengthening of substantive participation in public decision-making. Within the framework of the global *Sustainable Development Goals*, particularly those concerning gender equality and the development of inclusive institutions, this study affirms that eliminating women's political exclusion constitutes an essential component of efforts to build democratic governance that is more just, participatory, and grounded in respect for universal human dignity.

This study recommends the implementation of more substantive political reforms through the strengthening of women's political cadre development within political parties, the implementation of affirmative policies oriented toward *substantive representation*, and the continuous promotion of gender-sensitive political education. Strengthening *public campaigns* on women's leadership is also essential for transforming patriarchal culture and social stereotypes that continue to constrain women's political legitimacy. Furthermore, the integration of the *Mubādalāh* perspective into democratic education, public policy, and political governance may serve as a strategic pathway toward constructing democratic systems that are more inclusive, participatory, and gender-just at both the national and global levels.

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