

The Dynamics of Women's Political Participation and an Evaluation of Gender Representation in the Provincial Parliament of Gorontalo

Andi Yusuf Katili^{1*}, Ratih Arifin², Agus Pariono³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Bina Taruna, Gorontalo, Indonesia

Email: yusuf2801@gmail.com ; araarifin89@gmail.com ; guspri811@gmail.com

Abstract. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of women's political participation and evaluate gender representation in the Provincial Parliament of Gorontalo. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with female politicians, election organizers, and voters from various community groups, complemented by documentation and observation. The findings reveal that women's representation in the Gorontalo parliament has increased quantitatively, largely due to affirmative policies such as the 30% quota. However, this representation does not yet fully reflect substantive involvement in legislation and decision-making processes. Structural barriers, including political party dominance and high political costs, alongside cultural obstacles such as patriarchal norms and the double burden faced by women, remain significant challenges. Nevertheless, a positive trend emerges among young voters and parts of society who consider women's participation essential for producing more inclusive policies. These findings highlight the need for synergy between internal party reforms, capacity-building for women, and civic political education to ensure that women's representation is not merely symbolic but also meaningful. Thus, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of women's political representation at the regional level and offers strategic recommendations for fostering a more inclusive and gender-equitable democracy.

Keywords: Political Participation; Gender Representation, Women

Received:10-11-2025 **Revised:**28-11-2025 **Accepted:**18-12-2025

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality in politics is one of the key agendas in the development of modern democracy. Women's participation in politics is not merely a matter of representation; it is also closely tied to the quality of democracy and the direction of public policy outcomes. Across the globe, women's political involvement continues to face both structural and cultural challenges. UN Women (2025) reports that although women's representation in parliaments worldwide has increased, the figures remain far from balanced compared to men. This highlights the persistent barriers that prevent women from fully engaging in political processes.

Women's involvement in politics is also highly relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 on gender equality. The SDGs emphasize the importance of equal participation in public decision-making as an integral component of inclusive development. The World Bank (2020) affirms that women's political participation significantly contributes to improving the quality of social policies and fostering better governance.

Indonesia has made efforts to enhance women's representation through affirmative action. Since the enactment of the 2003 Election Law, political parties have been required to nominate at least 30% women in their candidate lists. However, in practice, the policy has yet to be fully effective. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2024), women's representation in Indonesia's parliament in 2024 remained below 25% of total seats, far from the expected target. This phenomenon demonstrates that affirmative regulations cannot be maximized without strong institutional support and an inclusive political culture. From a structural perspective, the barriers women face in politics include limited access to economic and political resources, lack of party support, and an electoral system that does not fully encourage female representation. Culturally, patriarchal dominance remains strong, reinforcing the notion that politics is primarily a male domain. Hendrarti and Windyastuti (2024) explain that Indonesian politics is still characterized by hegemonic masculinity, which directly restricts women's space to act as influential political actors. Psychological constraints also play a role, as many women lack confidence to compete in political contests, especially when facing social stigma that undervalues their abilities compared to men. Katili's (2020) study in Gorontalo City, for example, found that female party cadres were often placed merely to fulfill the quota without receiving genuine support from party structures. As a result, their roles did not develop substantively within the political arena.

The composition of the Gorontalo Provincial Parliament for the 2024–2029 term reveals a significant gender imbalance. Of the 44 members inaugurated, 38 are men and only 6 are women. This means that women's representation stands at merely 13.6 percent, far below the affirmative action requirement mandating a minimum of 30 percent female legislative candidates. This condition illustrates that while the quota regulation has opened opportunities, the final outcome remains dominated by men. A closer look shows that only a few parties successfully secured seats for their female cadres. Golkar, NasDem, PDI-P, PPP, and PAN recorded female representatives, though in very limited numbers. Meanwhile, Gerindra, PKS, Demokrat, PKB, and Hanura filled all their seats with male representatives. This indicates that commitment to supporting female candidates is uneven across parties. Women are often positioned as fillers on the candidate list rather than as leading figures prepared to compete and win elections. Such unequal representation has important implications for the legislative process. With such a small number, women may struggle to build collective influence in advancing substantive issues, particularly those related to women, families, and vulnerable groups. The few female legislators elected must carry a double burden: proving themselves equal to their male colleagues while also confronting gender-biased social perceptions.

Table 1. Composition of the DPRD Members for the 2024–2029 Period

No	Partai Politik	Laki-laki	Perempuan	Total
1	Golkar	7	1	8
2	NasDem	6	1	7
3	PDI Perjuangan	5	2	7
4	Gerindra	6	0	6
5	PKS	5	0	5
6	PPP	3	1	4
7	Demokrat	3	0	3
8	PAN	2	1	3
9	PKB	1	0	1
10	Hanura	1	0	1
	Total	38	6	44

Source: Secretariat of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) of Gorontalo Province, 2025

Nevertheless, the presence of six female legislators remains strategically meaningful. They can serve as catalysts for creating more inclusive discussions in parliament and act as role models for future generations. To enhance the quality of representation, however, synergy is needed among internal party reforms, institutional support, and broader public awareness to grant political legitimacy to women. With these measures, opportunities to reduce gender disparities in Gorontalo's legislature could expand significantly in the future.

Law No. 7 of 2017 on Elections explicitly addresses women's representation to ensure gender affirmation in legislative candidacy. A key provision lies in Article 245, which requires political parties to include at least 30 percent women in their candidate lists for the DPR, provincial DPRD, and district/city DPRD. This regulation serves as a formal prerequisite during candidate list verification, meaning that parties failing to comply may be deemed ineligible. Furthermore, Article 246(2) stipulates that candidate lists must ensure balanced representation, requiring that at least one woman be included in every group of three candidates. Commonly referred to as the "zipper system," this principle is designed to prevent women from being relegated to less strategic positions on candidate lists, thus giving them a real chance to be elected.

Article 252 further reinforces women's position by granting the Election Commission (KPU) the authority to reject candidate lists that do not meet the 30 percent requirement. This underscores that the regulation is not merely symbolic but carries clear legal consequences for noncompliant parties.

Despite such strong legal provisions, actual practice shows that the number of women elected remains far from expected. This demonstrates that legal affirmation merely opens the door, while substantive success still depends heavily on party support, women's preparedness as candidates, and shifts in political culture. In other words, the Election Law provides a vital foundation, but achieving proportional women's representation requires collaborative efforts across multiple actors.

In Gorontalo, these challenges are particularly evident. Although some women ran as candidates, many of their nominations were administrative in nature—intended more to fulfill quota requirements than to reflect genuine political strategies. This situation results in women being present in numbers but lacking substantive influence in decision-making processes. Women's political representation should therefore be understood not only in terms of meeting numerical quotas but also in terms of their contributions to policymaking. Hidayat and Susilo (2022) emphasize that the post-reform increase in women's parliamentary seats has not corresponded with greater influence in shaping public policies. This shows that substantive representation is far more crucial than mere descriptive representation.

Similar patterns have been observed elsewhere. Darmansyah and Sartika (2021) note that in Dumai City, female candidacies in the 2019–2024 legislative elections were largely driven by compliance with regulations rather than genuine efforts to secure their victory. This suggests that women's participation is often treated as a formality. Another aggravating factor is social stigma. Women in politics are frequently perceived as less competent, forcing them to work harder to gain legitimacy, while men are more readily accepted as leaders. Fauziah, Rizki, and Ramdani (2023) argue that women's challenges in formal politics stem not only from systemic barriers but also from societal pressures and gendered expectations that hinder their full participation.

The media also plays a role in shaping biased perceptions of female politicians. Coverage often emphasizes personal aspects rather than competence. Setiawan (2023), for instance, highlights gender discrimination in political reporting that reinforces stereotypes of women as weak and less capable. Taken together, these dynamics underscore that women's representation in politics still faces complex challenges. This calls for a new approach to evaluating female representation, one that goes beyond seat numbers to assess the quality of their contributions in policymaking. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering an evaluation model of gender representation that provides a comprehensive picture of women's roles in Gorontalo politics.

The urgency of this research is further reinforced by the fact that without strategic interventions, gender disparities in politics will persist. This not only disadvantages women but

also undermines the quality of democracy. Substantive women's representation is necessary to ensure their aspirations are genuinely reflected in public policies. Accordingly, examining the dynamics of women's participation in Gorontalo is expected to generate data-driven recommendations to strengthen inclusive democracy and promote gender-equitable development. ecosystem.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore in depth the dynamics of women's political participation in Gorontalo Province. This approach was chosen because gender representation issues cannot be sufficiently measured through statistics alone; they must also be understood through experiences, perceptions, and the social constructions that develop within society and political institutions. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with several key informant groups. First, female political officials serving in the regional legislature, whose experiences provide insights into the challenges faced from candidacy to parliamentary decision-making, as well as the strategies they employed to strengthen their roles. Second, the Chair of the Provincial Election Commission (KPU), who holds authority in election administration and understands the implementation of affirmative policies, particularly the 30 percent quota for female legislative candidates. Third, voters from the Gorontalo community—both men and women—who offer perspectives on public perceptions of female candidates and their political preferences in elections. In addition to primary data, secondary data were utilized, including official documents, statistical reports, and academic literature related to women's representation in politics. These sources helped strengthen field findings and provide a broader context.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and observations. In-depth interviews were used to explore informants' personal experiences, while FGDs involved voters, women's organizations, and academics to generate richer discussions on supporting and inhibiting factors for women's representation. Direct observations were also conducted in political activities and legislative meetings to better understand actual interactions among political actors in Gorontalo. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis method. The process began with transcribing interviews, then categorizing data into specific themes such as structural barriers, public perceptions, political party support, and the effectiveness of affirmative policies. Subsequently, the researcher interpreted the findings to identify patterns, relationships among variables, and meanings behind the informants' statements. To ensure data validity, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing interview results with field observations and official documents. Through this qualitative approach, the

research not only describes the low level of women's representation in parliament but also provides a deeper understanding of the factors influencing women's political participation in Gorontalo. By incorporating the voices of female political officials, the perspectives of election organizers, and the views of voters, this study aims to present a comprehensive picture of gender representation while offering strategic insights for strengthening a more inclusive democracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that women's political participation in Gorontalo Province is perceived differently by key stakeholders. From the perspective of election organizers, women's involvement is considered relatively high, even surpassing the national average. However, this quantitative achievement requires more critical reflection. The inclusion of women in legislative candidate lists remains heavily influenced by affirmative regulations, particularly the 30% quota, making representation appear more administrative than the result of structural party awareness or grassroots support. Consequently, the increase in the number of female candidates or elected representatives does not automatically correlate with stronger substantive representation in legislative processes.

Empirical data shows that only 44 out of 45 seats in the Gorontalo Provincial Parliament for the 2024–2029 period were officially filled, as one elected member resigned before taking the oath of office. Among them, 38 were men and only 6 were women, resulting in female representation of just 13.6 percent. This figure falls far below the 30% quota mandated by the Election Law. The gap between legal provisions and actual political outcomes reflects a persistent challenge: although regulations are relatively progressive, women's representation has yet to reach the ideal level. This situation mirrors the national trend, where quotas increase the number of women candidates but do not always translate into successful electoral outcomes.

The six women who gained seats in Gorontalo's parliament carry significant symbolic weight. Their presence creates opportunities for women's issues, children's rights, and the concerns of vulnerable groups to receive greater attention. Yet, their limited numbers weaken their collective bargaining power. While female legislators actively participate in commissions and plenary sessions, they remain constrained in steering policy agendas or holding strategic decision-making positions. This highlights the distinction between descriptive representation (numerical presence) and substantive representation (influence on policy).

Compared to the previous 2019–2024 period, the number of women in the provincial parliament has increased slightly, but the percentage remains low. The improvement reflects a gradual rise in public awareness of women's political participation, though the impact is not yet

significant. The lack of female representation has serious implications for public policy. Issues such as maternal and child health, women's education, protection from gender-based violence, and women's economic empowerment risk receiving inadequate attention, with legislation still shaped predominantly by male perspectives.

Greater female representation is not only a matter of political justice but also of policy effectiveness. Research has shown that women in legislatures often bring higher sensitivity to social welfare concerns. Therefore, enhancing both the number and quality of women's representation in Gorontalo's parliament could provide tangible benefits for regional development. The analysis underscores that female representation in the 2024–2029 period remains far from ideal. Structural barriers—such as political party dynamics and high campaign costs—combined with cultural barriers rooted in patriarchy, continue to limit women's participation. Although there is modest progress compared to the previous term, the proportion remains well below the legal quota. This demonstrates that affirmative regulations, while essential, are insufficient on their own. Achieving genuine gender-inclusive representation requires synergy between law enforcement, party commitment, women's capacity-building, and public awareness.

Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections provides a clear framework for women's representation. Article 245 mandates that at least 30% of legislative candidates be women, while Article 246 establishes the "one in three candidates" system (zipper system). Furthermore, Article 252 authorizes the Electoral Commission (KPU) to reject lists that fail to meet this requirement. Yet, in practice, compliance is often superficial. Parties frequently place women at the bottom of candidate lists or in electoral districts where their chances of winning are slim, reducing women's involvement to an administrative formality rather than a strategic commitment.

In Gorontalo, this issue was evident when the Constitutional Court ordered a re-election in one electoral district due to failure to meet the 30% quota. The case highlighted how violations—whether deliberate or due to weak oversight—undermine the effectiveness of affirmative measures. Female legislators' experiences provide further insight. Their motivations for entering politics range from moral obligations to advocate for marginalized groups to responding to constituency demands. Yet their journeys reveal complex challenges, including intra-party competition, the high financial costs of campaigns, and reliance on personal networks to mobilize voters. Once elected, they actively participate in parliamentary work, but balancing legislative duties with domestic responsibilities often places extra pressure on them, limiting their consistency in advancing gender-related agendas.

Views on the 30% quota are also ambivalent. Some legislators regard it as a vital entry point but insufficient for achieving genuine equality. Others argue the quota should be raised to 50% to achieve proportionality. However, political reality shows that while quotas grant formal access, strategic leadership positions remain dominated by men. Thus, the imbalance between descriptive and substantive representation persists.

From the perspective of young voters, there is growing recognition of the importance of women's political participation. They view women's involvement as crucial for more inclusive policymaking, yet their knowledge of affirmative action remains limited. Many are unaware of the quota's existence, perceiving it only as a "starting step." This reflects weak political education and insufficient public awareness campaigns. University students also identified additional challenges, such as gender-based violence, the double burden faced by female politicians, and the lack of female role models in politics.

Public perceptions more broadly are diverse. Some voters acknowledge the positive contributions of women, particularly in social welfare, education, health, and family protection. However, others still view politics as a masculine domain. This reflects the persistence of patriarchal norms, where women must prove their competence to earn legitimacy, while men are readily accepted. Structural barriers—such as high campaign costs and elite dominance in parties—further restrict women's ability to compete on equal footing.

Overall, the study reveals that while women's political representation in Gorontalo has improved compared to the previous term, its quality remains limited. The rise in female parliamentarians is driven more by affirmative regulations than by genuine political support. Society values women's presence, though perceptions remain split between normative acceptance and cultural bias. These findings suggest that women's representation in Gorontalo is still in a transitional stage—shifting from symbolic quotas toward substantive participation. This transition will require structural support, stronger political education, and the empowerment of women's capacity both individually and collectively.

Several structural factors continue to hinder women's electoral success. First, political parties, as primary gatekeepers, often position women unfavorably, prioritizing male candidates with stronger social bases, economic resources, and political experience. Second, the high costs of elections pose serious barriers. Campaigns in Gorontalo, as elsewhere, demand substantial financial resources for logistics, outreach, and networks. Many capable women lack such resources, despite their intellectual and social strengths. Third, weak party cadre development

contributes to the problem. Women are often recruited only close to elections, without long-term programs to strengthen their political capacity.

Thus, women's representation in Gorontalo reflects a tension between affirmative policies and social realities. While the 30% quota provides formal access, it often stops at procedural compliance, as parties strategically place women in unwinnable positions. Legal access exists, but substantive access to legislative power and agenda-setting remains limited. This underlines the importance of distinguishing descriptive from substantive representation. Women's presence in parliament does not automatically guarantee gender-sensitive policymaking. Genuine representation should be assessed by political action, not symbolic numbers. Recent studies in Indonesia support this view, showing that female legislators often struggle to advance gender issues due to weak party backing and patriarchal dominance.

Cultural barriers intensify these challenges. Patriarchal norms cast men as the dominant political actors, while women must first prove their legitimacy. Religion and culture often reinforce this bias, creating a double burden for female politicians: complying with quotas while confronting entrenched stereotypes. Gorontalo's strong traditional values illustrate this reality. Additionally, the "double burden" of balancing political roles with domestic responsibilities reduces female legislators' capacity to focus consistently on substantive issues. Reports highlight the lack of social support as a major constraint on women's political participation in Indonesia. Without supportive infrastructure, women's representation risks remaining a mere administrative formality.

From voters' perspectives, ambivalence persists. While younger generations favor inclusivity, their limited understanding of quotas shows weak political literacy. Broader society exhibits conditional acceptance—supporting women when they demonstrate clear benefits but retaining the belief that politics is fundamentally masculine. Theoretically, this reflects a transitional phase in Gorontalo's gender politics. Quotas have opened the door, but they have not eliminated structural and cultural barriers. Descriptive representation has been achieved, but substantive representation depends on stronger party support, societal shifts in gender norms, and women's own empowerment with adequate resources. The key challenge is not only increasing women's numbers in parliament but ensuring their presence translates into real influence on political practices and public policy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, women's political representation in Gorontalo has made numerical progress but still falls short of addressing substantive challenges. More significant change requires synergy between women's capacity-building, internal reform within political parties, political education for

society, and stronger social support that enables women to perform optimally in political roles. Without these measures, democracy in Gorontalo risks continuing to treat women merely as quota fillers rather than as key actors capable of shaping the direction of public policy. Closing conclusions and suggestions. The conclusions describe the answers to the hypotheses and/or research objectives or findings obtained. Conclusions do not contain a repeat of the results and discussion, but rather a summary of the findings as expected in the objectives or hypotheses. Suggestions present things that will be done related to further ideas from the research. Based on the findings, several strategic steps can be taken to strengthen women's political participation and representation. First, women's capacity must be enhanced through continuous political education, ensuring that their presence is not only numerical but also substantive in voicing public aspirations. Second, political parties should move beyond fulfilling quotas and instead provide greater opportunities for women to engage in decision-making processes, including shaping internal party policies. Third, more concrete institutional support is needed, such as regulations that ensure transparency and accountability in the recruitment of female legislative candidates. Fourth, society must be actively involved through improved political literacy, thereby strengthening collective awareness of the importance of gender representation. Fifth, academics and researchers should continue to examine women's political participation through more critical approaches, producing evidence-based recommendations that can guide policy-making. With the implementation of these measures, women's representation is expected to go beyond numbers and transform into substantive influence, creating tangible impacts on the quality of democracy in Indonesia, particularly in Gorontalo.

Acknowledment

We extend our gratitude to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, the Directorate of Research and Community Service, and the Higher Education Service Institute (LLDIKTI) Region XVI for funding and facilitating this research through Research Contract No. 867/LL16/AL.04/2025 dated June 4, 2025, and Research Agreement Contract No. 138/UNBITA/LLDIKTI.XVI/VI/2025 dated June 5, 2025. We also express our deepest appreciation to all parties who contributed to the completion of this study. Special thanks go to the informants particularly female legislators, election organizers, and members of the community who generously shared their time and valuable perspectives on women's political participation in Gorontalo.

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