



The Transformation of Women in Politics: From Symbolic Representation to Substantive Roles

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Abstract: This article examines the evolution of the political role of women in Indonesia, particularly in South Sulawesi, from symbolic representation to substantive political power. This transformation began with the 30% quota policy for women's representation, but more profound changes occurred when political parties started implementing selection mechanisms based on capacity and meritocracy. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach through literature analysis and case studies of female political figures in South Sulawesi, this study explores the internal dynamics of parties, social capital, and feminist leadership styles that influence women's substantive positions. The findings indicate that women can navigate patriarchal and patronage cultures through a combination of individual capacity, institutional support, and local legitimacy. Figures such as Husniah Talenrang, Andi Ina Kartika Sari, and Risfayanti Muin reflect a collaborative and empathetic leadership model that strengthens women's political influence. This study confirms the shift in women's politics from mere quantitative presence to strategic roles in decision-making. Nationally, this transformation is also reinforced by increased technocratic capacity, gender-inclusive cadre reforms, and cross-party solidarity networks that collectively promote

women's politics as a transformative force for Indonesian democracy.

Keywords: *Political Patronage; Social Capital; Merit-Based Recruitment; Technocratic Capacity*

Abstrak: Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana peran politik perempuan di Indonesia khususnya di Sulawesi Selatan mengalami transformasi dari representasi simbolik menuju kekuatan politik substantif. Transformasi ini berawal dari kebijakan kuota 30% keterwakilan perempuan, namun perubahan yang lebih mendalam terjadi ketika partai politik mulai menerapkan mekanisme seleksi berbasis kapasitas dan meritokrasi. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif melalui analisis literatur dan studi kasus terhadap figur perempuan politik di Sulawesi Selatan, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dinamika internal partai, modal sosial, serta gaya kepemimpinan feminis yang mempengaruhi posisi substantif perempuan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa perempuan mampu menavigasi budaya patriarkal dan patronase melalui kombinasi kapasitas individu, dukungan kelembagaan, dan legitimasi lokal. Tokoh seperti Husniah Talenrang, Andi Ina Kartika Sari, dan Risfayanti Muin mencerminkan model kepemimpinan kolaboratif dan empatik yang memperkuat pengaruh politik perempuan. Studi ini menegaskan pergeseran politik perempuan dari sekadar kehadiran kuantitatif menuju peran strategis dalam pengambilan keputusan. Secara nasional, transformasi ini juga diperkuat oleh peningkatan kapasitas teknokratis, reformasi kaderisasi inklusif gender, serta jaringan solidaritas lintas partai yang bersama-sama mendorong politik perempuan sebagai kekuatan transformatif bagi demokrasi Indonesia.

Kata kunci: *Patronase Politik; Modal Sosial; Rekrutmen Berbasis Merit; Kapasitas Teknokratis*

INTRODUCTION

Since the post-Reformasi era, women's political participation in Indonesia has increased significantly. Data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU)

show that women's representation in the House of Representatives increased from 8.8% in 1999 to 21.9% during the 2024 - 2029 period (Parline, 2025). This progress reflects the impact of affirmative action, as mandated by the 30% quota in Law No. 2/2008 and reinforced by Law No. 7/2017, which underscores the country's commitment to gender inclusivity (Irawanto, 2018). However, this increase in numbers has not translated into substantive influence. Studies show that women's presence often remains symbolic (Pramudita et al., 2024). Symbolic representation, in this case, means women are only present numerically in legislative institutions but do not have a commensurate influence in strategic decision-making processes. In practice, women's representation is often positioned as an administrative requirement for quota regulations, without being accompanied by equal access to leadership within the legislative apparatus, formulation of priority legislative agendas, or budgetary decision-making. For example, although the number of female legislators has increased, the proportion of women holding chair or deputy chair positions on strategic commissions such as the budget, legal, and defense commissions remains relatively limited and dominated by men. Persistent patriarchal norms, male-dominated patronage, and non-merit-based recruitment limit women's leadership opportunities.

Several studies indicate that challenges in women's political representation are not unique to Indonesia but constitute a global phenomenon. Goyal (2024) finds that female legislators are more likely to recruit female activists, significantly increasing women's political participation. This is reinforced by Vacaflores & Stephenson (2025), who show that female parliamentarians in Australia propose more initiative bills than their numerical share would suggest, particularly on family, education, and feminist agendas. In Latin America, Kim & Lee (2024) document that increases in female legislators encouraged gender-responsive policies, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

Within quota systems, Park (2023) identifies a synergistic effect between quotas and representation, where empowerment becomes stronger once women reach a "critical mass" of around 30%. Olaitan's theoretical study emphasizes that quotas are effective only when they lead to substantive representation, while International IDEA (2025) highlights the need to build a critical mass of women so their influence extends beyond symbolism (Chikwanha & Moyo, 2024).

Despite their importance, these studies mainly focus on national parliaments and overlook transformations within the internal structures of political parties, particularly at the local level. This gap suggests that analysis should extend to party organizations as key gatekeepers of recruitment, cadre development, and power distribution. Women’s positions in strategic party leadership therefore become crucial indicators of whether the shift from symbolic to substantive representation has truly occurred. The following table illustrates women’s involvement in formal party structures related to decision-making and strategic agenda management.

Table 1. List of female cadres holding structural positions in political parties

Political Party	Name of Female Cadre	Job title/ Position
PDI Perjuangan (PDIP)	Megawati Soekarnoputri	Chairperson PDIP
PDI Perjuangan (PDIP)	Puan Maharani	Chairperson DPR RI; Senior Cadre PDIP
NasDem Party	Irma Suryani Chaniago	Chairperson DPP Health, Women, and Children
NasDem Party	Amelia Anggraini	Head of Women and Children Affairs, NasDem DPP
Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (PSI)	Grace Natalie	Secretary of the Board of Trustees PSI (Former Chairman)
Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (PSI)	Ratu Ayu Isyana Bagoes Oka	Deputy Chairperson of PSI (2025–2030)

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources (2025)

The data in the table show that women are no longer merely fulfilling quotas but are increasingly occupying structural positions with real influence within party organizations, such as chairpersons, heads of women’s and children’s divisions, and other strategic roles at central and regional levels. Although some positions remain segmented around issues culturally associated with women’s gender roles, their presence in formal party structures marks a shift from numerical representation toward more substantive involvement in internal party dynamics. Political parties are thus becoming important arenas for women to build political capital, expand networks, and consolidate influence.

However, this involvement is still constrained by structural and cultural barriers. Patriarchal dominance and patronage practices, particularly male patronage, continue to limit women's access to top decision-making positions and strategic party agendas (Saputra et al., 2020). In South Sulawesi, these challenges are intensified by political dynamics shaped by kinship networks and political dynasties. The dominance of male elites is evident in the Syahrul Yasin Limpo political dynasty, which controls up to 45.80% of legislative seats, indicating a relatively closed local power structure (Aristama, 2020; Silas, 2024). At the same time, kinship-based politics can also create negotiating space for women who can mobilize family legitimacy and local social networks to enter the masculine political arena (Purwaningsih, 2015). As a result, women's political transformation at the local level is non-linear, unfolding through adaptation, negotiation, and strategic networking.

Over the past decade, figures such as Andi Ina Kartika Sari (Chair of the South Sulawesi DPRD, Golkar), Risfayanti Muin (PDIP), and Husniah Talenrang (Chair of the South Sulawesi PAN Regional Working Committee, 2025) have emerged, signaling a shift from "quota politics" to network- and influence-based politics. Their rise is rooted in organizational capacity, social legitimacy, and strong electoral networks, enabling women's participation in South Sulawesi to evolve into a substantive political force shaping local policy and power relations (Thojeng, 2025). This reflects a broader national shift toward capacity-based and meritocratic leadership, where success depends not only on quotas but also on accumulated social and symbolic capital and credible professional records recognized by local elites (Aspinall et al., 2021a).

Despite this progress, transformation remains incomplete due to persistent patriarchal norms, weak cadre regeneration, and unequal access to political resources. This study examines how women's roles in South Sulawesi political parties have shifted from symbolic representation to substantive power, focusing on the strategies,

networks, and political capital of Andi Ina Kartika Sari, Risfayanti Muin, and Husniah Talenrang to capture diverse pathways of women's leadership and the conditions enabling this transformation.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing data collected from document studies, online media reports, official agency reports, and academic literature related to women's politics and local patronage. Data was collected through systematic research on the activities and track records of three female figures in South Sulawesi: Andi Ina Kartika Sari, Risfayanti Muin, and Husniah Talenrang. All data were analyzed using thematic analysis, including categorization and interpretation of patterns related to symbolic representation, patronage networks, and substantive leadership. The analysis employs a theoretical framework that combines political representation, feminist institutionalism, feminist leadership, and social capital theory to explain the relationship between individual capacity, party structure, and social legitimacy. This method enables a comprehensive understanding of how women transform their position from a merely symbolic presence to strategic actors in local politics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The projection of women in the political arena in Indonesia

Post-Reformation Indonesia has seen a significant rise in women's political participation, yet substantive challenges persist. IPU data show that women hold 127 of 580 DPR seats (21.9%) in 2024-2029, slightly increasing from 20.9% in 2019 (Parline, 2025). Affirmative policies mandating a 30% quota for legislative and party leadership roles under Law No. 2/2008 and Law No. 7/2017 have expanded formal access, but women's entry into strategic decision-making remains limited (Basyari, 2024). Consequently, the current transformation emphasizes quality over quantity, shifting from "women's presence" to "women's strategic leadership." (Pramudita et al., 2024).

This marks a shift from symbolic to substantive politics: while symbolic politics involves quota-driven representation, substantive politics empowers women to have real influence in party and legislative decisions.

However, patriarchal norms and gendered stereotypes still confine women to complementary roles within masculine political structures (Soetjipto, 2023). Thus, meaningful transformation requires not only higher numbers but deeper involvement in legislation, policymaking, and leadership (Pramudita et al., 2024).

Affirmative policies without institutional reform often lead to symbolic representation. The 30% quota increases women's access to parliament but does not ensure strategic decision-making roles, as weak gender-sensitive regeneration and non-meritocratic systems sustain a "glass ceiling" and unequal resource access. Therefore, internal party reform is crucial to move from quota fulfillment to gender mainstreaming. Parties such as PDI-P, Golkar, NasDem, and PSI have begun adopting capacity- and merit-based selection, producing women with stronger electoral legitimacy and organizational skills. Regional studies show that social capital, organizational experience, and structural support distinguish symbolic from substantive leadership (Irawanto, 2018). Nevertheless, patriarchal norms persist, with over 30% of respondents rejecting women in top political positions (Halimatusa'diyah, 2024).

Women in politics increasingly demonstrate strategic capacity by leveraging social capital and cultural networks to overcome structural barriers. Research indicates that kinship ties, business relations, and local legitimacy enhance women's political access, with ASEAN studies suggesting that women with network capital gain greater influence than those without it (Safitri et al., 2024). In patronage-based systems, these strategies enable women to enter power structures through cultural negotiation and effective management of social capital (Taufiq & Ali, 2023). Qualitative evidence also highlights collaborative, inclusive, and empathetic leadership styles among female politicians, aligning with feminist and transformational leadership frameworks in Southeast Asia (Sinpeng & Savirani, 2022).

Women's leadership increasingly shapes political agendas, particularly in advancing public welfare and gender justice (Edward Aspinall & Savirani, 2024). This influence is most substantial among politicians with professional backgrounds, technocratic skills, and solid social networks, although effectiveness still depends on party structures and local political opportunities (Dewi, 2015). Collaborative and empathetic leadership facilitates gender mainstreaming, but its success depends on aligning

individual capacity with institutional support. Current trends show a shift toward strategic leadership, merit-based selection, and broader cross-party collaboration (Margret, 2025). Although women hold only 20.9% of DPR seats in 2019–2024 (Rosana, 2023), their presence in strategic roles is growing. More broadly, women’s politics carries transformative potential for inclusive governance, as women’s communication and political efficacy foster higher public trust (Amin et al., 2022). Yet barriers persist, including patriarchal norms, weak institutional backing, and masculine networks (Jakarta, 2024). Thus, the future of women’s politics relies on combining representation, professional leadership, and collaborative networks to strengthen democracy and gender justice.

Since the 1998 Reform, women's representation has increased from 8.8% in 1999 to 21.9% or 127 out of 580 seats in the 2024 - 2029 period (KPU RI, 2024). Despite approaching the 30% affirmative quota, substantive representation gaps persist due to internal party dynamics that remain patriarchal and elitist, despite the affirmative policies of Law No. 2/2008 and Law No. 7/2017 having effectively opened formal access.

Table 2
Trends in Women's Representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives (1999–2024)

Election Year	Number of Members of the House of Representatives	Number of Women	Percentage (%)	Primary Affirmative Action Policy
1999	500	44	8,8	Belum ada kuota
2004	550	61	11,1	Wacana kuota 30%
2009	560	101	18,0	UU No. 2/2008 (Kuota 30%)
2014	560	97	17,3	Penerapan awal kuota
2019	575	120	20,9	UU No. 7/2017
2024	580	127	21,9	Penguatan meritokrasi gender

Source: IPU Database (2024); KPU RI (2024), processed by the author (2025)

Although women’s representation has increased, many still face a persistent “glass ceiling” in accessing strategic party and legislative positions. From a feminist institutionalist perspective (Krook & Mackay, 2011), quotas alone cannot transform masculine institutional norms, causing women to be placed in non-strategic or low-viability constituencies. Patronage and

clientelism further limit their autonomy, keeping them dependent on male elites (Aspinall et al., 2021b). Recently, however, parties such as PDI-P, Golkar, NasDem, and PSI have shifted toward merit based assessments, supporting (Dahlerup, 2006) view that substantive representation requires real decision-making power.

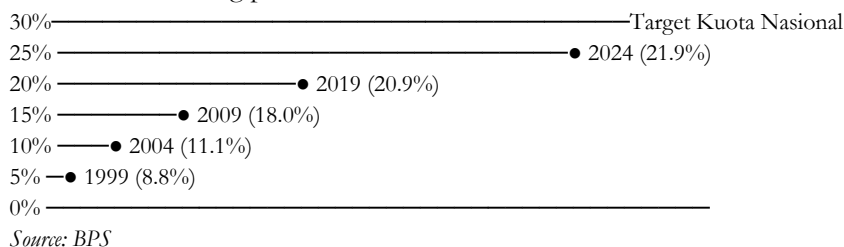


Figure 1
Trends in Women's Representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives (1999–2024)

Beyond numerical gains, women's political leadership in Indonesia shows a qualitative shift toward collaborative and empathetic styles. Feminist leadership in Southeast Asia is characterized by participatory governance and a focus on welfare policies (Sinpeng & Savirani, 2022). These traits enhance public legitimacy for female politicians. Their rise is also supported by the strategic use of social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), particularly in regions like South Sulawesi, where women leverage kinship networks and local legitimacy through the networker model (Safitri et al., 2024).



Figure 2. Theoretical Model of Women's Political Shift in Indonesia

Additionally, a comparative analysis across provinces reveals significant variations in the level of women's participation. Based on data from BPS and KPU (2024), South Sulawesi ranks among the top five provinces with the highest percentage of women in the DPRD, at around 22%, slightly above the national average (21%). The strategic positions held by figures such as Andi Ina Kartika Sari (Golkar) and Husniah Talenrang (PAN) indicate that the transformation of women's participation at the regional level is entering a substantive phase. This highlights the significance of the local context in comprehending the dynamics of women's representation in Indonesia.

Table 3
Comparison of Women's Representation in Provincial Legislative Councils (2024)

No	Province	Percentage of Women in DPRD	Female Figure	Characteristics of Local Politics
1	Aceh	8.6%	Iliza Sa'aduddin Djamal; Nurul Aida	Sharia politics & local patronage
2	Sumatera Utara	18%	Meutia Hafidz; Sari Thai Gayo	Batak–Malay ethnic politics
3	Sumatera Barat	15.3%	Nevi Zuairina; Emma Yohanna	Minangkabau religious and cultural politics
4	Riau	12.3%	Karmila Sari; Septina Primawati	Natural Resource Politics & the Malay Elite
5	Jambi	12.7%	Elva Hartati; Rahima Abdullah	Family patronage & bureaucracy
6	Sumatera Selatan	24%	Anita Noeringhati; Puan Maharani	Patronage politics & powerful elites
7	Bengkulu	22.2%	Dewi Coryati; Erna Sari Dewi	Family politics & local patronage
8	Lampung	22.4%	Eva Dwiana; Tanti Herawati	Javanese–Lampung migrant politics
9	Bangka Belitung	20%	Hellyana; Mei Purwati	Malay–Chinese community politics
10	Kepulauan Riau	13.3%	Cicilia Tantri; Hastuti	Urban-maritime policy
11	DKI Jakarta	22.6%	Ida Mahmudah; Vivi Indah	Urban politics & party competition
12	Jawa Barat	19.2%	Desy Ratnasari; Lia Anggia	Strong Islamic mass organizations and bases
13	Jawa Tengah	25%	Rustriningsih; Ayu Kurniasari	Nationalist-santri politics
14	Jawa Timur	18.4%	Khofifah Indar Parawansa; Anik	NU religious politics

Nama Penulis Pertama: Tiga Kata dalam judul...

Maslachah				
15	DI Yogyakarta	16.4%	GKR Hemas; Ema Rachmawati	Cultural politics & the royal palace
16	Banten	14%	Itet Trisnawati; Sri Hartati	Dynastic politics & patronage
17	Bali	16.4%	Ni Made Ayu Marthini; Kadek Diana	Hindu customary politics
18	NTB	10.8%	Sitti Rohmi Djalilah; Baiq Eka Nurhayati	Conservative religious politics
19	NTT	23.1%	Julie Sutrisno Laiskodat; Maria Goretti	Plural ethnic politics
20	Kalimantan Barat	23.1%	Angeline Depari; Thresia Simandjuntak	Dayak–Malay ethnic politics
21	Kalimantan Tengah	20%	Andina Thresia Narang	Dayak politics & bureaucracy
22	Kalimantan Selatan	18.2%	Ratna Kartika; Diana Rahmiati	Banjar religious politics
23	Kalimantan Timur	14.5%	Norbaiti Isran Noor; Marselinah Tinggi	Family policy & natural resources
24	Kalimantan Utara	17.1%	Rita Herawati; Delima Hasnawati	Frontier–maritime policy
25	Sulawesi Utara	26.7%	Felly Estelita Runtuwene; Yasti Soepredjo Mokoagow	Pluralistic politics–Christian
26	Sulawesi Tengah	25.5%	Nilam Sari Lawira; Siti Rohani	The politics of mass organizations
27	Sulawesi Selatan	24.7%	Andi Ina Kartika Sari; Husniah Talenrang	Bugis–Makassar kinship patronage
28	Sulawesi Tenggara	24.7%	Tina Nur Alam; Wa Ode Nurhayati	Mining elite politics
29	Sulawesi Barat	17.8%	Suraidah Suhardi; Andi Ratna Juwita	Mandar politics & family
30	Gorontalo	24.5%	Idah Syahidah; Rahmi Abdullah	Kinship and religious politics
31	Maluku	11.2%	Mercy Barends; Saadiah Uluputty	Island politics & religious segregation
32	Maluku Utara	26.7%	Irine Roba Putri; Nurhayati Manu	Sultanate politics & patronage
33	Papua	17.8%	Rina Asmuruf; Martha Wetipo	Clan politics & identity
34	Papua Selatan	14.3%	Julieta Kossay; Natalius Suwito	Customary politics–clan
35	Papua Tengah	8.9%	Debora Yoku; Tomi Yikwa	Clan politics & bureaucracy
36	Papua Pegunungan	13.3%	Yuliana Wenda; Helena Tabuni	Ethnic politics & the church
37	Papua Barat	8.6%	Ita Kamasan; Rosa	Clan politics & local elites

Mandacan				
38	Papua Barat Daya	14.3%	Rita Dasilva; Maria Iek	Customary politics & patronage

Source: KPU (processed by the author)

Women’s politics in Indonesia is shifting toward substantive leadership that combines professional capacity, social legitimacy, and cross-sector networks, although patriarchal norms and public skepticism persist. The PPIM UIN Jakarta survey shows that 33% of respondents still reject women as president or party leaders (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2024). Future developments are pointing toward an inclusive democracy driven by strengthened technocratic skills, meritocratic party reforms, and cross-party solidarity. The alignment of affirmative action, institutional change, and transformative leadership will shape substantive women’s political power.

Table 4
Pillars of Women's Political Transformation

Pillar	Main Focus	Expected Output
Political Capacity	Leadership education and training	Professional and technocratic cadres
Party Reform	Meritocratic recruitment mechanism	Gender-inclusive party structure
Cross-Party Solidarity	Collaboration on gender and social issues	Impact of national policy

Source: KPU RI (2024); Puskapol UI (2024), processed by the author.

The political projection for Indonesian women after 2024 marks an important shift from affirmative politics to transformational politics. Women's representation is no longer just a symbol of presence, but a new source of legitimacy in public decision-making. Suppose the trends of meritocracy and cross-sector collaboration continue to gain strength. In that case, Indonesian women's politics will become a crucial pillar in realizing a democracy that is not only formally representative but also substantive, inclusive, and gender equitable.

The Transformation of Women from Symbols into a New Political Force

The shifting position of women in Indonesian politics after the Reformation reflects a clear transition from symbolic representation to strategic political influence. Women’s representation in the DPR rose from 8.8% in 1999 to 21.9% in 2024–2029 (Parline, 2025), showing steady

progress despite remaining below the 30% quota target. Nevertheless, this quantitative growth has not fully translated into a qualitative representation due to entrenched structural constraints, such as patriarchal bias, elite-driven recruitment, and male-dominated party structures (Saputri et al., 2023). Affirmative policies under Law No. 2/2008 and Law No. 7/2017 have expanded access, but the broader transition involves women’s increasing role in substantive decision-making (Pramudita et al., 2024).

South Sulawesi illustrates this transformation through Husniah Talenrang (PAN), Andi Ina Kartika Sari (Golkar), and Risfayanti Muin (PDIP), who have gained political authority through social legitimacy, competence, and strong networks rather than symbolic roles (Alim, 2025). Husniah’s election as Chair of the PAN Regional Working Committee in 2025, supported by 62.5% or 15 of 24 DPD, reflects internal party meritocracy (DPP Partai Amanat Nasional, 2024). Her leadership integrates Bugis-Makassar values of *siri*’ with modern organizational strategies, signaling a new phase of women’s political legitimacy in South Sulawesi.

The leadership paradigm shift in PAN has strengthened women’s political momentum. PAN Chairman Zulkifli Hasan’s commitment to meritocracy is reflected in a 15% increase in women holding DPW/DPC positions over the past five years (DPP Partai Amanat Nasional, 2024). Husniah’s election signifies a shift from quota fulfillment toward structural reform based on trust and participation. This momentum is reinforced by public support, as women constitute 52% of voters in South Sulawesi (KPU RI, 2024). Meanwhile, Andi Ina Kartika Sari (Golkar), the first female Chair of the South Sulawesi DPRD, and Risfayanti Muin (PDIP), a key figure in female cadre development, highlight the growth of substantive women’s politics within traditionally male-dominated parties.

Table 5
Leadership Profile and Social Capital of Female Figures in South Sulawesi (2025)

Name	Party	Position	Leadership Characteristics	Legitimacy Basis	Dominant Social Capital
Andi Ina Kartika Sari	Golkar	Chairperson of the South Sulawesi Regional Representative Council	Institutional & negotiable	Golkar's elite network	Support from bureaucracy & elites
Husniah	PAN	Chairperson of	Collaborative	Local cadre	Network of

Talenrang		the South Sulawesi Provincial Working Committee of the National Mandate Party	and meritocratic	and community- based	cadres & social legitimacy
Risfayanti Muin	PDIP	Member of the South Sulawesi Regional Representative Council	Advocative & empathetic	Social activism & women's networks	Community and social advocacy

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources (2025)

From Bourdieu’s perspective, the differing strategies of Andi Ina Kartika Sari and Risfayanti Muin reflect women’s differential positions within a patriarchal local political field. Andi Ina accumulates institutional and symbolic capital within Golkar’s hierarchical structure, converting elite networks into leadership legitimacy through adaptation to the dominant habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). In contrast, Risfayanti mobilizes social and cultural capital rooted in women’s advocacy and urban religious communities, converting it into moral legitimacy and political representativeness (Bourdieu, 1986). Her transformational leadership constitutes resistance to masculine symbolic violence in political practice (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

The achievements of these three South Sulawesi leaders reflect the interplay between party reform and individual capacity. Women’s politics in the region have entered a collaborative phase, prioritizing economic empowerment and social justice, aligning with (Waylen, 2017) emphasis on *informal women’s networks* as drivers of gender change. Electoral data from the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU RI, 2024) show that urban areas such as Parepare and Makassar have relatively high female voter participation, which correlates with the emergence of more active female political cadres and leaders at the local level (Titin Purwaningsih, 2015). Findings regarding the importance of informal women's networks as a foundation for gender change in formal political systems refer to (Waylen, 2017) argument, which emphasizes the role of informal women's networks as the initial drivers of institutional transformation. Regional data also shows a tendency for a relationship between high female voter participation and the emergence of female figures in legislative and party positions. Parepare and Makassar, for example, have a relatively high proportion of female voters and have become the basis for the emergence of female cadres who are

active in local politics (Aspinall et al., 2021b; KPU RI, 2024; Purwaningsih, 2015)

The rise of women in strategic party positions has increased by 15% in the past five years (Parline, 2025). This signals a broader political transformation, though gender bias and weak merit-based regeneration remain obstacles. In South Sulawesi, women no longer operate as quota fillers but as strategic actors shaping policies and party structures. The trajectories of Husniah Talenrang, Andi Ina Kartika Sari, and Risfayanti Muin show that women's political success emerges from the interplay of capacity, social legitimacy, and institutional backing. As Indonesia, especially South Sulawesi, moves toward a meritocratic and inclusive democracy, strengthened party reforms can ensure that these leaders become pioneers of substantive gender transformation rather than symbolic figures.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the political transformation of women in Indonesia, particularly in South Sulawesi, has shifted from symbolic representation to substantive roles, aligning with the implementation of capacity-based selection and meritocracy within political parties. Figures such as Husniah Talenrang, Andi Ina Kartika Sari, and Risfayanti Muin prove that women are capable of navigating patriarchal and patronage cultures through a combination of social capital, local legitimacy, and collaborative and empathetic leadership styles. This change confirms that the presence of women is no longer merely a means to fulfill quotas, but has also contributed to shaping the direction of policy and the dynamics of power within the party. Nationally, the future of women's politics is supported by the strengthening of technocratic capacity, more gender-inclusive cadre reforms, and cross-party solidarity networks, enabling women to become a transformative force for Indonesian democracy.

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