

## Indonesian Overseas Elections as an Arena of Activism for Indonesian Women Migrant Workers

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### Abstract

Although since the first Indonesian general election was held in 1955, it has guaranteed political rights, especially the right to vote, for Indonesian citizens who are abroad; in the development of policies on elections in Indonesia, there has been no adequate policy update. Women Indonesian migrant workers, who are the face of the majority of Indonesian citizens abroad, have not participated in the implementation of Indonesian elections abroad and also have not felt the direct benefits of organising Indonesian elections abroad. This research traces the emergence of overseas election monitoring activities and political education of Indonesian migrant workers. These initiatives have encouraged the political activism of Indonesian migrant workers to ensure that Indonesian elections abroad are more qualified and responsive to the migrant worker protection agenda and encourage the representation of migrant workers in legislative political representation contested in elections.

Keywords: political activism, parliament, overseas election, Indonesian women migrant workers

### Introduction

Women's political activism is an area that has been widely studied in the study of politics in Indonesia, both in the fields of history, political science, and feminism and gender studies. If the study of history traces the movement of Indonesian women in specific political periods, political science, feminism, and gender studies focus more on women's political activities in the form of political participation and political leadership in the realm of formal politics/electoral politics.

Before discussing the political activism of Indonesian women migrant workers, it is worth reviewing the history of elections. Many studies of Indonesia's electoral history date back to the 1955 general election - as a form of free and participatory election. Some comparisons of elections in the Old Order era show government and military control (Feith 1957; Crouch 1978), as well as political consolidation with Golkar and the military as political forces under President Soeharto's regime (Reeve 1985). The holding of elections in 1999 (after the fall of the Soeharto regime) offered optimistic hope. The changing political context of the reform era included issues of voter participation, voter education, media influence, women's representation, and criticism

of corruption and money politics (The Asia Foundation 2003; Muhtadi 2020; Aspinall, Edward, & Berenschot 2019).

In the last decade, electoral themes in political science literature have also become more diverse, including direct local elections, money politics, and women's representation (Sulistiyanto & Erb 2015). Discussions of electoral politics in the study of women's political activism focus on quotas of women's political representation in parliament and bureaucracy, contestation of ideas, women's figures in legislative and executive electoral processes, and women candidates and political dynasties, with a tendency to discuss elite politics. A recent study on women's representation and leadership in politics as a result of elections can be found in a book edited by Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi (2022), which explores the problems and dilemmas of women's political leadership in networks of political dynasties and local oligarchies.

During the democratic transition in the year of the 1999 Indonesian elections, there were many political education programmes (including voter education) aimed at ensuring the active participation of the public.

This was different from the situation during the New Order era, which was more about mass mobilisation. There were various political responses to the 1999 elections by women, both individually and organised through the community. This participatory enthusiasm was evident in the emergence of political awareness through political parties, the nomination of legislative members and the organisation of political education for women. However, many obstacles were identified, such as the lack of political support for women's participation both in the parties and in the process of nominating women legislators (API 1999; Suryakusuma & Johnson 2001). Instead of being political subjects, women in this context were seen as tokens and political objects.

Other efforts included political education (including voter education) by many women's organisations. The aim was to open a space for dialogue between women as political subjects and political parties on the agenda of women's political interests. One of these was carried out by Solidaritas Perempuan, which held various women's political dialogues, including one on the protection of migrant women workers (Ardiantoro 1999). This form of political education was also carried out by Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia, founded in 1998. To date, the role of these two organisations has been consistent in producing cadres of women who join political parties, participate in the political sphere, and are active in the process of organising elections. Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia also pays attention to the agenda of protecting women migrant workers. This political education has contributed to women's enthusiasm for political participation in Indonesia, which has been suppressed for many years (Mughtar 2016).

These efforts have not succeeded in significantly increasing the number of women elected to parliament, with only 9 percent of the total number of female representatives in parliament. This shows that there are still many items on Indonesian women's political agenda that need to be addressed. There was, however, one item on the agenda that was successfully passed in the 1999-2024 legislative period, namely the adoption of the Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence.

The role of Indonesian women's political activism in the reform era was one of the important historical records. It was a starting point for changing the nuances of women's political participation. The push for quantity as an affirmative action could also promote substantive goals that articulated the interests of Indonesian women. This effort was a response to the numerical quotas for women in electoral and party systems

that paid little attention to women's voices and were eventually accommodated (International IDEA 1999). Unfortunately, there are not many comprehensive studies on the political aspirations of grassroots groups in Indonesian electoral contests. Terry Caraway and Michele Ford (2019) in "Activists in Transition: Progressive Politics in Democratic Indonesia" (Dibley & Ford 2019), write about the aspirations of workers and their efforts to engage in electoral politics. This poses a challenge to the agenda of protecting Indonesian women migrant workers, who remain marginalised.

Studies on the elections and aspirations of women migrant workers are also rare. One exception is Ayu Kusumastuti, who wrote a doctoral thesis for the University of Leeds entitled "Political Transnationalism of Indonesian Female Domestic Migrant Workers", which contributes to the study of women migrant workers' political participation. In another article, Ayu Kusumastuti (2023) also explores the political practices of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong, both in the electoral and non-electoral spheres, and how these political practices influence policies on migrant workers. The study in this article uses the concepts of transnational politics and political remittances.

What is interesting in the process of learning about the political activism of women migrant workers is the introduction of the dynamics of organising overseas elections in different countries. More comprehensive studies can be found in the context of transnational politics, diaspora political articulation, and studies on remittances and politics. These studies explore migrant workers as political subjects, their political strategies, and the vulnerabilities that they face. This can be seen in the implementation of several African countries (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) that use or exploit the participation of overseas voters in their elections to mobilise support and resources and to control and monitor their citizens abroad (Brand 2010). Another example is the Philippines, which uses remittances as a measure of the political behaviour of migrant workers' families and their preferences for the ruling government (Oh 2016).

Remittances are an important aspect of electoral politics (O'Mahay 2013), as they can systematically change the political cycle. Remittances can also make voters autonomous and independent of the state, allowing them to punish authoritarian states (Escriba-Folch, Sesequer, & Wright 2015), leading to a democratic transition in the country. Through these efforts, migrant workers can become active political actors so that their

participation has a significant impact on the political conditions in their home countries.

The search for studies on Indonesia's overseas electoral processes continues. The number of such studies is quite limited. Some studies are written by election observers or election study institutions, such as Migrant CARE's book "Pilu Democracy" (2014) and Perludem's translated book (2016) entitled "Memberikan Suara dari Luar Negeri: Buku Panduan International IDEA". The author found only one postgraduate thesis, written by Wahdy Hafizy (2017) for the Department of Politics and Government, Gadjah Mada University, entitled "Penjaminan Hak Pilih Warga Negara di Luar Negeri, Kajian Instrumentasi Pemilu". Several other studies on the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections focus more on organisational, political participation, and constitutional juridical aspects. This focus begins to question the quality and quantity of women migrant workers' participation as voters. In general, popular politicians have been found to influence the active participation of migrant workers (Suryani & Anna 2017). The increase in participation is also accompanied by policies that are seen as supportive of Indonesian migrant workers (Hasanah, Rizka, & Mui'in 2023). However, this increase is less significant as migrant workers still face difficulties in accessing information, registering to vote, electoral socialisation, and limited voting time.

The limited literature on the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections shows a lack of access and attention to Indonesian citizens abroad, particularly women migrant workers. At the constitutional level, the political rights of Indonesian migrant workers (as citizens) have been fulfilled in the conduct of elections. Several findings indicate that these constitutional rights are not being fully exercised, because not all migrant workers in Indonesia are eligible to vote (Akmal & Syarijal 20-22; Sani 2015). There is a lack of political representation of Indonesian citizens abroad (Siregar 2022), so additional instruments are needed that pay more attention to the fulfilment of the political rights of Indonesian citizens abroad, including migrant workers.

The regulations for holding the first elections in Indonesia stipulated that the participation of Indonesian citizens abroad would be possible and facilitated by the presence of Indonesian representatives abroad. This was regulated in Article 19 of Law No. 7/1953 on the Election of Members of the Constituent Assembly and Members of the House of Representatives, which explains the committee for overseas elections. Article

23(2) specifically regulates the mechanism of the number of members of the committee so that it can be conducted legally. Meanwhile, Article 30(4) confirms that Indonesians living abroad have the right to vote, and the mechanism of informing the committee of the number of Indonesians living abroad is the responsibility of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. This regulation was the precursor to the establishment of the Overseas Election Committee and the electoral district for Indonesian voters abroad - later known as Jakarta Electoral District II, which consists of Central Jakarta, South Jakarta and Overseas.

In light of these findings, it is important to study the electoral activism of women from marginalised groups (particularly women migrant workers) to see the process and political participation of marginalised women's groups. We need to learn from comparisons of overseas electoral governance and policy support and how migrant worker issues feature on the political agenda of electoral candidates (Bahagijo et al. 2022). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to specifically examine the political activism of Indonesian women migrant workers in response to the conduct of overseas elections. This is also part of putting the political interests of Indonesian women migrant workers on the agenda - as a marginalised group whose interests are often ignored, including in elections. They are also Indonesian citizens living abroad and within the electoral district of Indonesian overseas elections, which have special features in their conduct.

## Research Methods

This research examines the political activism of Indonesian women migrant workers abroad (specifically in Malaysia and Hong Kong) and compares three Indonesian overseas elections (2014, 2019, and 2024). The research is conducted using qualitative research methods. Qualitative data are collected through literature review and field observation. The literature review in this study is based on a thorough search of various academic journals published in the country and abroad. A comparative political approach to the conduct of overseas elections in different countries is used to locate the required data. The literature review is complemented by document studies (from primary sources) and literature studies (from secondary sources) related to data on Indonesia's overseas elections from election administrators, mass media, and election monitoring organisations. Field observation data are drawn from records and reports of Migrant CARE's

monitoring of Indonesian overseas elections from 2009 to 2024, with the author acting as an election observer. From 2009 to 2024, Migrant CARE observed Indonesian elections in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. All the data collected have been analysed to provide comprehensive findings on the journey and support of women migrant workers' political activism in Indonesia.

### **Criticism of the Conduct of Indonesian Overseas Elections that Ignore the Aspirations of Migrant Workers**

In the introduction, it was briefly explained that the system and conduct of the 1999 elections were different from that of the New Order government. However, these changes have not yet been felt by the millions of Indonesian migrant workers abroad. Officially, Indonesian migrant workers are recognised as voters in every election. In reality, however, there has been no serious effort to reach out to them as active voters. Moreover, there is no room for special representation of migrant workers in parliament, which could be achieved through the creation of special overseas electoral districts (Ardiantoro 1999). This can be seen from the merging of migrant workers' electoral areas with Jakarta Electoral District II, which consists of Central Jakarta, South Jakarta, and Overseas. This unification of electoral areas is very detrimental to migrant workers because the character of the interests and aspirations of overseas voters is different from the character of the interests and aspirations of voters from Central Jakarta and South Jakarta.

In the run-up to the 2014 elections, Migrant CARE became an expert witness at the Constitutional Court to provide testimony and arguments on the importance of special overseas electoral districts. At the time, Perludem, together with Indonesian diaspora activists, including migrant workers, filed a judicial review of the General Elections Law and the Law on the Structure and Position of the House of Representatives (DPR), proposing special electoral districts separate from the DKI Jakarta II electoral district. The plaintiffs argued that their aspirations had not been represented by the elected members of the DPR and that they needed authentic political representation that could articulate their political interests, such as the protection of migrant workers and the idea of dual citizenship for the diaspora. This legal action was filed on 12 December 2012, and the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia decided to reject the petition, despite

agreeing that in the context of elections, domestic territories are different from overseas territories, and the establishment of overseas electoral districts is the domain of the legislature (Constitutional Court Decision No. 2/PUU-XI/2013).

In light of this situation, there was a stronger push for the fulfilment of migrant workers' political rights in the elections. This was urgent as the policies that would be produced - based on the performance of the legislative and executive branches elected through the electoral mechanism (Susilo 2020) - would have a major impact on the livelihoods of migrant workers. The number of election monitoring institutions in Indonesia that emerged in the run-up to the 1999 elections did not pay attention to the process of organising Indonesian overseas elections. This shows that there was almost no public concern about the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections. In the Indonesian Parliamentary Guide published by the Almanak Parpol Indonesia, there is a list of election monitoring organisations, and all of them merely focus on the conduct of Indonesian elections at home (Suryakusuma 2001).

In an effort to promote the protection of Indonesian migrant workers in the 1999 general election, Solidaritas Perempuan organised political dialogues with women candidates. The candidates were asked about their commitment to the issue of women migrant workers. These dialogues were held in major cities in Sumatra, Java and Sulawesi and involved members of Solidaritas Perempuan (in the report on Women's Political Dialogues for the 1999 General Election by Solidaritas Perempuan Jakarta). In another effort, the Almanak Parpol Indonesia documented questions asked of all political parties participating in the 1999 elections regarding their vision, mission, and programmes on the protection of Indonesian migrant workers. The efforts of Solidaritas Perempuan and the Almanak Parpol Indonesia show that the agenda for the protection of Indonesian migrant workers was almost completely absent from the political agenda of the 1999 elections, whether promoted by political parties or legislative candidates (API 1999).

The activism of Indonesian women migrant workers abroad has been growing since the early 1990s, particularly in Hong Kong. They joined an organisation called the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union and Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Hong Kong (the Association of Indonesian Workers in Hong Kong). This organisation became the forerunner of the formation of a collective of women migrant workers



called the Indonesia Group, which was supported by the Asian Migrant Centre. In December 1994, for the first time, at a forum of the Asian Women's Tribunal at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Tina, an Indonesian woman migrant worker, gave her testimony about her vulnerability as a worker in Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong. Tina was one of the mobilisers of the Indonesia Group (Matsui 2002). In its development, the organisation of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong worked with Indonesian migrant worker advocates to push for regulations to protect migrant workers. The organisation also lobbied the Indonesian government to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (Ford & Susilo 2010).

To support the advocacy and campaign, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union produced a documentary film called "2.5 Billion Dollars for the State". The film shows that the hard work of Indonesian migrant workers, in the form of remittances amounting to US\$2.5 billion (when the film was made in 2000), was not appreciated by the state. At the time, the government and parliament had not taken the initiative to develop regulations to protect migrant workers. The film shows a delegation of Indonesian migrant workers from Hong Kong meeting with the Deputy Speaker of the DPR for Welfare, Muhaimin Iskandar, to urge the DPR to immediately discuss the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Bill.

This situation has raised awareness among migrant workers and migrant worker activists to advocate for migrant worker protection policies, starting from the electoral phase of executive and legislative elections (Yazid 2013). Provocatively, the founding statement of the Federation of Indonesian Migrant Workers Organisation on 23 February 2003 called for a boycott of the 2004 elections if they did not benefit Indonesian migrant workers. This call was an expression of disappointment at the slow pace of legislation to protect migrant workers. At the launch of the Federation of Indonesian Migrant Workers Organisation on 23 February 2003, a provocative call was made to boycott the 2004 elections if they were not favourable to Indonesian migrant workers. This call was an expression of disappointment at the slow pace of legislation to protect migrant workers.

In September 2004, at the end of the 1999-2004 term of the DPR, Law No. 39/2004 on the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers Abroad was

passed. Rather than being an umbrella of protection for Indonesian migrant workers, this law has been heavily criticised by migrant workers and migrant worker advocates as it is more prescriptive on the placement of migrant workers by recruitment agencies and has minimal human rights protection dimensions for migrant workers (Hidayah et al. 2013).

In the run-up to the 2004 general election, Migrant CARE reflected on the conduct of the 1999 elections, the performance of the 1999-2004 parliament, and its impact on the fate of Indonesian migrant workers. The reflection, in the form of an article entitled "Buruh Migran Indonesia dan Pemilu 2004", was published in Kompas on 25 February 2004. The article assessed the conduct of the 1999 elections, which were considered more democratic but did not significantly address the political rights of Indonesian migrant workers (Susilo 2004). The presence of Indonesian citizens living abroad was only a complementary form of participation in the elections. During this period, the votes of overseas voters were channelled to the Jakarta II electoral district.

There are several things to criticise about Indonesian overseas elections. First, voter registration has never been maximised, so the percentage of overseas voters is very low compared to the actual number. The largest number of Indonesians living abroad are Indonesian migrant workers, followed by students and diplomats and their families. Compared to the number of Indonesians living abroad, the List of Permanent Overseas Voters (DPTLN) set by the General Elections Commission (KPU) for each election has never exceeded 30 percent of the total number of Indonesians living abroad.

Second, the elections do not take into account the representation and aspirations of Indonesians living abroad. Under the old electoral system, the migrant worker sector and Indonesian citizens working abroad were never represented. Meanwhile, DPR members representing Jakarta constituencies lacked sensitivity to migrant workers' issues. It turns out that the new electoral system does not significantly change the political representation of Indonesian citizens living abroad. This reality shows that Indonesian citizens abroad (the majority of whom are Indonesian migrant workers) are still politically marginalised. Given their vulnerabilities, such as the violence experienced by migrant workers or the discrimination faced by students and Indonesian citizens living abroad, channels of political articulation for protective policies are important for them.

From a comparative political perspective, we can learn from the Philippines' electoral system. Indonesia and the Philippines are countries with large numbers of migrant workers and receive significant remittance flows for economic growth. In the Philippines, the electoral system has accommodated the interests and political rights of its migrant workers. The Philippines enacted Republic Act No. 9189 (An Act Providing for a System of Overseas Absentee Voting by Qualified Citizens of the Philippines Abroad, Appropriating Funds Therefore, and for Other Purposes) to guarantee the political rights of its migrant workers. This regulation, promulgated on 13 February 2003, governs the conduct of Philippine elections for migrant workers and Filipino citizens abroad (Rojas 2005). The lessons learned from the Philippines' experience in conducting overseas elections should encourage the enactment of a legal basis to address the interests and rights of Indonesian migrant workers.

Regulations on the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections only concern ad hoc election organisers and supervisors, voting methods, and the timing of the primary elections. In essence, there is no policy to recognise the representative rights of Indonesian citizens abroad to obtain political affirmation in the form of overseas electoral districts.

Since the 2004 elections, Indonesia's electoral system has undergone a fundamental change. Whereas previous elections used a closed proportional representation system, the 2004 elections used an open proportional representation system. This makes it easier for voters to identify the legislative candidates running in their electoral districts. This change opens up much space and opportunity for Indonesian migrant workers' political participation in elections. This includes making it easier for them to recognise the representation of migrant workers (and Indonesian citizens abroad) in parliament. However, there has been no significant progress in encouraging Indonesian migrant workers to participate in elections other than as voters. To date, there is no legal basis that recognises a special representation mechanism for Indonesian citizens abroad in parliament. This mechanism could open space for Indonesian migrant workers (who make up the majority of Indonesian citizens abroad) to maximise their political rights, not only the right to vote but also the right to be elected as candidates.

According to IDEA, a global election monitoring organisation, Indonesia is among the countries that allow voters to exercise their political rights abroad. However,

this does not include providing political representation for its citizens abroad. By comparison, there are at least 11 countries that provide for migrant representation in parliament. These are mostly countries where many of their citizens work abroad, such as Algeria, Angola, Cape Verde, Colombia, Croatia, Ecuador, Mozambique, and Panama. The rest are countries with large diasporas and political maturity, namely France, Italy, and Portugal (IDEA 2016).

The Philippines is also a country that accommodates sectoral interests in the party-list system, which allows the political aspirations of migrant workers to be channelled through migrant worker political parties or allied political parties with close ties to migrant workers. In the 2016 Philippine elections, there were at least five sectoral parties that specifically championed the aspirations of migrant workers: the Acts OFW Party-list, the Amepa OFW Party-list, the Gabriela Party-list, the Migrante Party-list, and the OFWFC Party-list. They managed to send three representatives to Congress, from Acts OFW Party-list and Gabriela Party-list (COMELEC 2016).

In Indonesia, the electoral representation of migrant workers has been in the Jakarta II electoral district, which covers Central Jakarta, South Jakarta, and Overseas. In the 2004-2024 elections, most legislative candidates running in the Jakarta II electoral district did not have a track record of promoting the protection of migrant workers (Migrant CARE 2009). There is, therefore, a need to promote policies that are more supportive of Indonesian migrant workers so that their political rights are accommodated.

### **Migrant CARE and Women Migrant Workers' Activism in Response to the Conduct of Indonesian Overseas Elections**

Based on the experience of advocating for migrant workers' legislative policies in parliament and the critical evaluation of the conduct of Indonesia's overseas elections in 1999 and 2004, Migrant CARE prepared itself to become an election monitor for the 2009 elections, especially the overseas elections. This decision was made to encourage migrant workers to exercise their political rights as voters and to push for the protection of migrant workers to be an issue discussed and fought for by election candidates. Some of Migrant CARE's critical notes on the 2009 Indonesian elections were published on the web blog [buruhmigranberpolitik.blogspot.com](http://buruhmigranberpolitik.blogspot.com) and in full in "Demokrasi Pilu" (Hidayah et al. 2013).

The 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, ratified by the Indonesian government through Law No. 6/2012, states that one of the fundamental rights of migrant workers is the right to participate politically in elections in their country of origin. Even Article 41(1) regulates the participation rights of migrant workers and their families in terms of political participation, the right to vote, and the right to be elected.

Since the 2009 elections until 2024, Migrant CARE has not only conducted election monitoring at the time of voting but also voter education programmes, political dialogues, and monitoring the track records of legislative candidates contesting in the Jakarta II electoral district (Migrant CARE 2009). Migrant CARE is registered as an official election monitor by the KPU and the Election Supervisory Board (Bawaslu), with monitoring areas in the destination countries of Indonesian migrant workers. Since 2009, Migrant CARE has been monitoring elections in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. In addition to these three countries, Migrant CARE also monitored Taiwan in 2024.

The description of the process and results of monitoring of Indonesian overseas elections in this section is based on the results of the Indonesian election monitoring reports conducted by Migrant CARE in 2014 (Migrant Care 2019), 2019, and 2024 (Migrant Care 2024). To run the programme, Migrant CARE developed a political education and overseas election monitoring module, which is updated with each election. This module is a guide for Indonesian migrant workers overseas who are involved in election monitoring (Migrant Care 2014).

Migrant CARE monitors Indonesian overseas elections in the countries of destination of migrant workers by working with Indonesian migrant worker organisations in the country. In Hong Kong, it works with IMWU, ATKI, SBMI HK and KOTKIHO. In Singapore, it works with the Indonesian Family Network and Himpunan Penata Laksana Rumah Tangga Indonesia Singapura. In Malaysia, it works with Persatuan PRT Migran Indonesia Malaysia (PERTIMIG) and several regional indigenous organisations that are mushrooming in Malaysia. In Taiwan, it works with GANAS, an organisation of Indonesian migrant domestic workers. The growth of Indonesian migrant worker organisations in these destination countries coincides with the emergence of political awareness of migrant workers' rights and demands for protection. In addition, interaction with

migrant worker organisations from other countries and support from NGOs and trade unions has also accelerated the process of politicisation of migrant worker organisations (Bastide 2023).

To monitor election day, Migrant CARE recruits and trains volunteer election monitors from these organisations. Most are women who work as migrant domestic workers. Prior to monitoring, they attend a briefing on the procedures for organising Indonesian overseas elections and their specificities, election monitoring methods, and reporting procedures. They are then deployed on the designated election day. So far, the KPU has always set the polling day for overseas elections earlier than for domestic elections. With the active participation of women migrant workers who have a better understanding of the field, the results of the monitoring of the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections can show the complexities and problems in the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections.

The growing awareness of the importance of the political rights of Indonesian migrant workers and the monitoring of Indonesian overseas elections has contributed to the identification of potential violations and fraud in Indonesian overseas elections. Indonesian migrant workers' access to social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter) has also become a means of articulation to communicate problems in the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections. Some of the key findings from monitoring the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections can be identified thanks to the active participation of Indonesian women migrant workers who have experienced repeated elections abroad (whether registered as voters or not).

Based on the results of Migrant CARE's monitoring of every Indonesian overseas election, the accuracy and low number of the DPTLN are the main problems that have never been resolved in the conduct of Indonesian elections. Based on the data on the mobility of Indonesian citizens abroad, which is indeed diverse (Rochim 2020), the number of the DPTLN set for each election has never exceeded 30 percent of the total number of Indonesian citizens abroad. Therefore, the possibility of Indonesian citizens (especially Indonesian migrant workers) not being registered as voters in the DPTLN is very high.

With each election, the number of domestic permanent voter lists (DPT) increases, but this is not reflected in the number of DPTLN. From the tabulation of DPT data processed by the KPU from 2009 to 2024, there

has never been a significant increase in DPTLN data; in fact, there was a decrease in DPTLN 2024 compared to DPTLN 2014 and 2019. In 2009, the number of DPTLN was 1,509,892; in 2014, it was 2,025,000; in 2019, it was 2,058,329; and in 2024, the number of DPTLN dropped dramatically to 1,750,474 (KPU 2024).

The low DPTLN turnout can be attributed to three factors. First, the election organisers did not maximise the socialisation of Indonesian citizens abroad on the importance of exercising their right to vote. Second, there is a lack of an accurate and comprehensive data collection process. Thirdly, the lack of a valid and adequate database on the presence and number of Indonesian citizens abroad leaves the election organisers with no reference to accredit the DPTLN. The determination of the DPTLN, which does not reflect the reality and accuracy of the number of Indonesian citizens abroad, creates problems in the distribution of election logistics and the swelling of the number of voters not registered in the DPTLN who are present at the Overseas Polling Station (TPSLN) on election day.

According to the KPU regulations, the conduct of Indonesian elections abroad differs from the conduct of elections at home. While there is only one method of voting at home, namely direct voting at polling stations (TPS), there are three methods of voting abroad, namely voting at polling stations, voting in mobile ballot boxes and voting by post. The latest regulations on voting procedures for Indonesian overseas elections are contained in KPU Regulation No. 25/2023, which contains specific articles on technical matters related to overseas voting. The three voting methods pose complex problems in terms of logistics distribution and determining which method will be used to identify potential voters. This also has an impact on the complexity of monitoring and supervising voting, especially in the case of the mobile ballot box and postal ballot methods.

In addition, while domestic elections are held on the same day with simultaneous voting, Indonesian overseas elections use the early voting method. The early voting period is usually one week before the simultaneous voting day in Indonesia and can be as short as one full day. In countries where the majority of voters are Indonesian migrant workers, polling days are usually held on weekends, Saturdays or Sundays, depending on local conditions. In the 2024 general election, the KPU determined the overseas polling days through KPU Regulation No. 122/2024.

According to Migrant CARE's monitoring from 2009 to 2024, the postal ballot method was the most widely used method for overseas voters, accounting for 40 percent of overseas DPTs, the mobile ballot box method was used by 35 percent, while the use of overseas polling stations was only around 25 percent. Even in 2024, the percentage of voters using the polling station method was likely to be even lower due to the Kuala Lumpur re-election and the Hong Kong authorities' ban on overseas polling stations outside the consulate accreditation area for the 2024 Indonesian elections.

In Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, for example, their freedom to vote is restricted by working hours/ holidays and permission from employers. Based on Migrant CARE's monitoring of migrant worker volunteers, most of whom were recruited from migrant worker organisations, many Indonesian migrant workers were unable to exercise their right to vote at the preliminary polls in Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore due to long queues and slow service at polling stations, forcing them to go home as they had to return to work. Another obstacle they faced was the withholding of documents by agents or employers, making it impossible for them to meet the documentation requirements. Some were unable to vote because their names were not on the DPTLN.

Another problem that has arisen in the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections is the unavailability of tools to supervise and monitor the voting process through the mobile ballot box and postal/mail processes. These two special mechanisms for overseas voters have yet to be considered to ensure that the voting process is based on the principles of LUBER (direct, general, free and confidential) and JURDIL (honest and fair). The complexity of this issue led to tension and suspicion when news circulated that ballots had been cast in Malaysia and Taiwan. As the jurisdiction is overseas, the ability of Indonesian election organisers and law enforcement officials to conduct investigations or inquiries is limited. In addition, there were irregularities in the conduct of the overseas pre-poll.

The findings on the complexity of conducting Indonesian overseas elections are a contribution from the election monitoring process conducted by migrant worker volunteers who have experienced several elections during their time working overseas. The experience of being registered or not as a voter in Indonesian overseas elections has provided knowledge on the complexity of being a voter in Indonesian overseas elections. With access to social media and



the flow of communication (via messaging apps), Indonesian women migrant workers can receive reports of complaints from other migrant workers about elections. They can also produce content on issues related to alleged fraud and violations in Indonesian overseas elections.

Migrant CARE's notes and recommendations on the problems identified in the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections from 2009 to 2019 were shared with the KPU and the Bawaslu. The report also became the main material for the Bawaslu to compile the Overseas Election Vulnerability Index, which was launched in August 2023 (Wahyu, Yohan et al. 2023). However, without the KPU's follow-up efforts, Indonesia's 2024 overseas elections will continue to repeat the same mistakes and even find new problems.

In addition to ensuring that the Indonesian overseas elections were conducted in accordance with the principles of LUBER, JURDIL and inclusiveness, and that every migrant worker was able to exercise their political rights, Migrant CARE also worked to ensure that the agenda for the protection of Indonesian migrant workers was included in the discussion of election manifestos. For each election, Migrant CARE brought potential women candidates together with migrant worker activists, both those who were working and those who had returned home. The process took the form of a candidates' policy dialogue forum, where the candidates' agendas on migrant worker protection were scrutinised, and Indonesian migrant worker activists responded with concrete experiences from the field.

Similar initiatives were also organised by women migrant worker activists in Hong Kong. For the first time in the 2014 General Election, Indonesian migrant worker organisations in Hong Kong organised a 2014 General Election Political Debate to scrutinise the candidates' vision and mission on the agenda of protecting Indonesian migrant workers. The debate was held at the Victoria Park field in Hong Kong and was attended by thousands of Indonesian migrant workers. The debate took place on 22 June 2014 and featured presidential campaigners and migrant worker activists (Wibisono 2014).

In 2019, Indonesian migrant worker organisations in Hong Kong consistently pushed for a migrant worker protection agenda in the 2019 general election. They took advantage of Hong Kong's relatively open democratic space, which allows migrant workers in Hong Kong to engage in political activism (Santosa 2023). This open democratic space is not enjoyed by

Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia and Singapore, let alone Saudi Arabia.

However, the situation has changed as mainland China's influence in Hong Kong has grown. The democratic space is shrinking, even when there are pro-democracy actions in Hong Kong, there is repression and arrests of pro-democracy activists. This had a strong impact on the political activism of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong during the 2024 elections. The Hong Kong authorities banned open voting at polling stations where tens to hundreds of thousands of migrant workers could vote (Muliawati 2023). In the end, 95 percent of Indonesian votes in Hong Kong were cast by postal ballot, while only 5 percent were cast in person at the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia (KJRI) in Hong Kong.

Migrant CARE is also actively involved in encouraging and promoting women candidates across electoral districts and parties who are interested in the protection agenda for migrant workers. They then become accelerator parliamentarians who actively fight for legislation to protect migrant workers, such as Law No. 21/2007 on the Crime of Trafficking in Persons and Law No. 18/2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers. Women candidates who later became Migrant CARE's partners in advancing the migrant worker protection agenda in parliament include Eva Kusuma Sundari (PDIP), Nihayatul Waforoh (PKB), Latifah Iskandar (PAN), Nova Riyanti Yusuf (Democratic Party), and Okky Asokawati (PPP, later moved to NasDem Party). The network established between the members of parliament and Indonesian migrant worker activists shows the strength of the constituency's mandate from the time of their candidacy during the election to the monitoring of their performance throughout their tenure in parliament. This is a way of ensuring the existence of policies to protect migrant workers and efforts to ensure that these policies are implemented (Sherlock 2020).

In the 2014, 2019, and 2024 elections, Migrant CARE always held a Candidate Dialogue on the Migrant Worker Protection Agenda for the DPR RI level in the Jakarta II electoral district, which includes Central Jakarta, South Jakarta, and Overseas. In addition, specifically at the district legislative level, Migrant CARE also held a Candidate Dialogue on the Migrant Worker Protection Agenda for migrant worker base areas, especially in Indramayu, Wonosobo, Kebumen, Banyuwangi, Jember, North Lombok and Lembata. In these areas, Migrant CARE worked with the community to establish the

Village that Cares for Migrant Workers (Desa Peduli Buruh Migran) initiative.

The existence of efforts to directly involve women migrant workers in monitoring Indonesian overseas elections has directly or indirectly encouraged the emergence of political activism among Indonesian women migrant workers as a form of response to the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections. In the course of their development, several Indonesian migrant worker activists who had been involved as Migrant CARE election monitoring volunteers became part of the Indonesian overseas election organisers in the next election, for example as volunteers of the Overseas Election Committee (PPLN), TPSLN officers, or overseas election supervisors. If some migrant worker activists were initially involved only as volunteer election monitors, some later became part of the Indonesian overseas election organisers, for example by becoming part of the Overseas Polling Organising Team (KPPSLN) or the Overseas Sub-District Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslu). With the experience and knowledge of migrant worker policies and political interactions gained during the election monitoring process, they also became more consistent in becoming the backbone of the organisation to drive policy advocacy related to the protection of migrant workers.

When the 2014 elections gave birth to the phenomenon of political volunteers, women migrant worker activists also coloured the birth of political volunteers not only as followers but also encouraged them to become political volunteers carrying the agenda of protecting migrant workers. This will continue until the 2024 elections. By carrying out the main agenda of protecting migrant workers, the involvement of women migrant worker activists in partisan political work as political volunteers shows that political activism is an important praxis. The aim is to ensure that the interests of Indonesian women migrant workers are heard and translated into policies and implementations that are favourable to their problems and experiences. To achieve this, we must always be consistent in our commitment to monitor and encourage women migrant workers to participate in representing themselves in the Indonesian political arena.

### Closing

In the study of politics in Indonesia, the study of elections is a study that is often carried out, even today, after the development of democracy in Indonesia.

However, more specific studies, such as the political activism of women migrant workers in relation to the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections, have not yet been conducted. This research contributes to studies on the complexities of conducting Indonesian overseas elections and the political responses of women migrant workers who have been marginalised in all areas of public policy.

A review of the literature on the political dynamics of overseas elections involving migrant workers as voters, data on the results of monitoring Indonesian overseas elections, and the experiences of Indonesian women migrant workers' electoral participation show that there are no significant changes in the rules for conducting Indonesian overseas elections from year to year. These findings also show that the regulations have yet to reach the majority of women migrant workers and have yet to open up the affirmation of special parliamentary representation of overseas voters in the form of special overseas electoral districts.

Within the limited and narrow space for the participation of women migrant workers in the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections, the political activities of Indonesian women migrant workers have emerged. This activism is articulated in many political practices related to the full implementation, such as participating in overseas election monitoring, volunteering, or raising demands for the protection of migrant workers through dialogue with the candidates or criticising the vision and mission of the candidates. Several obstacles arise from the limited space for representation, the dominance of political power and money in determining legislative candidates, and the absence of a specific affirmative action policy regarding the representation of overseas voters in parliament. This limits the opportunities for women migrant activists to stand as candidates in legislative elections.

From all the findings of this study, the author concludes that it is important to fight for more qualified conduct in Indonesian overseas elections. This can be done by maximising the meaningful participation of women migrant workers and promoting the special affirmation of the representation of Indonesian citizens abroad and special overseas electoral districts so that it can be the aspiration of the activism of Indonesian women migrant workers in the conduct of Indonesian overseas elections. Thus, we can achieve the goal of a politically favourable struggle that listens to the experiences of Indonesian women migrant workers.

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