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The Mobilisation of Reformative Women's Movements in Increasing Women's Political Representation and the Decline of Democracy in Indonesia

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Abstract

More than two decades have passed since the end of the authoritarian New Order regime, yet there has been no significant increase in the level of women's representation in politics. Following the 1998 Reforms, the women's movement gained strength and sought, among other things, to achieve at least 30 per cent female representation in Indonesia's political institutions. This paper seeks to explain why this agenda has not yet been achieved. By examining the movement's mobilisation and strategies, we conclude that mobilisation within the women's movement has tended to be reformative, characterised by efforts to change specific aspects of the system. However, this approach becomes ineffective when democracy faces setbacks alongside the strengthening of oligarchy. Through interviews with several movement participants and an analysis of relevant secondary literature, our study also found that such reform movements must address broader, more fundamental issues, necessitating new movement strategies.

Keywords: women's movement, women's political representation, reformative movement, democratic backsliding

Introduction

Since the end of the authoritarian New Order regime in 1998, the lack of women's representation in politics has been a serious concern for Indonesia's women's movement. In the first democratic elections in 1999, only 45 women were elected to the 500-member national parliament, accounting for around 9 per cent. At the regional level, the number of female Regional Legislative Council (DPRD) representatives was also low, accounting for around 3.41 per cent of members across Indonesia. For women activists and academics, this lack of representation is one of the main factors hindering the development of a fair, gender-empowering democracy. In the current context, Indonesia's democracy is in decline. Freedom House has noted a sharp decline in civil liberties and political rights. Indonesia's democracy index fell from 62 in 2019 to 57 in 2024 (Amnesty International, 2025). Public trust in the legal system and state institutions has also declined due to political and legal practices considered unfair and exclusionary. Therefore, it is important to re-examine the mobilisation of the women's movement and its chosen approaches to achieving the target of at least 30 per cent female representation in parliament. This article re-examines the women's movement that has mobilised to increase women's representation in politics over the past two decades. It considers the various obstacles that have prevented the realisation of the agenda championed since the start of the 1998 reforms.

The women's movement in Indonesia emerged and developed during the colonial era, when women's organisations were established. Following the 1998 Reform, the movement's agenda became more focused, including efforts to increase women's representation in formal politics. The intention was to create regulations that would protect against gender injustice and violence against women, as these issues had become increasingly prevalent at the local level (Rahayu 2019). One legal reform initiative emerging from feminist experience is the push to implement a 30 per cent quota for women in parliament, which is seen as a step towards more equitable justice (Mursidah 2012).

Several previous studies have sought to highlight the factors hindering women's movements in their efforts to increase women's political representation. Research by the Gender and Politics Team at the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) found that more than 50 per cent of women's movements, their members and their leaders were neither preparing to participate in elections nor collaborating with political parties to identify potential female candidates (The Conversation.com 2023). Another study by Perdana and Wildianti

(2019) analysed the contributions and challenges of women's movements within Indonesia's political landscape two decades after the Reform era. This study emphasises the pivotal role of women's activism in promoting affirmative policies, particularly in politics (e.g., the 30 per cent legislative quota) and law (e.g., the Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence, or the PKDRT Law). However, the authors argue that the adoption of policies does not necessarily equate to substantive implementation. The main challenges lie in structural resistance, the oligarchic dominance of political parties, and the lack of institutional capacity to implement gender-responsive policies effectively.

In addition to these two studies, further research specifically focuses on the Indonesian Women's Political Caucus (KPPI). KPPI's initial steps to increase women's political representation were carried out through interventions in the drafting of Law No. 12 of 2003 on General Elections. However, the organisation's role is considered limited, as it tends to be confined to narrow gender roles and focuses more on internal activities than on expanding its political influence more broadly. This situation is influenced by a lack of awareness of the importance of women's direct involvement in politics and poorly structured work programmes (Margaretha et al. 2005; Widyastuti & Listyaningsih 2013).

Efforts to increase women's representation in politics can also be observed in Thailand. Women's participation in the Red and Yellow Shirt movements has presented both opportunities and challenges with regard to their political involvement. Through these movements, women have succeeded in raising awareness of their political roles and opening up greater opportunities for political participation (Buranajaroenkij et al. 2016).

Several studies have analysed the successes and failures of the women's movement in increasing women's political representation. These analyses have primarily focused on institutional approaches and the movement's mobilisation strategies. However, the relationship between the women's movement and the state of substantive democracy in Indonesia has not yet been examined in depth, despite a tendency towards regression over the past decade.

In this paper, the authors highlight the limitations that the women's movement has faced in promoting the agenda of increasing women's political representation, amid a decline in democratic quality and the strengthening of oligarchic and patriarchal politics. They argue that these conditions help to explain why the agenda for women's political representation has not yet been realised, despite Indonesia having been in a state of electoral democracy for more than two decades. The authors specifically examine two civil society organisations that have played an active role in the women's movement by championing women's political representation as a shared issue.

By identifying these limitations, the authors hope to contribute to the conceptual and typological mapping of the dynamics of the contemporary women's movement. This mapping aims to provide a basis for rethinking future strategies to improve women's political representation.

Drawing on the typology of social movement approaches, we will revisit the reformative women's movement in politics and address the following question: what constraints are preventing this movement from achieving its initial goal of ensuring that women are represented at a minimum of 30 per cent in Indonesian political institutions? To begin our discussion, we will examine two women's organisations that are actively involved in women's and political movements: the Indonesian Women's Coalition and *Perempuan Mahardhika*. Analysing these organisations will illustrate the strategies employed by the reformative movement and enable us to identify its limitations and how its strategies could be strengthened in future.

In this paper, we examine feminist mobilisation in relation to the typology of reformative movements (Aberle 1966). Reformative movements target change at both the individual and broader societal levels, albeit with a limited scope to specific aspects of the social order (Aberle in Sunarto 2008). Unlike revolutionary movements, which demand radical transformation, reformative movements seek to improve certain aspects of the political, economic, social, or cultural spheres through reform. They usually focus on reducing injustice and inequality and modernising outdated structures to align them with the needs of a constantly evolving society. Reformative movements are generally peaceful and employ strategies such as lobbying, advocacy, public awareness campaigns, legal challenges, and peaceful protests. Their main strength lies in their ability to mobilise public support and urge the government and relevant institutions to adopt changes.

Aberle classifies social movements into four categories: alternative, reformative, redemptive, and transformative. Reformative movements aim to bring about change at the societal level, but their scope is limited to certain aspects of the social order (Aberle 1966). Unlike revolutionary movements, which demand

radical and total change, reform movements seek gradual improvements through reforms in the political, economic, social, or cultural spheres. Their primary focus is on reducing injustice and inequality through policy changes or institutional renewal.

Reformative movements typically arise when individuals or groups recognise weaknesses in policies or institutions that impede justice. They generally employ non-violent strategies, such as lobbying, advocacy, public awareness campaigns, legal challenges, and peaceful protests. Their primary strength lies in their ability to garner public support and pressure formal institutions to enact change. Thus, reformative movements emphasise society's capacity for self-correction, offering an alternative to radical revolutionary change.

Aberle's classic classification system is useful for establishing a typology of social movements and distinguishing the characteristics of each type. However, in order to understand women's movements, a feminist perspective is required to explain what distinguishes women's mobilisation from other social movements. This paper considers feminist mobilisation to be an analytical framework that explains how, why, and under what conditions women and gender-based groups engage in collective action to fight for rights, equality, and social justice. Grounded in feminist theory and social movement theory, this approach highlights that women's mobilisation is driven by structural inequalities, processes of critical consciousness-raising, solidarity, and the configuration of political opportunities that facilitate collective action.

Research on feminist mobilisation has emerged at the intersection of feminist theory, social movement theory, and gender politics. Several studies suggest that women's movement mobilisation is inextricably linked to political structures, configurations of elite power, and the context of political change or transition. For example, Gelb and Palley (1982) demonstrate that women's movements emerge from the interplay of political opportunities, organisational structures, and cultural shifts. This suggests that feminist mobilisation is an integral part of state dynamics. Conversely, Ferree and Mueller (2004) argue that the openness of the political system strongly influences feminist mobilisation, the presence of political allies, and the elite's vulnerability to public pressure. In transitional states, Waylen (2007) shows that regime change creates opportunities for women to initiate gender reforms, though these may disappear if formal institutions fail to respond.

Research Methodology

To address the above question, our study employs an exploratory qualitative research design. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), this type of research seeks to explore and understand how individuals or groups respond to social issues. Data were collected through interviews with women's organisations and academics, including *Perempuan Mahardhika*, the Indonesian Women's Coalition, *Jala PRT*, FSBPI (the Federation of Indonesian Labour Unions) and two academics: Ani Soetjipto and Chusnul Mar'iyah. The authors analysed the obtained data using process-tracing analysis, which aims to identify the mechanisms influencing variables X and Y, or to uncover the causal mechanisms of an issue by analysing the sequence of surrounding events. Process tracing was used in this study to identify the causal mechanisms underlying the factors preventing the Women's Movement from achieving the minimum threshold for women's political representation.

Women's Representation in Politics in Indonesia Post-1998 Reform

Soetjipto and Adelina (2012) cite five reasons why women's representation in politics is important. The first of these is the justice and equality argument, which is highly normative and principled. The second is the women's interest argument. This argument stems from societal misconceptions that lead to gender-based role divisions being constructed, restricting women's political participation. Third is the emancipation-and-change argument. The call for women's emancipation dates back to the colonial era and has challenged patriarchal systems within society and the state. The fourth argument is the 'women make a difference' argument. The implications of women's representation in politics are evident and impactful on society. Fifth is the 'role model' argument: women serve as role models. In this argument, women inspire and encourage other women.

Historically, women have been significantly underrepresented in Indonesian political institutions. Prior to the 1998 Reform, the highest level of women's representation at the national level was 13 per cent. This percentage peaked in the 1992 elections. Since the 1998 Reform, there has been an upward trend in women's representation, albeit slowly and not significantly. In the national legislature (DPR), the proportion of seats held by women increased in the last two elections. Following the 2019 election, women held 100 out of 575 seats (17.4 per cent). This figure increased to 122 out of 580

seats (21.0 per cent) in the 2024 election. Subsequent mid-term replacements have brought the total number of women in the DPR to 127, 21.9 per cent of the total.

Despite affirmative action measures such as quotas for women, this track record reflects certain limitations. Since 2004, and as enshrined in Law No. 7 of 2017, political parties have been required to nominate a minimum of 30 per cent women on their candidate lists. In 2024, women accounted for 37.1 per cent of all candidates for the House of Representatives—evidence that the number of female candidates has increased. However, the conversion of candidates into seats remains lagging. Although the proportion of women on the lists exceeds the 30 per cent threshold, they only hold around one-fifth of the seats. The proportional representation (PR) system with open lists and list-placement practices has been shown to influence the final election results in this regard.

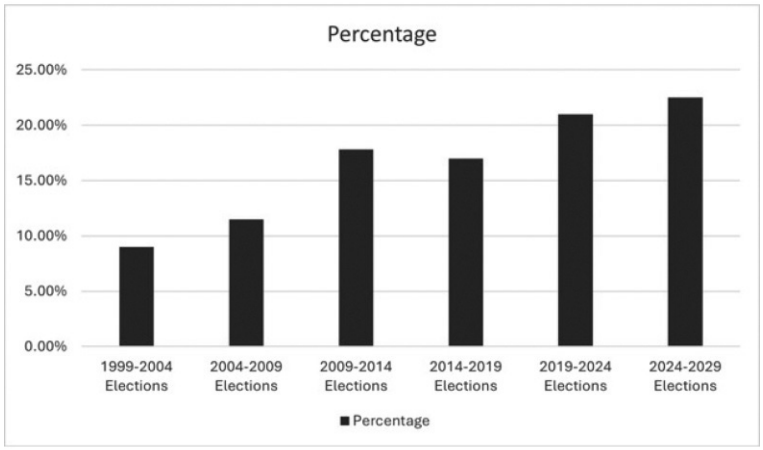

Figure 1: Percentage of Seats Held by Women in the House of Representatives, 2004-2019

Source: bps.go.id (2021 data)

As shown in the graph above, the percentage of women's representation has increased significantly since the enactment of the Law on Political Parties. Still, it has not yet reached the minimum threshold of 30 per cent. Several studies suggest that this minimum threshold has not been met due to patriarchal cultural factors. In this context, patriarchal culture shapes a social construct that positions women as a secondary gender and demands that they refrain from participating in the political sphere (Nurcahyo 2016). This construct also gives rise to male dominance in politics, meaning that women's participation in and activities within the political sphere are still frowned upon by society (Nimrah & Sakaria 2015).

In 2004, the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) passed a package of election laws that, for the first time, included affirmative action provisions for women in the form of a 30 per cent minimum quota. As shown in the graph, there has been a significant increase of 3.82 per cent since the implementation of this provision, with a particularly sharp rise in the 2009 elections. However, even after 20 years of affirmative action policies, women's representation in politics still has not reached 30 per cent by 2024.

The Women's Movement and Reformative Strategies for Increasing Women's Representation in Politics

Over time, the women's movement has adapted its agenda in response to the political circumstances of each era. In the early years of independence, emerging women's movements such as *Aisyiyah*, *Putri Indonesia*, *Wanita Taman-Siswa*, and *Jong Islamieten Bond* prioritised providing education for both girls and boys. Furthermore, issues such as polygamy, prostitution, and marriage were also central to the women's movement (Wahyuningroem 2004). Following independence, more women's movements emerged, including *Gerwis* (*Gerakan Indonesia Sedar*), which later changed its name to *Gerwani*. *Gerwani* played an active role in campaigns to elect women to parliament. As a result of this campaign, four *Gerwani* members stood in the 1955 general election (Aripurnami 2013). At that time, Gerwani was primarily concerned with political issues. They urged the government to enact pro-gender legislation and increase women's access to education.

The New Order period was the darkest era for the women's movement in Indonesia. Suharto restricted women's organisations' ability to pursue their own political agendas as the state co-opted them. The

Constitution was structured around a model of military discipline and patriarchy in every area of New Order-style development, creating unique conditions. Women were expected to fulfil their roles as "wives and mothers", acting as nurturers and educators of the younger generation (Blackburn 2004, p. 27). During this period, the women's movement did not focus on women's issues per se, but rather on the functions and duties dictated by its creators — namely, the government.

The end of the New Order era was marked by the May 1998 riots, which had a direct impact on women, particularly those of Chinese ethnicity. They became victims of mass and systematic rape amid the chaos in various parts of Indonesia. The Fact-Finding Team's report on the 1998 tragedy found that the rapes that occurred in 1998 left the victims with severe physical and psychological trauma (TGPF 1999). These events prompted many women to urge the government to address these cases, ultimately leading to the establishment of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*). This is one of the successes of the women's movement in demanding that the state address the issue of violence against women.

The year 1998 also shifted the focus and priorities of the women's movement in Indonesia. This began when women demanded that at least 20 per cent of participants in labour-intensive projects supported by the World Bank and implemented by the government should be female. These projects aimed to employ people who had lost their jobs due to the economic and monetary crisis (Wahyuningroem 2006). The Lotus Foundation, a women's organisation, put forward this demand to the President of the World Bank and the National Development Planning Agency, in collaboration with other NGOs.

Another women's movement that marked a turning point in women's roles was the action taken by a group of women at the roundabout in front of Hotel Indonesia in central Jakarta. Led by an organisation called *Suara Ibu Peduli*, the women held a peaceful protest and sold cheap baby and toddler milk to highlight their concerns about the worsening financial situation caused by the economic crisis.

In addition to these two organisations, other women's organisations also played a significant role in the evolution of the women's movement. These included *Gema Madani*, the Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy, and the Movement of Women's Voices for Electoral Awareness (GPSP) (Wahyuningroem 2006). The emergence of such organisations and coalitions signalled a consolidation within the movement, which began to prioritise increasing women's representation in parliament.

The issue of increasing women's representation in politics is inextricably linked to the women's movement's struggle to include the 30 per cent quota in the Law on Political Parties. Women's organisations such as the Indonesian Women's Coalition (KPI) and *Perempuan Mahardhika* have incorporated this agenda into their work. The following section elaborates on these two organisations, which are part of Indonesia's women's movement.

Indonesian Women's Coalition

KPI was formed following the Women's Congress on 17 December 1998, which almost 600 people attended. The Congress aimed to unite women's activists from across Indonesia. On 18 May 1998, a group of women activists in Jakarta first announced the formation of the Indonesian Women's Coalition, supported by 75 women activists from various regions (koalisiperempuan.or.id 2015). A significant outcome of the Congress was the introduction of a 50 per cent quota for women in political representation (Wahyuningroem 2006).

Strengthening women's political representation is one of KPI's main missions. Recognising that a democracy cannot be truly inclusive without women's voices in decision-making, KPI has developed strategies to promote women's participation in politics and increase their influence on policy and governance. One of the key strategies developed by KPI is policy advocacy. KPI consistently promotes the implementation of gender-sensitive laws and regulations to increase women's participation in political institutions. For example, KPI has played a pivotal role in advocating for the adoption and reinforcement of quotas requiring political parties to include at least 30 per cent female candidates on their legislative lists. Through lobbying in parliament and collaborating with other civil society groups, KPI aims to ensure these quotas are implemented effectively, creating more opportunities for women to enter politics.

KPI also emphasises the importance of grassroots mobilisation as a foundation for political representation. Through its regional and local branches, the organisation encourages ordinary women to participate in community decision-making processes, village councils, and local political forums. This bottom-up approach ensures that women's political participation

grows from community-level engagement, rather than being confined to elite circles. By raising awareness of political rights among rural and marginalised women, KPI is building a stronger base of support for female candidates and holding political institutions to account.

> "...it also involves preparing and training female candidates in collaboration with political parties, so that they are ready to stand in elections. They must also be prepared to fulfil their parliamentary duties if elected" (Verawati 2024, online interview, 2 September).

Furthermore, KPI invests in public education and campaigns to challenge harmful stereotypes about women in politics. Cultural and social biases often portray politics as a male domain. To counter this, KPI runs advocacy campaigns and public discussions and engages with the media to emphasise the importance of women's leadership for democracy and social justice. By changing public perceptions, KPI aims to create a more supportive environment in which female candidates are recognised as legitimate leaders.

Finally, KPI builds alliances and networks both nationally and internationally. By collaborating with women's organisations, human rights groups, and international institutions, KPI strengthens its advocacy capacity and shares best practices in promoting women's political participation. These networks enable KPI to influence broader policy discussions and ensure that women's representation remains a key priority in democratic development. KPI cooperates with political parties to increase women's representation in politics through 'critical engagement' (Suharko 2006).

> "...By collaborating with other movements, such as the human rights and pro-democracy movements, and other civil society movements, we can ensure that these movements are able to regenerate and train new members. This will increase their numbers and enable them to involve young people, who will carry the torch and safeguard the fulfilment of women's rights in the political and public spheres" (Verawati 2024, online interview, 2 September).

Perempuan Mahardhika

Founded in the early 2000s, *Perempuan Mahardhika* is an Indonesian feminist organisation that has been at the forefront of the fight for women's rights, labour justice, and gender equality. Unlike some women's organisations, which focus primarily on elite-level policy advocacy, *Perempuan Mahardhika* builds its movement from the ground up, particularly among working-class women, including factory and domestic workers, as well as women living in poverty in urban areas. Central to its mission is the belief that women's political representation should extend beyond mere numbers in parliament to ensure that marginalised women can influence the political and economic systems impacting their lives. To achieve this, *Perempuan Mahardhika* employs several interconnected strategies.

Firstly, the organisation focuses on grassroots organising and raising awareness. It organises discussions among women workers and community members about the realities of their lives, including exploitative working conditions, gender-based violence and political exclusion. Through study groups, popular education, and community meetings, women are encouraged to analyse the intersection of structural inequalities and gender critically. This process fosters political awareness and nurtures women leaders who can articulate collective demands. Rather than relying on elite representation, *Perempuan Mahardhika* strengthens a political base grounded in collective struggle.

Secondly, *Perempuan Mahardhika* focuses on developing the leadership skills of marginalised women. The organisation provides training for women workers to enable them to take on leadership roles in trade unions, local organisations, and social movements. By honing practical abilities such as public speaking, negotiation, and campaign organisation, women gain the confidence to engage in wider political processes. Crucially, these women leaders emerge directly from communities that are typically excluded from mainstream politics. This ensures that representation reflects diverse social realities, rather than merely echoing the interests of the elite.

Thirdly, the organisation engages in advocacy and coalition-building with other civil society groups to promote structural reforms that increase women's participation. For example, *Perempuan Mahardhika* campaigns for labour rights, social protection, and policies that address gender-based violence. By viewing these issues as inherently political, the organisation challenges the narrow definition of representation that focuses solely on parliamentary seats. It broadens the meaning of political representation to include advocacy on labour policy, local governance, and social justice movements.

As Ajeng from *Perempuan Mahardhika* explained:

> "At Perempuan Mahardhika, we always prioritise increasing political representation through discussions and actions.

> For example, during International Women's Day, we discussed ways to increase women's representation in politics. We also support women who stand for election. Yuni, for instance, who works in the domestic sector, recently stood for election, and we supported her even though her identity as both a domestic worker and a woman was questioned. We incorporate the agenda of increasing women's political representation into all our activities. These are ongoing issues, so we always include them. Women's movements always speak about women's representation in politics" (Ajeng 2024, online interview, 5 July).

Another key strategy is to challenge patriarchal cultures and political practices that hinder women's participation. *Perempuan Mahardhika* openly criticises the use of token gestures, patronage, and patriarchal control within political parties, all of which often limit women's ability to participate meaningfully in politics. Through public awareness campaigns, the organisation demands not only greater women's representation in politics, but also transformative politics that address class, gender, and structural inequalities.

Finally, *Perempuan Mahardhika* connects the national struggle with the global feminist movement. It participates in transnational networks that advocate for workers' rights, feminist democracy, and economic justice. This solidarity enables *Perempuan Mahardhika* to learn from international feminist strategies while also ensuring that the voices of Indonesian women are heard in the global debate on representation and justice.

Mobilisation and Reformative Strategies of the Women's Movement

Although the two organisations have relatively different strategies and approaches, in relation to the agenda of increasing women's representation in politics, both prioritise this as a shared movement.

In our view, this joint movement possesses the distinctive characteristics of a reformative movement, as defined by Aberle. Such a movement aims to change everything, yet can only alter a small part of a system. A reformative movement seeks to change a specific aspect of society; for example, the women's suffrage movement (Aberle 1966). Therefore, the women's movement, which aims to increase female representation in politics, can also be categorised as a reformative movement, as its objectives are limited and adaptable within the existing political order.

Activities undertaken by the women's movement include policy and legislative advocacy, capacity building for women, public campaigns and education, grassroots mobilisation, and building solidarity and coalition networks. Policy advocacy has become the focal point and foundation of the women's movement's strategy. Organisations such as KPI, CETRO, and other feminist NGOs have sought to promote gender-sensitive electoral laws and regulations.

> "At the start of the reform era, there were no women represented on district or city councils. Now, however, this figure has increased. Back in 2004, women accounted for just 5 per cent of regional council members. Now, the figure is much higher. Nationally, it used to be only 9-11 per cent, but today it is 22 per cent. It's not yet at the desired 30 per cent, but there has been an increase. This disparity cannot be allowed to continue. Women must be able to participate freely in democracy — it is the rule. It cannot be otherwise. At the time, we called for affirmative action policies — there must be specific policies to help women catch up" (Ani Soetjipto 2024, interview in Depok, 8 October).

Their efforts helped to make quotas a reality in Law No. 12 of 2003, and these were reinforced in subsequent electoral reforms. However, these affirmative action provisions have not been implemented effectively enough. This is primarily because there are no sanctions for political parties that fail to apply these provisions when selecting candidates or in their internal systems, as set out in Law No. 7 of 2007 on General Elections.

Recognising this, the women's movement has expanded its advocacy beyond quotas. It also promotes a legal framework that addresses violence against women, social protection, and labour rights — issues that are closely linked to women's ability to participate in politics. By framing political representation as integral to broader rights, the women's movement emphasises that genuine representation requires structural change as well as numerical inclusion.

Recognising that legal reform alone is insufficient, the movement also implements capacity-building programmes and initiatives for aspiring female leaders. These include leadership schools, training workshops, and mentoring programmes designed to prepare women to stand for election, participate in policy debates, and challenge male-dominated political environments.

For example, KPI has developed political leadership training programmes for women at national and local levels. Similarly, *Perempuan Mahardhika* works with factory and domestic workers to foster leadership among working-class women, who are often marginalised from elite politics. These programmes enhance women's skills in public speaking, campaign management, and

policy advocacy, while also building their confidence to challenge patriarchal norms.

When it comes to grassroots mobilisation and constituency-building, the women's movement recognises that sustainable representation must be grounded in community support. Grassroots mobilisation is therefore another critical strategy. Through community meetings, study groups and village forums, organisations encourage women to demand their political rights, participate in local decision-making, and support female candidates.

This bottom-up approach ensures that political representation encompasses diverse voices, including rural and working-class women, and is not dominated by elite women. For example, *Perempuan Mahardhika* organises women workers not only around labour issues, but also to engage in broader political processes. This strategy builds a politically conscious women's base that can act as both leaders and constituents.

The women's movement also recognises that patriarchal norms continue to pose a significant barrier to women's political representation. Politics is often considered a male-dominated field, with female candidates evaluated against traditional gender roles. To challenge these cultural constraints, the women's movement runs public education campaigns through the media, organises seminars, and runs advocacy programmes. These campaigns emphasise the importance of women's leadership in achieving democracy, equality, and social justice. They also challenge gender stereotypes and advocate for equal opportunities. By changing societal perceptions, the women's movement aims to create an environment in which women's political participation is the norm and is valued.

Another key strategy is to form coalitions between different groups. The Indonesian women's movement is not monolithic, but rather encompasses feminist NGOs, labour-based organisations, religious women's groups and academic networks. Coalitions such as the KPI bring these diverse groups together to advance shared goals, including electoral reform and gender justice policies.

These networks also extend beyond national borders. Indonesian women's groups engage with global feminist movements and international organisations to learn from comparative experiences and situate their struggles within the broader global debate on women's rights and democracy. This transnational solidarity strengthens their advocacy power and visibility.

Feminist Mobilisation in the Context of Oligarchic and Patriarchal Politics

As highlighted at the outset of this paper, a number of strategies employed by the women's movement have proven insufficient in achieving the goal of increasing women's representation in Indonesian politics, twenty-seven years after the Reform era.

Mike, from the Indonesian Women's Coalition, stated:

> "... we know that there is nothing concrete — no firm commitment or anything of that nature. Even now, there is no legislation mandating 30 per cent female representation, particularly within political parties. They are under no obligation to commit to this. If the 30 per cent target has not been met, then we should look at political parties, as they are the primary vehicles for elections, and see if they are committed to achieving it" (Mike 2024, online interview, 2 September).

Mike's statement makes it clear that the women's movement alone is unable to achieve the 30 per cent quota for women's representation in politics. This is because the movement is unable to reform the existing system, and political parties play a key role in increasing women's representation. Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the electoral system and the nature of political parties are among the factors preventing women's representation in politics from reaching this mark. We have identified several structural issues that have not been addressed in the strategies developed by the women's movement, and we have also highlighted the limitations of the women's reform movement.

The first factor is the oligarchy's political dominance within Indonesia's democracy. This dominance has become increasingly consolidated over time. Oligarchy is defined as the concentration of political and economic power in the hands of a small elite group, which continues to shape the country's political system. According to scholars such as Richard Robison and Vedi Hadiz (2004), post-authoritarian Indonesia is characterised not by the dissolution of the oligarchy, but by its reconfiguration within democratic institutions. During the post-New Order period, oligarchic actors adapted to the new institutional framework. Decentralisation created opportunities for local elites to secure political office, while competitive general elections provided a new arena for oligarchic competition. Political parties became tools for elite interests, relying significantly on financial backers and business networks to sustain their operations.

Oligarchic dominance in Indonesia is reflected through several mechanisms. Firstly, money plays

a decisive role in electoral politics. This culture still characterises the political contests held every five years. Money politics is inextricably linked to elections because it is one of the determining factors in a candidate's victory (Ulum 2020). Although it is officially illegal, vote-buying is increasingly regarded as commonplace during elections and is rarely prosecuted (Muhtadi 2023). The normalisation of vote-buying among voters poses a significant challenge for parliamentary candidates from outside the upper-middle class. Candidates require substantial financial resources for their campaigns, ranging from party nomination fees to vote-buying practices. This makes politics accessible only to the wealthy elite or those backed by powerful financiers.

In this regard, few women have the opportunity to advance in political contests, as Indonesian women are generally marginalised in economic opportunities. The feminisation of poverty is a reality faced by Indonesian women today. According to 2022 data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) on the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), 61.29 per cent of women are employed. This percentage is significantly lower than that of men, which stands at 84.49 per cent. The feminisation of poverty is influenced by women's position within a patriarchal society and exacerbated by the double burden they bear within the family. This means that women often face obstacles in managing their socio-economic lives (Purnama 2019; Arjani 2012). Jumisih, a female parliamentary candidate from the Labour Party, stated that vote-buying poses a challenge during elections because candidates with more funds also have more 'power'.

> "This may also be a class issue, as I experienced it myself while campaigning in the constituency. It was a real struggle to raise awareness among constituents that we, as women, were capable, and that was what we were selling. However, based on experience from one election to the next, residents still perceived money to be involved, and sometimes constituents would ask questions like, 'What could the candidate offer in return for money?' That was quite common in constituencies. Those who have money do indeed have more power in that regard" (Jumisih 2024, online interview, 5 November).

Oligarchic dominance is also evident in dynastic politics. Political families are consolidating their control over regions and parliament, allowing dynastic politics to flourish. Studies show that more than 100 regional leaders elected in the 2010s have links to political dynasties. In their paper, Suharto et al. (2017) analysed candidates from political dynasties and non-dynastic candidates, showing that dynastic candidates tend to have greater potential and a higher success rate in regional leadership elections. Hadiz (2010) and Winters (2013), however, argue that the rise of political dynasties is a consequence of the absence of lower-class movements within the political system. This is one of the factors underpinning the entrenched hegemonic power generated by oligarchies (Aspinall & As'ad 2016).

The third aspect of an oligarchy is the patronage network linking the business elite and politicians, ensuring mutual benefit. Business leaders secure favourable regulations, while politicians receive financial support. As Muhtadi (2013) notes, this patronage system persisted even after Suharto stepped down from office. He claims that patronage became more sophisticated, with politicians using clientelism to secure electoral support, which they then exploited to access the state's political and economic resources.

Together, these three aspects of oligarchy — money politics, political dynasties, and patronage — create a socio-economic and political landscape that inherently marginalises women. The primary foundation underpinning these three aspects is patriarchy. Consequently, patriarchal politics consistently hinder women from advancing as leaders and representing their own interests.

The masculine nature of government, shaped by patriarchal culture, is one factor hindering increased female representation in politics. As Mike told the authors in an interview, this predominantly masculine character and patriarchal perspective make it difficult for women to be represented in parliament. This also affects how policies within decision-making institutions often fail to accommodate society's needs, particularly those of women. Ajeng, a member of *Perempuan Mahardhika*, also supports this view.

> "Well, the government still adopts a patriarchal orientation in governance, doesn't it? They also make no effort to meet the 30 per cent quota. The law is already in place, so they need to implement it, but they must also make their own efforts to do so" (Ajeng 2024, online interview, 5 July).

Mike also highlighted this from the Indonesian Women's Coalition: *"The paradigm and way of thinking of political parties is very masculine"* (Mike 2024, online interview, 2 September).

These statements make it clear that the government does not fully understand this affirmative action policy. The requirement to meet the 30 per cent affirmative action target is merely viewed as a quantitative target. The government's inherently masculine character and

patriarchal perspective hinder women's representation, meaning it also fails to pay sufficient attention to the feminist awareness of each female parliamentarian.

This masculine nature and patriarchal politics also influence how women's organisations collaborate with political parties. Mike from the Indonesian Women's Coalition stated that KPI collaborates with political parties by preparing and training cadres. However, as political parties are the only institutions with the exclusive right to conduct the recruitment process — including screening, selecting, nominating, and registering legislative candidates — any cooperation between political parties and women's organisations ultimately fails to have a significant impact.

Repression and the Restriction of Women's Freedom of Movement

In their 2019 study, Eve Warburton and Edward Aspinall attempt to analyse the factors behind the decline of democracy from three perspectives: structural factors, the role of political agency, and public opinion. Indonesia's political structure contains deep-rooted elements that reinforce oligarchs' dominance within the system. Political actors exploit the system's weaknesses to achieve their personal goals. This article further elaborates on the decline of democracy by examining the shrinking space available for organisations to operate. Policies granting the government broader powers to dissolve organisations have been introduced as a form of repression during the Jokowi era.

Repressive state actions against women's organisations are also rare. The authors view this as a means of weakening social movements and as an example of democratic regression, a view reinforced by Ajeng's statement from *Perempuan Mahardhika*.

> "Of course, there are many obstacles when it comes to fighting for women's issues. The obstacles are varied: political parties disagreeing, for example, or the public disagreeing. Many women's issues are also not considered important. As for the women's movement itself, it is still very limited and faces a great deal of repression" (Ajeng 2024, Online Interview, 5 July).

This form of government repression against women's organisations has existed since the New Order era through the practice of state *ibuism*, whereby the regime exercised control over all aspects of life (Bariroh 2024). Furthermore, during Jokowi's administration, he used state resources to consolidate political power, creating an environment of repression for government opponents (Hamid & Gammon 2017). As previously explained, the decline of democracy is also marked by restrictions on the freedom of movement for organisations and members of the public who oppose the government. Jumisih of the Indonesian United Labour Union Federation (FSBPI) has experienced a similar situation. The Labour Party put her forward to stand for election as a legislative member in Jakarta's Constituency 2, citing her extensive experience with domestic workers' issues. However, midway through the candidacy process, she withdrew due to restrictions on her freedom of movement within the Labour Party, specifically the debate over candidate numbers and the limitations placed on her and her colleagues' ability to express their opinions.

> "Then, I withdrew as a candidate because I felt I had not been given the opportunity to express my views on requesting the number 1 spot. For my friends and me, securing the number 1 spot would impact what the party had already decided — namely, to provide space and freedom for women to stand. So, I thought, yes, I deserve that, given my capabilities" (Jumisih 2024, Online Interview, 5 November).

From Jumisih's statement, the authors conclude that political parties are unable to grant women freedom. Instead, they are merely used to meet the 30 per cent affirmative action quota, with their needs and opinions as legislative candidates being ignored. However, the obstacles faced by the women's movement do not stem solely from these issues. The authors conclude that these obstacles are structural in nature. The phenomenon of parliamentary seats being filled by the families of party officials or political dynasties is deeply entrenched within the government. Consequently, a government predominantly composed of the families of party officials will not provide opportunities for qualified individuals to enter government. This also impacts the fulfilment of the quota for women's political representation. As Chusnul Mar'iyah stated:

> "There is room for women to participate in elections. However, it is predominantly the families of the party elite — both executive and legislative — who utilise these opportunities—for instance, the wives of regents and governors, and the children of officials. A regent may serve two terms, for example, and in the third term, the first wife may run against the second wife. In the fourth term, the incumbent's first wife may face the third wife" (Chusnul 2024, Online Interview, 5 November).

The narrowing of opportunities for women to participate in elections stems from various factors. Although opportunities for women to participate have

been enshrined in law, the 30 per cent target will not be met, given the numerous challenges women face in politics. Of the 48 ministers in the Red and White Cabinet formed by Prabowo-Gibran, only five are women, accounting for 9 per cent of the total. This illustrates the marginalisation of women in politics and a disregard for democracy.

As mentioned above, restrictions on women's freedom of movement suggest that their representation in Indonesian politics is merely symbolic. This marginalises their ability to voice their opinions and influence decision-making processes. This can be seen as a substantive strengthening of democracy with regard to women's representation in politics. However, questions remain about the effectiveness of women's representation: do they truly understand women's issues, and do they genuinely represent women's groups?

The authors view the efforts of the women's movement, ranging from policy advocacy to encouraging grassroots women to stand as legislative candidates, as the change that the movement aims to achieve. Drawing on Aberle's categorisation of social movements, it is evident that the women's movement has shifted from being reformative to transformative. This indicates that the women's movement is not merely striving to increase women's political representation through policy alone. Rather, it seeks to change the political structure by encouraging women with an understanding of women's issues to take their place in parliament. As we advance, the women's movement's struggle is no longer solely about increasing the number of women in politics. It is also about how women in parliament can represent women's groups.

Conclusion

The reformative movement explains that external factors can hinder a social movement from achieving its goals. This is evident in the efforts of the women's movement to increase women's political representation. The movement's progress on this agenda is limited by external factors such as the decline of democracy, characterised by oligarchic dominance, masculine government, patriarchal politics and the influence of money in politics. Both *Perempuan Mahardhika* and KPI advocate for greater female representation in politics. While *Perempuan Mahardhika* pursues this agenda through policy advocacy and women's education, KPI advances it by advocating for women's participation in, and representation of their political interests within, decision-making institutions.

Using Aberlian's typology to analyse women's movements yields two sub-classifications: classical and limited (McGuire 2024). These sub-classifications produce quite different analyses. Classical reformative movements have a broader impact and bring about greater systemic change than limited reformative movements. In the context of this research, women's movements that aim to increase women's representation in politics fall into the 'limited' category. The limited reformative movement explains how a women's movement can achieve results with limited objectives. This can be seen in the obstacles that women's movements still face arising from the government. However, women's movements demonstrate a shift in focus — not merely an effort to increase the rate of women's political representation, but also to ensure that women in parliament represent women through the election of female candidates at the grassroots level.

From the statements and discussions in the previous sub-section, the authors conclude that the women's movement has not yet succeeded in increasing the number of women in politics. This problem stems from internal factors within the movement itself, as well as external factors such as oligarchic domination and the decline in the quality of democracy. Ultimately, the women's movement lacks the capacity to achieve its goal of increasing women's representation in politics because the existing social and political order constrains it. In this paper, therefore, we aim to reflect on the women's movement operating within a context of oligarchic and patriarchal political dominance. Recruiting female candidates to sit in parliament must become a primary focus to ensure that women's presence in politics is not merely symbolic. Furthermore, political parties must recognise the importance of women's representation in politics and address this issue as a matter of urgency.

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