

Reading the Direction of Post-Reform Feminism: Critiques and Collective Practices

Editorial

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Articles

Women's Movements in West Java during the Reform Era: Case Studies of the *Rumpun Indonesia Women's Movement*, *Samahita*, and the Indonesian Women's Coalition
Antik Bintari

The Mobilisation of Reformative Women's Movements in Increasing Women's Political Representation and the Decline of Democracy in Indonesia
Nisa Nurachmah and Sri Lestari Wahyuningroem

Advocacy for Gender-Just Lawmaking by the Women's Movements in Post-Transition Indonesia
Sri Wiyanti Eddyono

Women Human Rights Defenders: From State Absence to Stigmatisation
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State Violence in Digital Spaces: Digital Feminism, Repression, and the Struggle of Women's Civil Society Organisations
Abby Gina Boang Manalu, Asterlita Tirsa Raha, Patricia Beata Kurnia, Faiz Abimanyu Wiguna, and Panca Lintang Dyah Paramitha

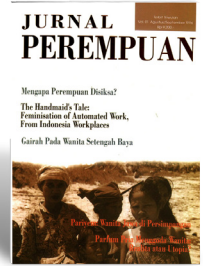
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Reading the Direction of Post-Reform Feminism: Critiques and Collective Practices

Over twenty years since the 1998 Reform, the focus of feminism and women's work in Indonesia has shifted beyond merely opening up spaces for participation. Instead, they focus on a more fundamental question: how can feminist work be made sustainable in an unstable and fragmented political context that demands short-term adaptation? Although post-Reform democracy offers procedural opportunities, it does not automatically guarantee protection, policy consistency or the conditions necessary for long-term continuation.

This concern is reflected in Issue 121 of *Jurnal Perempuan*. Rather than depicting the women's movement as weakened or failed, the six featured articles present it as a political practice operating under structural pressures such as widespread state repression, the professionalisation of civil society organisations, dependence on project-based funding, fragmented strategies, and the shift of the arena of struggle to the digital spheres. This shift simultaneously opens up opportunities and introduces new vulnerabilities.

In her article on the women's movement in West Java during the Reform era, Bintari shows that the sustainability of women's work at a local level hinge on their ability to identify political opportunities, build mobilisation structures, and navigate ideological debates. By examining independent organisations such as *Rumpun Indonesia*, *Samahita*, and the Indonesian Women's Coalition between 2018 and 2023, the research demonstrates that sustainability cannot be taken for granted, but is instead the result of continuous collaborative efforts within a context of fluctuating political opportunities.

The article by Nisa Nurachmah and Sri Lestari Wahyuningroem prominently features questions regarding the resilience of strategies. By examining the agenda for women's political representation, the authors demonstrate that reformist mobilisation, which has long been the main pillar, is severely restrained when democracy is in retreat and oligarchy is on the rise. This raises the crucial question of whether strategies that rely on democratic procedures can sustain feminist work in the long term when democracy itself is fragile.

In the legal sphere, Sri Wiyanti Eddyono's article shows that advocating for gender-just legislation requires

significant compromise and is an arduous undertaking. The diversity of ideologies and organisational visions within women's organisations influences the issues that are championed, prioritised or disregarded. In this context, legal advocacy becomes the arena in which the sustainability of feminist work is tested against the movement's internal dynamics, political pressures, and the state's institutional boundaries.

The article by Christine Constanta and Vania Christabel on Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) highlights the most vulnerable dimension of sustainability. A lack of legal protection, stigmatisation, and threats to physical and psychological safety demonstrate that activism carries a high personal cost. In these circumstances, survival becomes a political practice in its own right, not merely a technical prerequisite.

Khaerul Umam Noer's article discusses the transformation of the arena of struggle into the digital realm. It shows how social media opens up spaces for solidarity and the articulation of experiences, while also creating a reliance on virality and posing digital security risks. As this article demonstrates, the sustainability of digital feminist work cannot be separated from structural work at the grassroots level - work that is often invisible yet determines long-term resilience.

The article by Abby Gina Boang Manalu, Asterlita Tirsia Raha, Patricia Beata Kurnia, Faiz Abimanyu Wiguna, and Panca Lintang Dyah Paramitha complements *Jurnal Perempuan* 121 by illustrating the impact of state repression in the digital sphere on the sustainability of women's organisations. Through legislation, surveillance, moral stigma, and algorithmic discipline, repression operates silently, producing exhaustion, self-censorship, and low-profile survival strategies.

Together, the six articles in *Jurnal Perempuan* 121 show that the main challenge for post-reform feminism is not just the effectiveness of strategies, but also the ability to sustain feminist work in an uncertain political climate. Here, sustainability is not understood as linear success, but rather as the practice of nurturing networks, knowledge, solidarity and the vitality of feminism amidst fragmentation and structural pressures (Dewi et al. 2024; Hemment 2007; Bernal & Grewal 2014).

Beyond these six articles, the culture section of *Jurnal Perempuan* 121 provides a broader understanding of the movement's sustainability, offering a more reflective and practical perspective. Rita Ramadhani's profile sheds light on human trafficking as a tangible area for feminist action. It illustrates the challenges of supporting victims, changes in criminal tactics, and the importance of networks and activists' resilience. The interview with Bambang Prayudi (Yudi) explores the ongoing challenges faced by the LGBTQI+ community amid repression and social rejection. It considers strategies such as internal solidarity, layered work, and cross-issue alliances.

Meanwhile, the 'Book Review' and 'Words and Meanings' sections encourage readers to consider the limitations of women's NGO work within project logic, the retreat of democracy, and the necessity of developing a more critical and sustainable feminist political imagination that goes beyond mere symbolism. The 'Poetry and Short Story' sections complement *Jurnal Perempuan* 121 by exploring the emotional aspects

of feminism, such as memory, loss, the body, and resilience, which are not always present in analytical language. Through literary language, readers are invited to understand feminist work as both a political strategy and a fragile, layered life experience that is continually nurtured from generation to generation.

Thus, *Jurnal Perempuan* 121 encourages readers to view feminism not only as an agenda for change, but also as a long-term endeavour to sustain collective practice. In the uncertain post-Reform era, questions about how feminism endures, adapts and survives are as important as those concerning the causes it fights for. By interpreting feminism as both a horizon and a critique, *Jurnal Perempuan* 121 explicitly rejects a limited view of feminism that is confined to jargon, identity, or symbolic victories. Feminism is understood as an ideal continually tested through practice, serving as a critical tool directed not only outwards, but also inwards towards women's own work. This ensures that its vitality and emancipatory imagination endure (**Abby Gina Boang Manalu**).

Abstracts

Antik Bintari

Padjajaran University, Bandung, Indonesia

Women's Movements in West Java during the Reform Era: Case Studies of the Rumpun Indonesia Women's Movement, Samahita, and the Indonesian Women's Coalition

Manuscript Code: DDC 305

Jurnal Perempuan Vol. 30 No. 2, 2025, pp. 115–125, 20 References

West Java continues to experience significant gender inequality, making women's organisations key political actors in driving social change. This study examines women's movements in West Java during the Reform Era (2018–2023) through the lens of political opportunity, mobilisation structures, and framing processes. Using feminist research methods, including interviews, online and offline focus group discussions, literature reviews, and documentation, the study analyses independent women's organisations that are neither state-formed nor party-affiliated. The findings show that political opportunities, the contestation of ideas, and the collective mobilisation and public engagement practices shape the growth, sustainability, and impact of women's movements.

Keywords: Social Movements, Women's Movements, Reform Era

Nisa Nurachmah and Sri Lestari Wahyuningroem

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

Manuscript Code: DDC 305

Jurnal Perempuan Vol. 30 No. 2, 2025, pp. 127–138, 1 List of figures, 38 References

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

Sri Wiyanti Eddyono

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Advocacy for Gender-Just Lawmaking by the Women's Movements in Post-Transition Indonesia

Manuscript Code: DDC 305

Jurnal Perempuan Vol. 30 No. 2, 2025, pp. 139–159, 7 Lists of tables, 90 References

The women's advocacy movement within the legal reform efforts of the post-Reform era is dynamic. Legislative advocacy aims to promote the enactment of gender-just legislation, but the process is complex, particularly due to the internal dynamics of the women's movement. The diversity of women's organisations influences the issues raised in advocacy. This study examines how the dynamics of the women's movement in Indonesia influence the agenda-setting and promotion or rejection of legislation on women's issues. Drawing on secondary data and the author's reflections as an advocate, the study demonstrates that the diversity of ideologies and visions among women's organisations influences the causes they support. This study examines three legislative advocacy processes — the Law on Sexual Violence Crimes, the Amendment to the Marriage Law, and the Maternal and Child Welfare During the First 1,000 Days of a Child's Life (KIA) Bill — and finds that these processes reinforce the organisations' ideologies and visions. However, not all issues affecting women that are advocated for through legislation aim to transform patriarchal structures and systems. This depends on the organisations championing the issues.

Keywords: legislative advocacy, women's movement, legal reform, gender justice policy.

Christine Constanta¹ and Vania Christabel²

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Women Human Rights Defenders: From State Absence to Stigmatisation

Manuscript Code: DDC 305

Jurnal Perempuan Vol. 30 No. 2, 2025, pp. 161–174, 1 List of figures, 2 Lists of tables, 16 References

The dynamics of the women's movement in Indonesia since the Reform era are inextricably linked to the vital role of women human rights defenders (WHRDs), who have driven the advocacy agenda to achieve gender equality and the protection of women in Indonesia. However, WHRDs face various challenges, ranging from state-imposed obstacles, such as gaps in legal protection, to internal challenges within the movement itself. These challenges hinder advocacy efforts and impact the safety and well-being of WHRDs. This study uses qualitative methods and a feminist legal theory approach to analyse data collected through in-depth interviews with six WHRDs from diverse backgrounds. The findings suggest that the primary needs of WHRDs include legal protection, security, and well-being guarantees, as well as the integration of a gender perspective into every decision and legal instrument. The study details the nature and dynamics of the challenges and legal gaps faced by WHRDs in their struggle in Indonesia.

Keywords: women's movement, Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), legal protection

Khaerul Umam Noer

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**From Physical Space to Cyberspace: Hashtags, Feminist
Digital Activism, and Counterpublics**

Manuscript Code: DDC 305

Jurnal Perempuan Vol. 30 No. 2, 2025, pp. 175–187, 73 References

The feminist movement in post-Reform Indonesia has undergone a transformation with the emergence of digital spaces as arenas for advocacy. Through digital ethnography, analysing conversations, hashtags, and interviews with survivors, members of the PPKS Task Force (Task Force on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence) and the academic community at 28 campuses, this study shows that social media acts as an alternative public sphere. It enables people to share experiences, reduces isolation, and fosters solidarity. The #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and #SahkanRUUTPKS campaigns have raised public awareness and pressured the state to take action. However, key challenges include reliance on virality, digital security risks, and patriarchal backlash. This study highlights the importance of linking digital campaigns with grassroots structural work to ensure the movement's sustainability.

Keywords: digital feminism, sexual violence, social movements, counterpublic space

**Abby Gina Boang Manalu^{1,2}, Asterlita Tirsa Raha³, Patricia
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**State Violence in Digital Spaces:
Digital Feminism, Repression, and the Struggle of
Women's Civil Society Organisations**

Manuscript Code: DDC 305

Jurnal Perempuan Vol. 30 No. 2, 2025, pp. 189–204, 3 List of tables, 25
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This article analyses state violence in the digital sphere and its impact on women's civil society organisations (CSOs) in Indonesia. It also examines how feminist digital solidarity is formed and why it is fragile. Employing a critical feminist lens, this qualitative study uses cross-CSO online focus group discussions (involving urban, youth, progressive religious, disability, indigenous and LGBTIQ+ groups) and social media content analysis. The findings suggest that repression occurs through the intersection of lawfare (the ITE Law and the Criminal Code), surveillance, doxxing, moral stigma, and algorithmic discipline, resulting in a chilling effect and self-censorship. CSOs respond by implementing digital security measures, diversifying funding, adopting low-profile strategies, and establishing solidarity networks. However, transformative solidarity requires protection, equitable resources, and cross-issue alliances.

Keywords: state violence, digital feminism, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, digital solidarity, women's civil society organisations

Women's Movements in West Java during the Reform Era: Case Studies of the Rumpun Indonesia Women's Movement, Samahita, and the Indonesian Women's Coalition

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Abstract

West Java continues to experience significant gender inequality, making women's organisations key political actors in driving social change. This study examines women's movements in West Java during the Reform Era (2018–2023) through the lens of political opportunity, mobilisation structures, and framing processes. Using feminist research methods, including interviews, online and offline focus group discussions, literature reviews, and documentation, the study analyses independent women's organisations that are neither state-formed nor party-affiliated. The findings show that political opportunities, the contestation of ideas, and the collective mobilisation and public engagement practices shape the growth, sustainability, and impact of women's movements.

Keywords: Social Movements, Women's Movements, Reform Era

Introduction

The development of a democratic political system has opened up space for citizens, including women, to voice injustices and mobilise themselves in the struggle for social justice and gender equality. In a democratic society, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the ability to make collective demands are prerequisites for the emergence and sustainability of social movements. Conversely, authoritarian political systems restrict society's capacity to organise itself and challenge unjust power relations. Therefore, the women's movement can be understood as a form of citizen participation in democratic practice, namely when women collectively voice their experiences, interests, and political demands. As Jill Bystydzienski and Joti Sekhon (1999) wrote about democracy:

"... enables the full realisation of human creative potential. ... [and] thereby supports the development of values and structures that promote and give people a direct say in matters affecting their lives."

The view of democracy as a process through which ordinary citizens can express themselves is becoming increasingly organised within social institutions, as reflected in numerous studies on the women's movement. These studies position the movement as a

primary form of collective expression for women and as a means of achieving democratic citizenship (Beckwith 2005).

In this study, the women's movement is understood as the collective expression of Indonesian women's desires and interests. Following Wieringa (1999), a broad definition is adopted to capture its heterogeneity and complexity: it is considered to be a spectrum of actions, activities, groups, and organisations — both individual and collective — which seek to reduce the various forms of gender subordination intertwined with class-, race-, ethnicity-, age- and sex-based oppression.

In line with Mazur and McBride (2008), the women's movement is understood as collective action by women who explicitly make demands in the public sphere on the basis of their gender identity. This definition, therefore, encompasses two main elements: an organised collective action and claims of gender identity. Furthermore, Mazur and McBride (2010) emphasise that the fundamental characteristics of the women's movement lie in discourse and actors. Discourse encompasses ideas, objectives, and claims about women's gender identity, while actors are collectives of women operating outside state structures in the socio-political sphere.

The 1998 Reform brought about changes to Indonesia's political landscape, shifting the country from an authoritarian system to a democratic one, from a centralised to a decentralised system of government, and from military supremacy to civilian supremacy. These changes have implications for social and political movements in Indonesia, including the women's movement. This is particularly relevant when considering the women's movement in West Java, which has received little attention thus far and may have been overshadowed by various highly masculine heroic narratives. In fact, the women's movement in West Java is part of Indonesia's broader women's movement. While several notable women from West Java, such as Dewi Sartika, Raden Ayu Lasminingrat, and Emma Poeradiredja, are recorded as having played a part in the struggle for women's rights during the colonial era, evidence of collective action by women in West Java during this period and the subsequent Old and New Orders is scarce.

During the colonial era, *the Pasundan Istri* organisation showcased the participation of West Javanese women in the fight for independence. This involvement included political participation and organising the Women's Congress, which established 22 December as Mother's Day. The organisation survived into the post-independence era and continues to be active in social causes. However, as Rahayu (2007) notes, the history of Indonesian women tends to portray female figures as elite individuals, thereby obscuring their existence as a collective within social movements.

Various women's organisations and collective actions emerged in West Java during the Reform era, much as they did in Jakarta and other cities influenced by the democratic political system. Democratisation in Indonesia following the 1998 Reform has given women greater access to political processes and policymaking (Dhewy 2019). However, the mainstream literature on democracy generally focuses on institutional transformations during democratisation, neglecting the gender-relations dimension that explains these complexities. The contradictions in the interactions between the women's movement, the democratisation process, and the three electoral agencies — namely political parties, elections, and the legislature — are also overlooked (Margret 2019). Democratic transitions measured against gender-neutral criteria silence women's voices and interests (Jaquette in Margret 2019).

In West Java, particularly in the city of Bandung, women's organisations have flourished. These range from religious groups to organisations focused on economic development, politics, and critical thinking. They typically provide capacity building for local stakeholders through training, public education, and community organising. However, not all women's movements are automatically categorised as feminist movements, whether they are directly led by women or address women's issues.

In various Asian contexts, for instance, a distinction is made between women and feminism, specifically between feminist and women's movements. Stivens (2000, p. 31) notes that Islamic women's activists in Malaysia feel more comfortable using the term 'womanist' than 'feminist'. Furthermore, Chinese academics and researchers tend to use the term 'feminology' to differentiate themselves from Western feminist theories (Edwards 2010, p. 53). The term 'feminist' is still widely regarded as originating from outside 'them', so many women, particularly academics and researchers, feel more comfortable being part of Women's Studies than a feminist group (Arivia & Subono 2017). Women's movements with a feminist agenda can be characterised by features that prioritise women's experiences of gender relations in society, women's issues, women's leadership and women's participation in policymaking processes (Beckwith 2000).

This study aims to identify and analyse women's movements in West Java during the Reform Era. According to Beckwith (2007), studies of women's movements seek to trace organised female actors, contextualise them spatially, and compare the movements' dynamics with the responses of the state and other actors. The Reform Era was chosen because it was a period of significant political change that shaped the dynamics of women's movements both directly and indirectly.

Research Methodology

In line with the research focus on mapping the ways in which political opportunities and the democratisation process provided space for women's organisations and movements in West Java to participate, this study employs a feminist research methodology. Feminism views patriarchy as a power structure that produces androcentric bias and sexism in knowledge production, placing men at the centre whilst disregarding other perspectives (Hesse-Bieber 2011). Feminist research, therefore, aims to correct these biases by incorporating all genders into knowledge production, while ensuring

that the situation of any one group is not homogenised. Other factors, such as race, class, sexual orientation, and cultural context, also play a role. Feminists must strive to be as inclusive as possible (van Witteloostuijn 2013).

This study takes a feminist approach, focusing on the diverse experiences of women and the institutions and structures that influence them (Creswell 2007). Adopting a participatory approach, this study follows Álvarez (1990), who views the women's movement as a socio-political movement primarily driven by women to advocate for gender interests. Based on this framework, the study focuses its analysis on three women's organisations in West Java: *Samahita*, *Rumpun Indonesia* and the Indonesian Women's Coalition (*Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia/KPI*).

Political Opportunities

The post-New Order era was characterised by the increased participation of civil society, including women, in advocating for public policy. During this period of reform, religious, secular and progressive women's organisations flourished, each with its own ideologies, issues and strategies of resistance. This study aims to map the political opportunities and cultural structures of three such organisations/ movements: *Rumpun Indonesia*, *KPI*, and *Samahita*.

Since 1998, the women's movement has continued to develop, including in West Java. Gadis Arivia and Nur Iman Subono (2017) describe this phase as characterised by the diverse discourses and critical research produced by women's organisations. From a social movement perspective, the state becomes a battleground for women's organisations, according to Singh (2001). This relates to the structure of political opportunities, which opens up spaces for discourse for many groups in society.

Ruang Media Perempuan (Rumpun) Indonesia is an example of a women's social movement in West Java that focuses on anti-corruption issues. Initiated by women activists, one of whom has a background in the Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW), the organisation promotes the vision of 'Integrity in Indonesian Families' through arts-based participatory communication. *Rumpun* identifies itself as a nationalist organisation. Its emphasis on women is based on the interpretation of the body and the role of the mother as the source of the formation of values, characters and social ethics, a view also held by the interviewees in this study.

"*Rumpun Indonesia* actually came into being during the "Save the KPK" campaign... It was the issue because I was with the ICW... I noticed that these movements had previously been very male-dominated. The same people always took the lead, and the movement lacked inclusivity, failing to involve women... Eventually, the Women Against Corruption group launched the "Nine Women's Initiatives"... and friends in Bandung with similar concerns came together. In 2014, we continued to organise the "Nine Women's Initiatives" activities. As our relationships developed positively and we had been helping each other via the WhatsApp group from the start, we eventually continued to meet and organise follow-up activities. The issue of corruption continued to gain prominence... so we created a distinctive tagline for the 'anti-corruption family' and fought corruption from home. We used symbols of resistance, such as handprints... because our activities had to be participatory and involve physical action, making use of free days and schools. The highlight was the declaration of the 'anti-corruption family' on International Women's Day. More and more communities became involved in the campaign, which promoted the KPK's values of integrity and the keyword 'patience' because corruption stems from impatience. On National Anti-Corruption Day, 300 communities were involved" (SM 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 30 March).

In the history of *KPI*'s formation, the congress — attended by over 500 women activists from various backgrounds and regions — demonstrated robust support for women's issues across different regions and areas of interest. The congress successfully identified and agreed upon fifteen activity sectors, including farmers, fisherfolk, domestic workers, migrant workers, sex workers (later renamed 'women forced into prostitution'), housewives, the elderly, child labourers, and LGBTIQ+ individuals. The driving spirit behind its formation was a commitment to an independent, autonomous mass base. This means striving to remain free from state control, unlike most mass organisations under the New Order. *KPI*'s organisational principles are democracy, human rights, gender equality, justice and diversity, with feminism forming its ideological foundation. Gender equality and justice lie at the heart of these principles. This was reiterated by a *KPI* representative from West Java in the following interview:

"*KPI* is an independent women's mass movement organisation that was established in 1998, following the Reform Era. The West Java branch was formed in 2003. Its activities focus on two areas: organisational strengthening and public policy reform. While there are 18 interest groups championed nationally, in West Java itself, only 8 groups are currently supported: Housewives, Elderly Women, PPM (Youth, Schoolchildren, and Students), Women in the Informal Sector, Professional Women, Women Farmers, Women Fisherfolk, and Women Migrant Workers. This categorisation is based on interest groups because each

group faces different issues” (DW 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 27 March).

KPI itself emphasises that the principle it upholds is democracy. However, the source revealed that the journey towards a healthy democracy, including with regard to women’s participation, is still a long way off and faces various issues. The source provided the following further elaboration:

“When it comes to democracy, KPI is fundamentally based on democratic principles. However, we still have a long way to go in combating deviant practices such as vote-buying and identity politics, as well as other forms of corruption within the democratic system. Furthermore, in the post-Reform era, everyone, including women, has been given a platform to voice their opinions on how to improve state systems. However, this is not as straightforward in practice. Oligarchy persists; for instance, although it has begun to erode in Indramayu, new oligarchies continue to emerge. At KPI, we already have voter education programmes for women in place. The aim is, of course, to improve Indonesian democracy in the future” (DW 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 27 March).

Samahita is a community that advocates for gender equality and combats violence and sexual harassment. It also addresses LGBTQ issues, which have long been considered taboo in public spaces, particularly in West Java, a province that often claims to be religious. Samahita is based in Bandung, where its secretariat is located. The name Samahita derives from Sanskrit, meaning ‘steadfast’ or ‘strong’. In the Batak language, Samahita is an acronym for ‘sama’ and ‘hita’, meaning ‘together we are’.

Samahita was founded in 2015 by six female student initiators from various universities in Bandung. Notably, the majority of board members and volunteers are young women aged between 15 and 30. The Chair of the Samahita Community explained that the organisation was inspired by the global movement One Billion Rising (OBR),¹ launched in 2012 by Eve Ensler to end rape and sexual violence against women. Furthermore, Samahita was formed in response to the high number of victims of sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence that often go unaddressed. This was highlighted in an interview with the founder of Samahita, who stated:

“Samahita began its work in 2013. It was not originally called Samahita; it was part of a global campaign held simultaneously around the world, with Bandung, Indonesia, being one of the cities to take part. However, by 2014, more and more people were becoming interested and getting involved. In 2015, an increasing number of victims began

sharing their stories with us about the violence they had experienced, seeking our advice on how to proceed. Eventually, a particular case came to our attention that made us realise that we could no longer use the name of the global campaign for our movement. Ultimately, in 2015, we agreed that we needed a platform focused on Dating Violence (DV) among young people. Samahita was established on 16 February 2015 with the aim of supporting victims or survivors of sexual violence. However, as we developed, our focus also shifted to include other forms of gender-based violence. The founders of Samahita were students from various universities and disciplines who had experienced sexual violence. At the time, they were unsure who to report such incidents to or where to report them (AY 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 9 April).

Like other collective movements or actions, women’s movements capitalised on political opportunities within a democratic context to expand further. During the reform era, women had greater opportunities to engage publicly through various media channels, free from fear of repression by the authorities. This expansion was supported by structural conditions that enabled the movement to flourish, with women activists beginning to articulate its ideas. The conditions described above are evident in the three women’s organisations that were studied. All three can be said to have ‘benefited’ from the previous reform movement. A Samahita source elaborated further on her understanding of democracy and its connection to women’s movement activism, as in the quote below:

“If you ask whether there has been any change, there certainly has been, albeit a small one. At the very least, gender issues are now being incorporated into various policies being drafted, as well as those already enacted. Some policies are also gender-sensitive. The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology is now addressing gender-based digital divides, too. In my view, the changes between the pre-reform and post-reform periods are very evident. However, as the government and policymakers’ system and mindset remain patriarchal, current policies are merely a formality. Thus, in my opinion, democracy has not yet fully embraced women’s rights” (AY 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 9 April).

Ideologically, Samahita affirms its adherence to a feminist ideology, which, according to the interviewees, is considered the most appropriate approach to issues such as the oppression of women and minorities, as well as environmental concerns. They also revealed that transformative justice is the working principle employed. The women’s movement of the Reform Era is part of a new social movement that can operate within a democratic political system. A key consideration in strengthening collective action by women is reinforcing the women’s movement’s platform.

Although the three organisations in this study emerged post-Reform, they are not entirely new, as the structure of political opportunities merely provided a medium for movements that already had foundations, goals, and strategies. The history of the women's movement in Indonesia demonstrates this continuity, as illustrated by Wieringa (1999) in her study of *Gerwani*, which had been operating since the early 1950s within a highly pressured political context.

The democratisation process that followed the Reform opened up vast spaces in which women's movements could express their needs and demands regarding gender issues. This is particularly evident in the ease with which the three collective actions in West Java gained access to resources and established networks, and in the absence of repressive actions by the state or other groups when they formed their organisations and carried out subsequent activities in public spaces.

The political opportunities examined in this study also refer to the active involvement of women's organisations in West Java Province in the development of gender-responsive public policies. One issue they are advocating for is child marriage in West Java. With the support of Oxfam Indonesia through the STRONGER programme (Sustainable Intervention, Greater Voices, and Change the Barrier on Violence Against Women and Girls), KPI West Java continuously undertakes efforts to prevent child marriage through discussions and training sessions, as well as by advocating for the adoption of local policies. KPI West Java has also contributed to the enactment of West Java Governor Regulation No. 40 on the Prevention of Extremism in West Java Province. It is actively involved in monitoring the progress of the draft Regional Regulation (Raperda) on the Protection and Empowerment of Women in West Java. A KPI spokesperson stated that democracy and decentralisation should naturally influence women's organisations' participation in public policy formulation, particularly in West Java.

"My hope, particularly in West Java, is that, once the necessary regulations are in place and the governor's programmes better accommodate women, the government will commit to implementing those regional regulations (Perda), for instance by translating them into governor's regulations (Pergub). Through these regulations, I hope to establish a shared commitment with district governments and local authorities. This is because provincial-level regulations are often merely drafted and not implemented through programmes. But have these regulations been evaluated to ensure they meet community needs?" (ZA 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 27 March).

To advocate for and monitor the legislative process of the Draft Regional Regulation on the Protection and Empowerment of Women in West Java, KPI West Java organised a discussion entitled "Youth Campaign Strategies for the Protection and Empowerment of Women" on 21 March 2023. This programme focused on gender justice and aimed to improve the position of young people, women, and marginalised groups by applying the principles of the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA), encouraging youth participation, and ensuring the explicit involvement of men.²

The subsequent term of the regional head (2018–2023) saw a change in political party affiliation (from a faith-based to a non-faith-based party), which led to differences in policy on implementing gender mainstreaming in West Java. In 2019, the West Java Provincial DP3AKB initiated the Women's School programme, which has been funded annually from the Regional Revenue Budget (APBD) ever since. *Sekoper Cinta (Sekolah Perempuan Capai Impian dan Cita-Cita)*, also known as *Sekoci*, is a programme run by the West Java Provincial Government as part of the Governor of West Java's 100-day 'quick wins' initiative. It is designed to help women achieve their dreams and aspirations. It is one of several programmes designed to address high rates of divorce, stunting, human trafficking, and gender-based violence in West Java. The programme provides a platform for women in West Java to share insights and experiences, identify and recognise women's needs and interests, and improve their quality of life. This empowers West Javanese women to realise their vision as individuals capable of uplifting themselves, their families, and their communities.³

The DP3AKB allocates annual funds to support the development of women's organisations that are affiliated with the Women's Organisations Cooperation Body (BKOW). These organisations are included in the DP3AKB's work programmes at provincial and district/city levels. Other women's organisations, whether faith-based or non-faith-based, collaborate with the DP3AKB in formulating various local policies, such as the Governor's Regulation (Pergub) on preventing child marriage and radicalism.

Political opportunities enable women's organisations and movements to represent themselves as part of socio-political change. In West Java, both religious and secular women's movements demonstrate the characteristics of a new social movement by engaging with policy issues and articulating public interests through various strategies. Strategic choices, particularly networking,

are heavily influenced by political considerations and the social context of the time, including assessments of momentum, opportunities, and obstacles. The success of networks depends on a shared consensus regarding the issues being advocated for, as well as a willingness to set aside individual organisational interests. In the context of regional autonomy, this opportunity was used to promote and monitor local government policies that favoured women in West Java.

Research confirms that the study of women's movements cannot be reduced to electoral politics alone. Until now, political studies have largely ignored women's movements unless they relate to parliamentary representation or elections. This implies that activism by women outside these areas holds no political significance. In reality, however, women's movements operate as political practices in a broader sense, namely in the struggle for interests and gender power relations.

In the Indonesian context, faith-based women's organisations such as *Aisyiyah*, *Fatayat NU*, and *Wanita Katolik Republik Indonesia* (Catholic Women of the Republic of Indonesia) are independent of the political system's openness or closeness. Nor are they influenced by the stability or instability of intergroup relations. Their presence throughout Indonesia's political history, including during the colonial era prior to independence, is evidence of this. Prior to the Reform Era, it was challenging for Indonesia's women's movement, including in West Java, to prioritise strategic gender issues such as women's representation, gender equality, human rights, and sexual violence. Global issues were not easily adopted, and even when they were, they were quickly viewed with suspicion and regarded as opposing the government or challenging religious and cultural values. Women's movements in West Java, whether faith-based or secular, tended to utilise the state as a battleground for various practical and strategic gender-related interests.

Religious minority women's organisations in West Java, including Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and *Penghayat* groups, have not yet maximised their presence in the public sphere. This includes collaborating with the local government to implement various pro-gender policies. *Penghayat* groups, in particular, still need to adapt to a situation in which their presence was previously rejected. Consequently, building strength, capacity, and self-confidence within the organisation has become their main focus. Based on the above, Singh's (2001) assertion that the state is the battleground for social movement organisations holds. It is also agreed that

a democratic social system is a prerequisite for the emergence of social movements, including women's movements that address practical and strategic gender issues.

However, this study does not fully confirm Singh's assumption that movement actors generally come from the new middle class. Most women's organisations in West Java originate from marginalised groups, but subsequently collaborate with the middle classes to broaden the scope of their issues and their support base, as seen in KPI West Java. In line with Singh, almost all of the organisations studied utilise cultural and technological approaches as mobilisation and framing strategies, in accordance with McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald's (2016) framework.

More broadly, the democratisation that followed in 1998 created an environment conducive to ongoing political negotiation. This enabled a broader spectrum of identities and interests to be expressed, including those based on culture, class, gender, and the environment. Alongside the opening up of this democratic space, there was also a re-emergence of local and religious values that had previously been suppressed.

Since 1998, the women's movement has developed a new awareness and has begun to actively define its own issues and politics, rather than merely supporting the political agenda of other organisations. Indeed, the women's movement has grown in terms of its operational scope, geographical reach, diversity of participants, areas of work, and definitions of gender issues. This aligns with the views of political process experts, who regard the political context as the most influential factor in the emergence and fate of social protests. They refer to this as a 'favourable political context', which is influenced by external political components such as the state and political institutions. While there are many other factors surrounding the emergence and fate of social protests, such as social unrest, resources, and the organisation and strategy of social movements, the political context remains the most influential. This is also linked to the objectives and opponents of social protests in general, namely the effort to gain political power (Kriesi 2005).

To achieve the objectives of a social movement, it is essential to have a clear vision and mission. Through these, an organisation can plan its future direction and clarify its aims and causes. As well as serving as a guide, the vision and mission also constrain policy-making, thereby minimising decisions that deviate from the organisation's objectives. In this context, both faith-

based and secular women's organisations appear to have relatively clear visions and missions. A strong vision and mission, coupled with high levels of organisation, will give the women's movement greater bargaining power and political strength.

Mobilisation Structure

The West Java branch of KPI forms part of a wider organisation. Similar to religious women's organisations, which have a central or national structure, its mobilisation structure regarding priority programmes is aligned with that established at the central level. According to one interview excerpt, KPI West Java has around 4,000 members. In line with its village-based (bottom-up) organisational structure, known as the *Bale Perempuan*, KPI West Java has human resources extending down to the grassroots level (villages/sub-districts). As one of the interviewees stated:

"Our members are individuals, all women over the age of 18. Those under 18 are referred to as probationary members. Our structure extends down to the village level (*Bale Perempuan*). At the branch level, our structure comprises executive and legislative bodies. In West Java, several branches exist, including those in Indramayu, Garut, Bogor, Cirebon (city and regency), Purwakarta, Bandung, and Sukabumi. Kuningan Regency is the only branch where the PPM Interest Group Council has been established, rather than the full branch. Inactive branches include Cianjur, Bandung City, Karawang, Bekasi, and Depok. This is because one of the former committee members has moved to another city" (DW 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 27 March).

Meanwhile, KPI West Java comprises approximately nine interest groups,⁴ namely women workers and women migrant workers, housewives, elderly women, youth, schoolchildren and students, coastal women and fisherwomen, women in the informal sector, professional women, female farmers, widows, female heads of households, and single women. Several other interest groups, including Indigenous women, women in prostitution, domestic workers, and women from urban and rural areas, as well as groups related to people with disabilities, and the LGBT community, have not yet been included due to various considerations. Other interest groups have not yet been included as their numbers are currently unknown and remain small. In the WhatsApp interview below, the interviewee stated the following:

"As for interest groups that do not yet exist, this is because there are currently no members of such groups, and their numbers are dwindling. Furthermore, at the regional congress, no one stood for election to the regional praesidium, so these interest groups have no regional

representation. There are also no members of the LGBT-related interest group, as it is a highly sensitive group facing significant resistance in West Java. This group also presents a challenge for the regional executive in terms of educating cadres and the network. This is why candidates must first undergo basic cadre training as part of the KPI cadre recruitment process to gain an understanding of KPI principles, the role of KPI cadres, and the KPI Articles of Association. Although some have not yet accepted this, it remains a challenge in the cadre development process in West Java" (DW 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 27 March).

KPI takes into account the socio-cultural context of West Java, a region generally considered highly religious. LGBT issues present a particular challenge for them, as resistance to these issues is considered to be quite high in West Java. This aligns with the views of LZ and ZJ (2012), who state that organisations based on a collection of issues or sectors tend to be more vulnerable than union-style organisations in addressing local needs. This applies to issues relating to the provision of early childhood education (PAUD) and other local issues. Organisations based on issues or sectors do not necessarily accommodate the needs of a particular region, as they always align local needs with the issues or sectors of their parent coalition. KPI continues to strive to ensure that all interest groups mandated at the central level can be realised in West Java. KPI West Java mobilises resources through various activities, such as training, outreach, education, workshops and webinars, in partnership with numerous stakeholders.

When it comes to mobilising resources, KPI West Java consistently involves its partner networks, including local governments at provincial and district/ municipal levels, universities, women's activists, organisations that advocate for women and children, and other institutions such as the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu). Given its focus on child marriage, KPI's resource mobilisation efforts are largely directed towards preventing such issues. For instance, KPI West Java supported the amendment to Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 regarding the minimum marriage age for women. The revised Marriage Law was passed by the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) on 16 September 2019 and set the minimum marriage age for women at 19. Prior to the revision, the marriage age for women was 16. In response to this decision, KPI West Java organised a meeting to strengthen the Child Marriage Prevention Network in West Java. The chapter collaborated with civil society and government networks to advocate for a legal framework to prevent child marriage, including releasing a statement opposing the practice.

In terms of funding, KPI relies on membership fees and partnerships with various institutions, including domestic and international donor organisations and the West Java provincial government. Unlike KPI West Java, *Rumpun Indonesia* is a women's movement in West Java with a simple organisational structure, a foundation comprising a chairperson and specific departments.

It was stated from the outset that *Rumpun* is an acronym for *Ruang Media Perempuan* (Women's Media Space), a platform that enables women to express themselves and their interests through art and culture. This information was confirmed by a source who was one of the initiators of *Rumpun*.

"We advocate for the interests of all women, particularly with regard to public services such as education, healthcare, and citizenship. These are our priorities. In our view, women should be the first members of the family to access these services. Furthermore, *Rumpun Indonesia* uses art to convey messages and values of integrity. For example, when injustice occurs, we respond in this way" (SM 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 30 March).

Although the foundation has a structure, *Rumpun* has a core team of nine people who can be considered the founders. However, it does not yet have a permanent membership base or a membership system, nor does it have a leadership development process. This is because *Rumpun's* activities are largely non-routine, although various activities always involve volunteers from other women's communities. *Rumpun* has no branches in other cities or districts; it is based solely in Bandung. To mobilise public participation and promote the organisation, *Rumpun* actively utilises art and culture. Whenever organising an event, *Rumpun* forms an organising committee involving volunteers from various communities, particularly women's communities.

As part of its mobilisation strategy, *Rumpun Indonesia* collaborated with the *Indonesia.id* community in mid-2019 to launch the "How Indonesian Are You?" campaign, which celebrated diversity through regional dance and flash mobs. This initiative drew upon the 2018 Indonesia Survey Report (LSI), conducted in partnership with the Wahid Foundation and UN Women. The report revealed that 55 per cent of women displayed intolerant tendencies, which was slightly lower than the 59.2 per cent recorded among men. Consequently, *Rumpun* felt it was necessary to address issues of intolerance in West Java through this campaign. Dance was chosen as a cultural strategy rooted in local wisdom; as well as being a tradition, it promotes Indonesia's diversity and culture.

One example of *Rumpun Indonesia's* work came in 2022 when it collaborated with the West Java Provincial Department of Tourism and Culture to organise "Tari Merak Sadunya" – a colossal event celebrating the artistic and cultural heritage of Sundanese culture to mark World Peace Day. *Rumpun Indonesia* also collaborated with West Javanese artists and other arts communities for this event, which featured no fewer than 1,000 dancers. The event's tagline was #perempuangotongroyong. As part of a campaign series featuring mass dance performances, *Rumpun Indonesia* also organised a webinar titled "Women's Movement for a Sustainable Life" to provide community education. This webinar featured speakers from the government, academia, and *Rumpun Indonesia*.

In addition to campaigning, *Rumpun Indonesia* is actively engaged in capacity building through interactive discussions, as outlined by the interviewee:

"We produce anti-corruption parenting materials, films, and music, as well as *wayang* performances... We also network with male colleagues because we want to involve men as well as women... One of the capacity-building initiatives we have undertaken targeted PKK women and included sessions on BPJS services (integrity in public service), and the anti-corruption movement for people with disabilities" (SM 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 30 March).

Funding for *Rumpun's* activities largely comes from *Rumpun* members' self-funding. *Rumpun* also seeks public donations, primarily from local government partners via corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds, as well as from other donors. *Rumpun* frequently collaborates with KPI West Java on various activities, including international campaign events such as International Women's Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. *Rumpun's* primary target group is urban women, most of whom are middle-class and highly educated.

Samahita has a simple organisational structure and is supported by around 30 people and other networks, primarily for case support and management with local governments, legal aid institutions, and other community or service organisations. Within its structure, the title of 'chairperson' does not exist; instead, there is a 'responsible person', such as a programme coordinator, campaign coordinator, education coordinator or support coordinator. *Samahita's* volunteers differ from *Rumpun's* in that they are involved in almost all of *Samahita's* activities and are expected to assist in the case support process. In contrast, *Rumpun's* volunteers attend on a per-activity basis.

To this end, *Samahita* regularly provides capacity-building training for its volunteers, particularly with regard to issues of sexual and dating violence. Unlike the other two organisations/movements previously discussed by the author, *Samahita* originally had no organisational structure and campaigned on global issues, thus demonstrating its ability to meet the needs of young people. The interviewee elaborates on this below:

"Samahita began its work in 2013. It was originally part of a global campaign held simultaneously around the world, including in Indonesia, and was not originally called *Samahita*. Bandung was one of the cities that took part. However, by 2014, more and more people were becoming interested and getting involved. In 2015, a growing number of survivors began sharing their stories with us about the violence they had experienced and seeking our advice. Recognising the need for a platform focused on adolescent sexual violence, *Samahita* was finally established on 16 February 2015 with this aim. However, as it developed, our focus shifted to include gender-based violence" (AY 2021, Focus Group Discussion, 9 April).

Unlike the other women's organisations and movements included in this study, *Samahita* frequently mobilises resources through themed street actions and collaborations with like-minded communities. *Samahita* regularly initiates joint actions at events such as the Women's March and in support of the Sexual Violence Crimes Bill (now known as the TPKS Law). In its efforts to mobilise resources, *Samahita* appears consistent in its choice of issues, focusing on sexual violence and discrimination against vulnerable groups, such as the LGBT+ community. These are issues that are often overlooked or rejected by other women's movements or organisations in West Java, despite their claims to be progressive in their activism.

According to Locher, the distinction between a social movement and other forms of collective action, such as crowds, riots, rebels, and fads, indicates that the women's movement in West Java is a social movement because of its organisational structure. All of the women's organisations studied were well organised, with a division of tasks, designed strategies, and clear leadership. Furthermore, all of the organisations met the participation criteria based on collective consciousness and undertook promotional activities while seeking support from various parties. Meanwhile, most other collective actions were poorly organised, took place without planning, and lacked the participants' full consideration and awareness.

Furthermore, Dieter Opp (2009, p. 139) argues that the resources of a movement encompass not only funds, but also access to the media, support from sympathisers, member loyalty, the availability of spaces, and the knowledge and capacity of its members. Based on these criteria, women's movements with a secular basis in West Java demonstrate relatively strong mobilisation structures, underpinned by media networks, supporters and adequate organisational capacity.

Most of the women's movements and organisations studied in West Java have organisational models and structures that tend to be non-hierarchical and flexible. These structures avoid the pitfalls of oligarchy and feature collective leadership, making them more responsive to individual needs and less bureaucratic. Some of these characteristics are particularly evident in secular women's movements and organisations. Nevertheless, even moderate religious women's movements and organisations, such as *Cherbon Feminist*, have organisational structures that are less rigid, offering greater openness and responsiveness to individual needs.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, although fragmented and non-electoral, the women's movement in West Java during the Reform Era possessed strength in freedom, independence, and inclusivity. This was made possible by political opportunities within the democratic regime, which provided a broader space for movement activities. The women's movement was relatively free to determine issues and advocate for a variety of women's interests, encompassing both practical needs and strategic gender concerns. However, marginalised women's groups have not yet been fully engaged with or benefited from this movement. Conversely, resistance to the ideas of feminism and gender equality remains high, originating from organisations opposed to feminism and certain religious groups.

Secondly, the organisational structures adopted by the women's movement in West Java during the Reform Era have given rise to a movement addressing various issues affecting women. These issues include gender-based violence, violence against women, gender equality, reproductive rights, and women's participation in politics. The movement aims to advocate for women's rights and raise public awareness of these issues. Furthermore, the movement actively campaigns

for gender equality and criticises social structures that perpetuate injustice through activities such as organising and campaigning. These activities aim to change the attitudes and practices that disadvantage women in society. In terms of mobilisation structures, all women's movements and organisations meet the criteria for participant involvement based on deliberation and awareness. They also engage in publicity and seek support from a wide range of people. All women's movements and organisations in West Java, including *Samahita*, KPI West Java, and *Rumpun Indonesia*, can be categorised as new social movements. This aligns with Mc's view that new social movements take the form of pluralistic movements addressing diverse issues, such as urban, environmental, feminist, anti-racist, ethnic, and LGBTQ+ rights movements, as well as movements addressing the impacts of globalisation.

Thirdly, although one of the women's movements in West Java included in this study is based in a rural area, the research has not explicitly demonstrated a connection between the activism carried out by women's organisations and that carried out by long-established women's movements in the community, such as the *PKK* and *Posyandu*. It is crucial that other women's movements support gender inclusion and enhance women's influence in all areas of life. Progress has begun to emerge over the past two decades, but these achievements remain unevenly distributed, particularly in rural areas.

Fourthly, the women's movement in West Java faces the challenge of a lack of structured organisation at the grassroots level. Women's movements in West Java, particularly secular ones such as *Samahita* and *Rumpun* (which have no specific religious affiliation), need to extend their reach beyond the middle classes and urban areas. This is important, given that West Java comprises 27 regencies and cities, which necessitates an approach similar to that adopted by KPI West Java.

Based on these findings, issues related to strategic gender needs – such as sexual violence, gender equality, intolerance, anti-corruption, and anti-radicalism – need to target rural or suburban women, who are often the most vulnerable to becoming victims.

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Footnotes

- 1 <https://antronesia.com/event-one-billion-rising-bandung-menari-untuk-melawan-kekerasan-pada-perempuan-bersama-komunitas-samahita/>, accessed on 27 December 2019.
- 2 Further details can be found in the article titled "Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia Jawa Barat Ajak Orang Muda dan Perempuan Bangun Pemberdayaan dan Pelindungan" at

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- 3 See more at www.instagram.com/sekoper_cinta.
- 4 Interest groups championed by KPI at the national level: (1) Indigenous women; (2) Elderly and disabled women; (3) Professional women; (4) Women in the informal sector; (5) Poor women in urban areas; (6) Poor women in rural areas; (7) Youth, Schoolchildren, and Students; (8) Women forced into prostitution; (9) Women workers; (10) Widows, women heads of households, and single women; (11) Marginalised girls; Women farmers; (13) Coastal and fishing women; (14) Housewives; (15) Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women; (16) Women with disabilities; (17) Women migrant workers; (18) Domestic workers. See <https://www.koalisiperempuan.or.id/tentang/kelompok-kepentingan/>.

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 (Buranajoenkij 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.

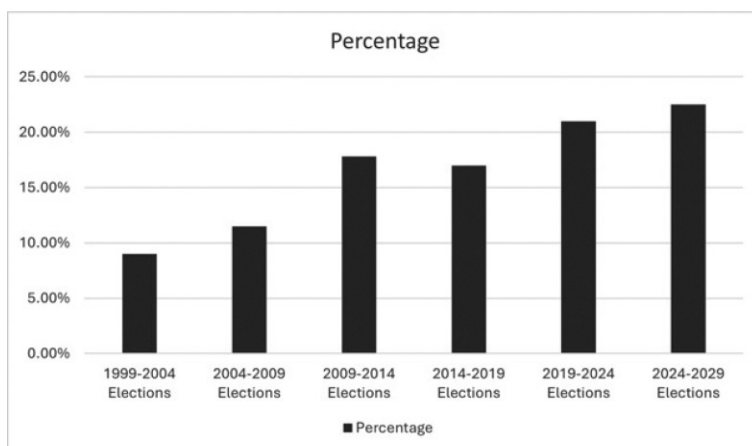


Figure 1: Percentage of Seats Held by Women in the House of Representatives, 2004-2019

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 (Nurchahyo 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 (koalisperempuan.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 *ibuisim*, 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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Advocacy for Gender-Just Lawmaking by the Women's Movements in Post-Transition Indonesia

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Abstract

The women's advocacy movement within the legal reform efforts of the post-Reform era is dynamic. Legislative advocacy aims to promote the enactment of gender-just legislation, but the process is complex, particularly due to the internal dynamics of the women's movement. The diversity of women's organisations influences the issues raised in advocacy. This study examines how the dynamics of the women's movement in Indonesia influence the agenda-setting and promotion or rejection of legislation on women's issues. Drawing on secondary data and the author's reflections as an advocate, the study demonstrates that the diversity of ideologies and visions among women's organisations influences the causes they support. This study examines three legislative advocacy processes — the Law on Sexual Violence Crimes, the Amendment to the Marriage Law, and the Maternal and Child Welfare During the First 1,000 Days of a Child's Life (KIA) Bill — and finds that these processes reinforce the organisations' ideologies and visions. However, not all issues affecting women that are advocated for through legislation aim to transform patriarchal structures and systems. This depends on the organisations championing the issues.

Keywords: legislative advocacy, women's movement, legal reform, gender justice policy.

Introduction

This paper specifically examines the women's movement in legislative advocacy at the national level, focusing on the struggle for gender-just state policies across a range of issues. Studies of the women's movement in Indonesia have demonstrated its dynamism and diversity in terms of ideology and organisational form (Susan Blackburn 2004; Eddyono et al. 2016), as well as the issues raised and the strategies employed (Aripurnami et al. 2013). This diversity can be a source of strength (Eddyono et al. 2016) and has made a significant contribution to democratic life in the post-reform era (Porter 2003; Rinaldo 2013).

The diversity of women's organisations does not hinder the formation of coalitions when all groups perceive a shared issue, such as the advocacy of anti-violence policies against women (Eddyono et al. 2016). Blackburn (2004) agrees with Wieringa (1992) that it is difficult to categorise Indonesian women's organisations by issue because various groups prioritise the same issue from different perspectives and with different objectives.

Aripurnami (2013) explains that, despite working on different issues, women's organisations complement

one another. These organisations operate across various distinct spheres, ranging from economic empowerment for rural women to public education, outreach, and raising public awareness. This paper focuses specifically on women's movements that advocate for gender-just policies. This focus was chosen based on the author's experience of being involved in various policy advocacy efforts related to gender justice. However, the paper does not disregard other forms of women's movements in different fields with different agendas. Previously, the author examined legislative advocacy movements on various themes, including the state's response to women's movements advocating for gender justice in Indonesia (Eddyono et al. 2016), as well as legislative advocacy movements for the protection of migrant workers (Eddyono 2021). This paper builds on that analysis in the context of ongoing developments.

Studies of the women's movement in the context of legislative advocacy are limited, particularly in examining the movement's internal dynamics. A key manifestation of the women's movement's strength lies in its achievements in national policy advocacy. Notable examples include the enactment of Law No. 23 of 2024 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence

(UU PKDRT) (Munti 2008; Eddyono 2019), and Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (UU TPKS). Munti (2008) examines the complex legislative dynamics of UU PKDRT and highlights the success of the women's movement. Meanwhile, Siregar and Prihatini (2024) analyse the legislative advocacy process for UU TPKS from the perspective of the dynamics within the House of Representatives (DPR).

In contrast, Nalle and Arianto (2023) focus on deliberations regarding digital movements' support for UU TPKS. Kurniyasih (2024), on the other hand, examines advocacy for UU TPKS through a coalition-based approach involving various actors. Eddyono et al. (2016) discuss in more detail the dynamics of the legislative advocacy movement regarding the Domestic Violence Law, the Pornography Law, and the Domestic Workers Bill. Eddyono et al. (2016) demonstrate that the women's movement was successful in its advocacy for the enactment of UU PKDRT. However, they also experienced failures in advocacy, particularly with regard to monitoring the Pornography Law and the Domestic Workers Bill. Eddyono et al. (2016) emphasise that differing perspectives amongst various women's organisations resulted in strong pro- and anti-dynamics. This study focuses on advocacy and legislation within the women's movement itself, examining these dynamics from a feminist perspective. Eddyono (2020) built upon the research of Eddyono et al. (2016), but that study did not capture the latest five years of advocacy developments. Furthermore, the context may have changed considerably over the past five years compared to the early years of the reform era.

Drawing on her experience of interacting with various social movements, the author argues that the women's movement is frequently criticised for its perceived lack of cohesion, limited contribution to democracy, and focus on women's issues alone. The women's movement tends to advocate for issues of gender-based violence. This paper argues that the women's movement is integral to social and democratic movements that invigorate democracy through legislative advocacy. Htun and Weldon (2014) state that gender-based violence, including sexual violence, is a gender-specific issue that feminist groups will always address. In many countries, other social movements do not necessarily support the feminist movement in addressing sexual violence, including domestic rape and sexual harassment in the workplace (Htun & Weldon 2014). For Indonesian feminists, this issue is of paramount importance as it relates directly to women's

bodies and their sense of safety. Sexual violence affects how women interact and carry out their daily activities.

This study analyses the extent to which women's movements in Indonesia are sustainable in their efforts to confront patriarchal structures that permeate all areas of women's lives. It explores the question: to what extent do diverse women's movements engage in setting the agenda and championing or rejecting legislation on women's issues? The author argues that various legal reform agendas are being championed in the name of women's interests. However, not all issues advocated through legal reform aim to dismantle patriarchal ideology. Success in challenging one aspect of patriarchy does not automatically eliminate it in other areas. Understanding the circumstances and strategies through which diverse women's movements can collaborate and consolidate is crucial for the success of policy advocacy. While acknowledging the challenges of policy implementation, the paper focuses specifically on the process of advocating for gender-just policies.

Research Methodology

The author adopts a feminist approach to researching policymaking processes and legislative advocacy. Munro (2017) explains that this approach helps researchers analyse women's positions within decision-making processes and determine the extent to which their diverse voices are heard. In a context of unequal power relations in society, women's voices are often dismissed as unimportant. This research emphasises the perspectives of the women's movement and its efforts to advocate for gender-just policies. Bartlett (1990) asserts that adopting a feminist perspective when researching the law-making process encourages researchers to pay closer attention to how laws are drafted and debated, and to consider women's interests.

The researcher analysed secondary data by conducting a literature review of news items published by organisations on their official websites, as well as media reports and advocacy organisation reports available online. In constructing the analysis, the author also consulted international journals and existing research findings available online. Data from discussions and seminars at feminist conferences, including those organised by the Kartini Annual Conferences (2025), were also used.

The author acknowledges the subjectivity involved in interpreting data and considers their experiences and perceptions of events worthy of sharing with

various parties. Within academic feminism, there is a strong view that the academic role is one of 'knowing' rather than 'changing' (Wasserfall 1993). Academic feminists tend to separate their academic work from their activism. In contrast, the author is both an academic and an active advocate for the legislation in question. Nencel (2014) emphasises the importance of researchers contextualising their position in relation to research data. Reflexivity, or awareness of this position, encourages the author to understand better the context of the data's availability within the existing knowledge structure. The primary source of data in the law-making process tends to be policy-making bodies. However, the author sought out and collected primary data from members of the women's movement involved in advocacy. The author triangulated the data by gathering further information to supplement and complete it. The author endeavoured to remain open to scientific findings that differed from her own views. She attempted to process the information obtained and structure it for this presentation. Data triangulation was conducted by confirming existing data through informal discussions with several advocacy stakeholders.

The Women's Movement in Indonesia

There are various perspectives on how the women's movement in Indonesia is conceptualised. Blackburn (2004) describes it as a collective will of women, which is realised to a certain extent through women's organisations (Blackburn 2004; Qibtiyah 2009). Blackburn categorises Indonesian women's movement organisations into three groups: religious and non-religious organisations; membership-based and non-membership-based (foundations); and class-based and non-class-based. This categorisation cannot be separated from the state's political and ideological context, including how the state views and positions women within statehood and its policies.

Qibtiyah (2009) categorises women's organisations into two types: religious and secular. Each type is then divided into three subtypes: women's organisations that are subsidiary or dependent on a main organisation; semi-autonomous organisations; and autonomous/independent organisations. Eddyono et al. (2016) utilise Blackburn's framework, modifying it to categorise women's organisations into three groups based on their objectives: organisations that challenge and seek to transform the patriarchal system; organisations that affirm the patriarchal system; and organisations situated in between. Religious/non-religious, membership-

based/non-membership-based, and class-based/non-class-based organisations can be categorised according to their objectives. Some secular, membership-based, and class-based women's organisations aim to challenge patriarchal structures. Furthermore, some organisations do not challenge patriarchal structures, instead focusing on discussing women's issues within the status quo. There are also more pragmatic organisations that occasionally contribute to efforts to promote change in patriarchal culture, albeit in a more issue-based way (Eddyono et al. 2016). Rinaldo (2019) distinguishes between two simpler categories of women's movement: women's rights activists and conservative women's activists. Rinaldo links this categorisation to faith-based women's organisations. Qibtiyah (2009), Eddyono et al. (2016), and Rinaldo (2019) all argue that the Indonesian women's movement is connected to the global feminist movement.

This paper argues that each category has its own distinct role in explaining the various directions of women's movements. The author does not perceive any significant differences in perspective between the various views, but rather a complementarity between the different categories. For this paper, the author adopts the women's movement framework developed by Eddyono et al. (2016). This framework categorises women's organisations based on their ideological or movement-specific vision as either opposing, reinforcing, or pragmatically situated between the two.

This framework is used because, in the context of legislative advocacy, there are groups of women who support women's issues and groups who oppose them. Between these two extremes, there is a third group that neither supports nor opposes. Blackburn (2008) refers to this group as 'government-aligned organisations'. Whether they support one side or the other depends heavily on the issue at hand and the direction of the state's gender ideology. This neutral stance can have a positive or negative impact on legislation that promotes gender justice.

The dynamics of this third group are evident in their advocacy of UU PKDRT and the Pornography Law (Eddyono et al. 2016). Third-category women's groups, including Kowani, supported and participated in the legislative advocacy for UU PKDRT, which was championed by the feminist movement. However, regarding the Pornography Law, this group opposed the feminist movement, instead forming a coalition with conservative women's groups and supporters of patriarchy.

Recent literature on the women's movement in Indonesia suggests that religious-based feminist movements are becoming increasingly prominent and cannot be ignored. In the early years of the reform era, women's movements opposing the New Order were predominantly initiated by non-religious feminist groups and class-based organisations, such as women's worker groups and organisations representing the urban poor (Eddyono et al. 2016). However, religious-based women's movements have gradually become more organised. Blackburn (2008) specifically examines the uniqueness of the women's movement in Indonesia, which is characterised by religious-based movements. The existence of women's organisations affiliated with religious organisations lends these groups a distinct character, as they tend to be masculine in nature (Blackburn 2008; Qibtiyah 2009).

Rinaldo (2013) found that religious-based women's organisations such as Rahima play a crucial role in advocating for women's rights within an Islamic framework and have sparked a discourse on Islam and gender. Furthermore, Rinaldo (2019) emphasises that women's movements in Indonesia tend to exhibit a stronger connection between secular feminist movements and religious-based women's movements. This aligns with the findings of Eddyono et al. (2016), who discovered that religious and non-religious women's groups collaborate on various advocacy efforts for gender-just policies.

Kusmana (2019) identifies the emergence of the women ulama movement, known as the Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI), as a moral movement grounded in gender equality and justice. Qibtiyah (2020) confirms the existence of a Muslim feminist movement in Indonesia. This movement, including KUPI, contributes to the strengthening of discourse on democracy and women's rights within a framework of just Islam. Issues raised by KUPI include the protection of victims of sexual violence and the abolition of both female genital mutilation and child marriage. Qibtiyah (2020) states that Muslim feminists oppose conservative interpretations of Islam that weaken women's position by reinterpreting religious teachings to promote women's empowerment and equal rights, as well as building cross-organisational networks within religious groups.

The distinction between class-based and non-class-based women's movements is not always clear. The differences between the two and the discourse

surrounding them have not become particularly pronounced, particularly as issues of sexual violence in both the public and domestic spheres have received more attention. Sexual violence is considered an issue that transcends class, category, and group (Eddyono et al. 2016). Nevertheless, class-based women's movements have played a more prominent role in legislative advocacy for the protection of migrant and domestic workers (Eddyono et al. 2021). Meanwhile, membership-based movements have emerged alongside the growth of membership-based women's organisations, such as the Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy (1998) and the Empowerment of Female-Headed Households (PEKKA) (2002).

The above studies show that women's movements are more closely linked to women's organisations, particularly non-governmental organisations (NGOs). When it comes to addressing issues of sexual violence, these organisations have expanded their advocacy efforts to include academics from higher education institutions (Eddyono 2024). Following the Agni case in 2018 and several other cases of sexual violence within higher education institutions, academics at various universities—including both faculty members and students—are advocating within their institutions (Fitri et al. 2021) for a national anti-violence policy at both religious and non-religious universities, as well as a specific law addressing sexual violence.

Advocacy for Pro-Gender Justice Legislation

At the global level, Engeli and Mazur (2018) found that gender issues have begun to be raised through policy advocacy, reflecting the view that state laws and policies can reduce unequal power relations. Htun and Weldon (2013) argue that policy interventions to reduce gender injustice, gender-based discrimination, and violence are crucial for three main reasons.

Firstly, discriminatory laws and policies violate women's rights by being discriminatory, failing to provide benefits, and disregarding women. Secondly, policies cannot be implemented if they are not adopted or if the state does not issue written policies. Thirdly, in order to understand the policies adopted by the state, it is necessary to understand the legislative process.

In a study conducted across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and East Asia, Htun and Weldon (2013) discovered a correlation between the existence of women's movements and pro-gender state policies. They found that countries with strong women's

movements tend to have more gender-responsive policies.

Contestation of Issues and Advocacy Agendas in the Women's Movement during the Reform Era

The issues raised by women's movements in Indonesia are highly diverse. Various organisations may advocate for a single issue from different perspectives, while different organisations may prioritise different issues. Shared issues can serve as a bridge between organisations, but conflicting priorities can also create tension.

At the start of the Reform Era, *Suara Ibu Peduli* (SIP) disguised its agenda by drawing attention to the limited availability and high cost of milk for children from lower-income families, a situation exacerbated by the economic crisis (Pohlman 2011; Arivia & Subono 2017). The demand to lower the price of milk was not merely a matter of children's consumption. In this context, 'milk' functioned as a political symbol or semiotic. It provided an opportunity to challenge the state's failure to meet the basic needs of its citizens and, implicitly, to criticise the Suharto regime. Ideologically, the SIP movement mobilised various groups of women to challenge the authoritarian regime that had failed to prevent the economic crisis (Arivia & Subono 2017). The SIP movement ideologically worked to mobilise various groups of women to challenge the authoritarian regime that had failed to prevent the economic crisis (Arivia & Subono 2017).

The concept of 'motherhood' was once powerful and used to champion women's issues. However, in the 2020s, it has instead become a contested and problematic term in discussions of women's rights, particularly during the debate on the Maternal and Child Welfare During the First 1,000 Days of a Child's Life (KIA) Bill in the House of Representatives. The Bill tends to reinforce the idea that women's primary role is to provide unpaid care for their children (Eddyono 2024).

The issue of sexual violence emerged at the beginning of the reform era, driven by the experiences

of ethnic Chinese women. The state's failure to prevent sexual violence and protect women from it led to the establishment of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), an independent state institution (Pohlman 2011). Arivia and Subono (2017) characterise Komnas Perempuan as 'state feminism' (feminism that is rooted in or operating within the state sphere). Following its establishment, Komnas Perempuan's position as a state institution has been instrumental in advocating for policies on sexual violence in Indonesia (Eddyono et al. 2016; Alifah et al. 2021; Triguswinri 2023).

The issue of sexual violence remains contentious, particularly in relation to past gross human rights violations that remain difficult to resolve to this day (Eddyono, forthcoming paper). Sexual violence is an ongoing issue, whether within marriage, in efforts to advocate for the protection of women within the household, in efforts to provide legal protection for children against sexual violence, on university campuses, in the workplace, or in national policy advocacy in the form of Law No. 12 of 2023 on Sexual Violence Crimes. Although the Law has been passed, there are ongoing calls for effective advocacy to ensure its implementation for the protection of victims (LBH APIK 2024).

Rinaldo (2019) emphasises that women's rights activists emerged following the New Order era, campaigning and mobilising for legislative advocacy. This mobilisation has yielded various gender-just policies, including Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence (UU PKDRT) (Eddyono 2016; Poerwandari et al. 2018). Building on the momentum of democracy (Poerwandari et al. 2018; Rinaldo 2019) and the more fluid relationship between the state and civil society (Eddyono 2021), the women's movement prioritised legislative advocacy as a key focus at the start of the reform era.

Eddyono et al. (2016) identified six major policy agendas championed by various women's organisations during this period, which are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1.
The Indonesian Women’s Movement’s Agenda for Legal and Policy Reform

No.	Agenda	Issue
1.	Protection of women’s rights in marriage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ensuring equal rights for women in marriage. b. Amending Articles 31 and 34 of the Marriage Law to remove the codification of gender roles. c. Ensuring that women in cross-border marriages receive equal protection.
2.	Protection against violence against women and girls within the framework of the right to bodily autonomy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establishment of an independent institution for the protection of women from violence – the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan). b. Promoting the enactment of Domestic Violence Law. c. Promoting the enactment of legislation on sexual violence. d. Amending the Criminal Code. e. Enacting legislation regarding human trafficking. f. Ensuring that women are not criminalised for exercising their sexual rights and bodily autonomy. g. Ensuring women’s right to justice. h. Advocating for the establishment of women’s service units by the police and local governments across cities and regions. i. Advocating for the establishment of witness and victim protection. j. Advocating for legal aid for victims. k. Advocating for the resolution of sexual violence cases as part of past human rights violations.
3.	Women’s economic rights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Protection of migrant workers. b. Protection of domestic workers. c. Protection of migrant workers’ reproductive rights.
4.	Reproductive health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Abolition of female genital mutilation. b. Safe and woman-friendly abortion that does not criminalise women.
5.	Women and politics.	Ensuring political participation through the implementation of a quota policy for women’s representation.
6.	Gender Mainstreaming Policy.	The existence of a gender mainstreaming policy that is applied and binding at every level of government.

Source: Adapted from Eddyono et al. 2016

This policy agenda constitutes a joint advocacy framework that will remain in effect until 2025. As Table 2 shows, the majority of the agenda has been successful in formulating and enacting existing policies.

Table 2.
Agendas and Laws Successfully Advocated

No.	Agenda	Laws with a gender justice dimension	Substance
1.	Protection of Women's Rights in Marriage.	Law No. 16 of 2019 on the Amendment to Law No. 1 of 1974.	Raising the minimum age of marriage for women from 16 to 19 years.
		Law No. 12 of 2006 on Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia.	Ensuring equal rights for married couples of different nationalities, including mothers with children from cross-border marriages.
2.	Protection for victims of violence against women and girls.	Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence (UU PKDRT).	Defining domestic violence and protecting victims of domestic violence through specific provisions in criminal law.
		Law No. 13 of 2006 on the Protection of Witnesses and Victims, as amended by Law No. 31 of 2014.	Establishing the foundation for the protection of witnesses and victims, including victims of human trafficking, human rights violations, and sexual violence.
		Law No. 21 of 2007 on the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Trafficking in Persons (UU PTPPO).	Protecting victims, particularly women and children, from human trafficking through prevention, punishment of perpetrators, and victim protection.
		Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, as amended by Law No. 35 of 2014 in conjunction with Law No. 17 of 2016.	The revised law provides for the protection of children in special circumstances, including child victims of sexual violence.
		Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes.	This is a special criminal law that regulates the types of violence categorised as criminal acts and the sanctions and procedural laws for processing criminal cases. It also covers the rights and protection of victims of sexual violence.
3.	Women's economic rights.	Law No. 18 of 2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers.	Protection of migrant workers, from recruitment, training, and placement to repatriation.
		Law No. 13 of 2003 on Labour.	Protection of women workers' reproductive rights.
4.	Reproductive health.	Law No. 36 of 2009, which was replaced by Law No. 17 of 2023 on Health.	Regulations on abortion for women who have been raped.
		Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code.	Prohibition of forced abortion; abortion is not criminalised if performed on a rape victim with a pregnancy of less than 14 weeks.
5.	Political rights.	Law No. 12 of 2003 on General Elections, in conjunction with Law No. 10 of 2008 on the Election of Members of the DPR, DPD and DPRD.	A 30 percent quota for candidates for the House of Representatives (DPR), Regional Representatives Council (DPD), and Regional People's Representative Councils (DPRD) nominated by political parties.
6.	Gender mainstreaming.	Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 on Gender Mainstreaming in National Development.	This policy is still an executive policy and has not yet been enacted into law.

Source: Compiled by the author from policy review findings

Of the six priority issues of the women's movement at the start of the reform era, gender-based violence against women and children has been the subject of the most vigorous advocacy. Significant attention has been given to this issue by women's organisations, which has become a unifying factor transcending ideological divides. This is due to the alarming reality of sexual violence that persists to this day. According to 2024 data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the prevalence of gender-based violence experienced by women aged 15-64 has decreased, with a 17 per cent decrease in sexual violence and a 12.9 per cent decrease in physical violence compared to 2021, when the figures were 18.7 per cent and 13.8 per cent, respectively. While these figures have decreased, they remain relatively high, indicating that gender-based violence is still a serious issue (BPS 2024).

Referring to research findings on advocacy for gender-just policies in 70 countries, Htun and Weldon (2014) state that advocating for legal changes to criminalise perpetrators of violence is only one key strategy. However, this must be accompanied by changes in legal administration and law enforcement, as well as a shift in societal attitudes. Sustained public awareness of gender justice is essential to the process of advocacy for gender-just policies. Ongoing studies by Komnas Perempuan indicate that protecting women victims remains highly problematic, particularly within existing legal practices (Komnas Perempuan 2025). Consequently, gender-just policy advocacy requires sustained effort, particularly to raise critical public awareness of gender justice.

Policies successfully advocated for by women's organisations at an institutional level have brought about changes to institutional policies regarding gender-based violence. These include Supreme Court Regulation No. 3 of 2017, which sets out guidelines for adjudicating cases involving women in conflict with the law, and Attorney General's Office Regulation No. 1 of 2021, which ensures access to justice for women and children in criminal cases. These regulations represent a step towards a fairer approach to handling cases, pending the establishment of clearer rules for enforcing laws on sexual violence.

Following the enactment of UU TPKS, several ministries have formulated policies to combat sexual violence and other forms of intersectional violence:

- 1) Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Regulation No. 30/2021 on the

Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence in Higher Education Institutions;

- 2) Regulation of the Minister of Religion No. 73/2022 on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence in Educational Institutions under the Ministry of Religion;
- 3) Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology No. 46 of 2023 on the Prevention and Handling of Violence within Educational Institutions;
- 4) Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology No. 55 of 2024 on the Prevention and Handling of Violence in Higher Education Institutions;
- 5) Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises Circular Letter SE-3/MBU/04/2022 on the Respectful Workplace Policy (RWP);
- 6) Ministry of Health Instruction HK.02.01/1512/Kemenkes/2023 on the Prevention and Handling of Bullying, including Sexual Bullying, against Students at Teaching Hospitals under the Ministry of Health.

The existence of these subsidiary policies suggests that the state is becoming more responsive to violence against women. Education, religious education, and higher education are considered critical areas requiring intervention to prevent and handle sexual violence, alongside the labour and health sectors.

However, advocacy issues and agendas continue to evolve. For example, the digital era and the post-COVID-19 period have brought significant changes to social interactions in the context of sexual violence, including the emergence of social media. Women's organisations such as the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan 2022) and LBH APIK Jakarta have begun raising the issue of legal protection for women against sexual violence in the digital context (Eddyono & Fathurozi 2022), including digital scams targeting women.

The women's movement extends beyond the national level. Eddyono (2016) analysed advocacy movements aimed at eliminating violence against women in West Lombok, Jember, and West Pasaman. She found that the constellation of state power is becoming increasingly complex at the regional level. Despite decentralisation, the national government still plays a significant role. Women's movements, therefore, face a multi-layered

power structure comprising the national government, local governments, and local cultures or customary laws. Kabeer argues that patriarchal structures operate in a highly contextual manner. While Blackburn observes the interconnection between women's movements and the state, Kabeer (2011) analyses women's agency and collective action against patriarchal culture, which is manifested through culture and non-state actors, such as traditional leaders and community figures.

During the reform era, women's movements have increasingly interacted with other movements, such as those advocating for people with disabilities, environmental protection, Indigenous communities, religious freedom, pluralism, labour rights, and other democratisation movements. This diverse interaction has led to the evolution of advocacy issues and agendas that increasingly highlight the intersectionality of women across dynamic contexts and spheres. For instance, the disability rights movement's advocacy for the protection of persons with disabilities, which resulted in Law No. 8 of 2016, incorporated gender intersectionality by affirming multi-layered non-discrimination and including specific provisions regarding the rights of women with disabilities. Furthermore, advocacy for the protection of migrant workers through Law No. 18 of 2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers is expected to affect the protection of female migrant workers positively (Eddyono et al. 2021).

Furthermore, the face of the feminist movement is increasingly being shaped by young feminists. Although they did not experience the New Order era or the early Reformasi movement first-hand, they are becoming increasingly visible within women's organisations. This also indicates the continuity of the movement. Young feminists have played a key role in raising awareness of important issues in the public sphere through digital platforms, particularly in advocating for policies against sexual violence and issues concerning women's bodies (Maryani et al. 2021). Rather than operating within the framework of a single women's organisation, these young feminists act collectively as individuals, utilising more flexible platforms and spaces, including the virtual realm. Based on the author's experience of advocating for the enactment of UU TPKS, digital platforms and young influencers such as Khalis Mardiasih played an active role in raising awareness of the importance of enacting the UU TPKS in public forums.

Challenges Facing the Women's Movement in Legislative Advocacy

Advocacy is a continuous and dynamic activity. Following the New Order era, the state has not always accepted the women's agenda for policy reform. Blackburn (2004) notes that the state is not monolithic. In the Indonesian context, state institutions hold the legislative, executive, and judicial powers. These three branches interact with one another and possess the authority to shape legal norms and legislation. Previous work by Eddyono et al. (2016; 2020) shows that political dynamics play a particularly strong role in advocating gender-just policies. At least four factors influence the state's response to the demands of the women's movement: i) the processes of democratisation and decentralisation in Indonesia following the New Order era; ii) the presence and strength of the women's movement in initiating and/or acting as agents of mobilisation and cohesion within the movement itself; iii) gender ideologies within cultural and religious frameworks; and iv) the influence and presence of international organisations providing support to the women's movement (Eddyono et al. 2016; 2020).

The outcomes of women's advocacy do not always align with the initial demands voiced. Political negotiations occur at almost every stage of the process, including when the issues are determined. Furthermore, negotiations take place not only between the state and women's movements, but also amongst, and even within, the women's movements themselves.

Building on the work of Eddyono et al. (2016; 2020), this paper focuses on the diversity of women's movements, their ideologies and visions, the policy issues they champion and the strategies they employ. Within a legal reform agenda concerning women, collaboration can be observed between women's movement organisations with different ideologies. However, divided perspectives may also arise, complicating the advocacy process itself. Secondly, this paper presents an argument based on the state's gender ideology. The author argues that the state's response to the demands of the women's movement is influenced by its own gender ideology, which remains fluid (Eddyono 2025). This dynamic ideology is influenced by the leadership of the president and the ruling party. The fluid nature of gender ideology influences how issues raised through the women's movement's policy advocacy are perceived.

This paper examines the dynamics of women’s movement advocacy using case studies of several advocacy initiatives, including Law No. 12 of 2022 on Criminal Acts of Sexual Violence (the TPKS Law), Law No. 16 of 2010 amending Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage (the Marriage Law Amendment), and Law No. 4 of 2024 on Maternal and Child Welfare During the First 1,000 Days of a Child’s Life (UU KIA). These three laws were

championed by women’s movements with different ideological perspectives and demonstrate distinct advocacy dynamics.

Meanwhile, UU TPKS and the Marriage Law Amendment were strongly supported by the feminist movement in Indonesia. UU KIA is also said to be an attempt to protect women and was supported by a non-feminist women’s movement.

Table 3.
Three National Policies

Law	Issues raised	Initiating actors and support	State response
UU TPKS	Protection for victims of sexual violence includes: types of sexual violence constituting criminal offences, criminal procedure law, and victims’ rights to handling, protection, and recovery.	The National Commission on Violence Against Women and the Service Providers’ Forum. Support from religious-based women’s movements, feminist women’s organisations, academics, young feminists, and Gen Z youth.	The draft Bill and academic papers were facilitated by the DPD (2016). The Bill became a DPR-initiated Bill in 2017 and was passed in 2022.
Amendment to the Marriage Law	Raising the minimum age for marriage for girls; from 16 to 19 years of age.	The 18+ Coalition of Civil Society Organisations and Individuals concerned with ending child marriage, led by the Indonesian Women’s Coalition for Justice and Democracy (KPI 2025). The 18+ Coalition has filed a judicial review with the Constitutional Court regarding Article 7 of the Marriage Law as one of the legal strategies to encourage state policies to prevent child marriage. Support from religious organisations (Fatayat NU, Aisyiyah, and the Indonesian Congress of Women Ulama) and academics.	Constitutional Court Decision No. 22/PUU-XV/2017 states that Article 7 of the Marriage Law regarding the minimum marriage age for girls of 16 years is not binding and is of an institutional nature. The decision orders the state to carry out a revision within a maximum of three years. The government proposed the Bill to Amend the Marriage Law as a government-initiated Bill in June 2019. The House of Representatives passed the Amendment to the Marriage Law on 15 October 2019.
UU KIA	Improving the well-being of mothers and children in the first 1,000 days of life.		Academic Paper 9 June 2022. The Bill was a 2022 House of Representatives initiative Bill, originally titled the Maternal and Child Welfare Bill. The Bill was passed in 2024.

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources

Advocacy for UU TPKS: A Dynamic Women's Movement

Advocacy for UU TPKS marked a significant milestone in the Indonesian women's movement, both in terms of the issues it addressed and in the advocacy process itself. Sexual violence has been a key issue for women's rights campaigners since the beginning of the Reform era. The mass rape of ethnic Chinese women in 1998, which was later confirmed by the Joint Fact-Finding Team (Seno 2005), sparked strong demands for the state to take responsibility for victims of sexual violence—one of the measures introduced by President B. J. Habibie, at the time, established an independent state institution: the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan 2025).

Komnas Perempuan is expected to make sustained efforts to eliminate violence against women in Indonesia. One of Komnas Perempuan's key roles is to compile data based on reports of cases of gender-based violence from victims to various service-providing institutions. This data is analysed annually, with trends being identified in the form of an Annual Report. The annual reports have revealed that sexual violence remains a persistent and concerning issue, with cases tending to increase over time. In 2011, Komnas Perempuan initiated a comprehensive study of women's experiences of sexual violence in Indonesia.

The study was conducted in 2012, and its results were published. Komnas Perempuan identified 14 forms of sexual violence experienced by women in Indonesia. These include: i) Rape; ii) Sexual intimidation; iii) Sexual harassment; iv) Sexual exploitation; v) Commercial sex trafficking; vi) Forced prostitution; vii) Sexual slavery; viii) Forced marriage; ix) Forced pregnancy; x) Forced abortion; xi) Forced contraception and sterilisation; xii) Sexual torture; xiii) Inhumane and sexually oriented punishment; xiv) Harmful and discriminatory traditional practices of a sexual nature against women (Legislative Body of the House of Representatives 2021).

Eddyono et al. (2018; 2020) observe that the advocacy for gender-just legislation in Indonesia is both dynamic and non-linear. This is evident throughout the legislative process of UU TPKS, from planning to enactment. The advocacy for the TPKS Bill underwent four phases: a) idea generation (2012-2016); b) tabling in the House of Representatives (2017-2018); c) critical and stagnation (2019-2020); and d) network strengthening and reformulation (2021-2022). Ongoing discussions with various networks of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas

Perempuan), particularly service-providing institutions participating in the Forum of Service Providers for Victims, prompted Komnas Perempuan to develop an advocacy programme in 2012 to draft the Bill on the Elimination of Sexual Violence.

In 2013, Komnas Perempuan's Legal Reform division drafted an initial concept for the Bill and held consultations with networks of service providers for victims and other stakeholders. At least 132 meetings were held to develop the concept, which began to take shape as a draft bill (Siregar and Prihatini 2024). With this draft Bill in hand, Komnas Perempuan continued to lobby members of the House of Representatives (DPR). As a result, several members of the House of Representatives agreed to sponsor the Bill as a DPR-initiated Bill.

In 2016, Komnas Perempuan collaborated with an external drafting team comprising academics and activists, including Sri Wiyanti Eddyono, Estu Fanani, and Fathuroji, to draft the Bill on the Elimination of Sexual Violence. The Bill's content was based on consultations conducted by Komnas Perempuan with women's networks regarding issues to be included, informed by the challenges of addressing sexual violence. Topics discussed included the various forms of sexual violence, the rights of victims, and the mechanisms for handling cases.

In 2017, Komnas Perempuan expanded its collaboration with the Service Providers Forum (FPL), garnering support from stakeholders such as leaders of the Regional Representative Council, academics, legal practitioners, and enforcers. The Regional Representative Council supported Komnas Perempuan and the FPL in conducting further public consultations, drafting an academic paper, and refining the initial draft of the Bill. Legal and social academics contributed to drafting the academic paper, while legal practitioners and law enforcement officials participated in discussions to refine the Bill. The FPL compiled case management experiences relating to sexual violence, including relevant case studies, to serve as references, which were then integrated into the academic paper.

In 2017, an academic paper and a revised TPKS Bill, both facilitated by the Regional Representatives Council (DPD), were submitted to the legislative body. Following discussions between Komnas Perempuan, the Service Providers' Forum, and the legislative body, it was agreed that, to streamline the legislative process, the Bill would be introduced as a DPR-initiated Bill to streamline the

legislative process, despite the academic paper and the draft bill having been facilitated and funded by the DPD. In 2018, the Bill was included in the National Legislation Programme (Prolegnas). However, in 2020, the Bill was removed from the Prolegnas agenda because Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) faction and three other parties — namely PPP, PAN, and the Democratic Party — rejected the discussion of the Bill on the grounds that it contained sensitive provisions. They argued that it would be better for the bill to be passed alongside the Criminal Code (Setyawan 2022). This rejection followed a backlash against the Bill in the form of mass protests and online petitions, such as 'Reject the Pro-Adultery Bill' (Kurniyasih 2025). The TPKS Bill was perceived as being tolerant of the LGBT community and, therefore, deemed to contradict religious norms.

Following the removal of the TPKS Bill from the Prolegnas in 2021, Komnas Perempuan and the FPL intensified their advocacy efforts. Komnas Perempuan held discussions on revising the draft with government teams, academics, and law enforcement officials, while continuously lobbying DPR members, parliamentary factions, and the Legislative Body (Baleg). Meanwhile, the FPL collaborated with academics, including the Association of Gender/Women's Studies Centres and academic alliances, to support the PKS Bill as it was debated in the House of Representatives (Sinombor 2020).

The Academic Alliance, which includes the author, successfully gathered at least 100 endorsements from professors and over 1,000 academics in support of the PKS Bill, which later became the TPKS Bill. The Association of Gender Studies Centres from various universities also stated support for enacting the TPKS Bill into law.

The academic movement reached its peak after the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology issued Regulation No. 30 of 2021 on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence in Higher Education. This regulation itself emerged from advocacy led by Komnas Perempuan and academics. Following the success of this policy, the academic movement has intensified its push to enact the TPKS Bill, as Regulation No. 30 is insufficient without a TPKS Law.

Consequently, advocacy for the TPKS Bill expanded in 2021, growing beyond Komnas Perempuan and FPL. Other civil society movements have joined the call for the TPKS Bill, including the Civil Society Movement (Germas) and the Civil Society Network (JMS). The

Indonesian Network of Female Clerics (Alimat) has also voiced its support for the TPKS Bill. Affiliated with KUPI, the network produced an analysis emphasising the importance of the TPKS Bill from an Islamic perspective that upholds justice (KUPI 2020). The network conveyed its views to the government team and the DPR (Mawangi 2021), and the author of the analysis helped to break the deadlock in the DPR's deliberations. Previously, concerns had been raised that the DPR would not proceed with discussions on the TPKS Bill due to the views of the Islamic religious group within the PKS faction. This group had consistently voiced its opposition, dominating discussions with arguments that the TPKS Bill was contrary to religion. However, with KUPI's support, the DPR and the government were able to gain legitimacy to continue discussions.

Furthermore, this advocacy was complemented by a digital campaign launched by several organisations (Nalle & Arianto 2023). On 3 May 2016, the Lentera Sintas Indonesia network launched a petition on Change.org. By the time UU TPKS was passed, this petition had received 349,525 signatures of support. Additionally, civil society organisations that were not specifically categorised as women's organisations, such as INFID, participated in a campaign on the online platform Change.org, urging the DPR to swiftly discuss and pass the PKS Bill, which subsequently became the TPKS Bill. By December 2021, INFID's petition had received the backing of 35,979 people (Nalle & Arianto 2023).

Both Rinaldo (2019) and Eddyono et al. (2016) emphasise the pluralistic ideologies reflected in the diverse visions within the women's movement itself, which are rooted in both feminist and conservative perspectives. However, Eddyono et al. (2016) add a third category: women's organisations with a more pragmatic vision or ideology that may be less clearly defined and subject to change depending on the advocacy issue at hand.

Despite their ideological diversity, women's movements that advocate for anti-sexual violence policies are aligned with feminist movements and those that challenge patriarchy. However, they conflict with women's movements that hold conservative views. This division within the women's movement mirrors the situation surrounding the Pornography Bill. In this case, however, the proponents of the Bill were conservative women's organisations, while the opponents were feminist women's organisations (Eddyono et al. 2016). Meanwhile, a third group neither vocally opposed the bill nor supported the Sexual Violence Bill.

Table 4.
Diversity of Views on the T(PKS) Bill within Women's Organisations

Women's Organisations		In Favour
Organisations with an ideology opposing patriarchy (Feminist)	Religious	Rahima Alimat Fatayat NU KUPI Srikandi Lintas Iman
	Non-religious	The Service Providers' Network (comprising 126 organisations providing services to victims across Indonesia). LBH APIK Jakarta, the APIK Federation, and regional LBH APIK organisations. The Indonesian Women's Coalition (KPI). Other civil society networks, including Kalyanamitra and the Women's Health Foundation.
	Academics	Academic Alliance for Advocacy on the PKS Bill. Centre for Gender and Society Studies, Faculty of Law, UGM. Centre for Law and Gender Studies, UI. Association of Gender and Child Studies Centres across Indonesia.
Women's Organisations		Opposing
Conservative	Religious	Aceh Muslim Women's Alliance (Umar & Budi 2019). Aliansi Indonesia Cinta Keluarga (Indonesian Alliance for Family Love) (AILA) (Nugraha 2019). Indonesia Tanpa Pacaran (Indonesia Without Dating) (ITP). Aliansi Perempuan Cinta Pertiwi (Alliance of Women Who Love the Country).
	Non-Religious	
Category 3	Religiously-based	Aisyah (Sucahyono 2022)
	Non-religious	KOWANI Women's/Gender Studies Centres at various universities

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources

In addition to women's organisations, other groups support or oppose the TPKS Bill. Several non-governmental organisations that are not women's organisations have also provided support through advocacy, including INFID, ICJR, and the LBH network, across various regions of Indonesia. Student organisations at various universities, such as Undip, UGM, UI, Unpad, Unesa, Udayana University, and the Adisutjipto Institute of Aeronautical Technology, have also provided strategic support. Furthermore, there are

student alliances within UI (Chaterine & Galih 2021), as well as extracurricular student organisations such as GMNI and GMKI.

Meanwhile, those opposing the Bill were largely religious organisations (Mukhtar 2019). These organisations have joined the Council of Islamic Mass Organisations, which has openly declared its opposition (Hidayatullah 2021). Religiously based women's organisations with conservative views have been linked to the religious organisations that opposed

the TPKS Bill. As Blackburn (2008) analysed, religious women’s organisations tend to be subordinate to their parent organisations. Consequently, religious women’s organisations acting as a wing of such organisations typically follow the views of their parent organisation. Similarly, while some individuals within Aisyah expressed support for the TPKS Bill, the organisation remained ambivalent. While it supported efforts to eradicate sexual violence, it also implicitly suggested that other policies were more important. The criticism of the TPKS Bill’s articles was similar to that expressed by other Islamic women’s groups who rejected the Bill. This was also consistent with the stance of the organisation Muhammadiyah, which did not explicitly state its support for the Bill, but would do so if it aligned with religious principles (Suara Muhammadiyah 2019). This ambivalent and unclear position effectively amounted to a lack of support for the TPKS Bill (FAI UAD 2019). In contrast, independent religious organisations such as Rahima and Alimat were able to adopt a more independent stance despite their affiliations with religious mass organisations (Rinaldo 2019).

Advocacy for the Bill Amending the Marriage Law: A Collaborative Civil Society Movement

The advocacy of Law No. 16 of 2019, which amends Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage (the Marriage Law), was intriguing and significant to examine. During the reform era, democratic spaces tended to be more open, including to the women’s movement. The Constitutional Court is one of the key institutions involved in advancing women’s rights. Although the Constitutional Court faces challenges in advocating for raising the minimum marriage age, the Court has become a strategic arena for civil society networks to challenge policies deemed contrary to the Constitution.

Pushing for a revision of Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage was no easy task. Htun and Weldon (2010) state that women’s issues and agendas are neither simple nor singular. They can be doctrinal issues, which clash with long-established cultural norms, or non-

doctrinal issues that conflict with class interests or other political considerations. According to Htun, raising the issue of gender injustice within the family, particularly in the Marriage Law, is a doctrinal issue. Advocating for changes to the Marriage Law was perceived as a challenge to the idealised family structure.

The drafting of the Marriage Law in 1973-1974 was a legislative process fraught with dynamics and tensions that could have destabilised politics and security (LBH APIK 2002). Consequently, despite being part of the legal reform agenda, efforts to push for changes to the Marriage Law have remained virtually stagnant. In every review of the Indonesian government’s report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) has recommended amending the Marriage Law due to its discriminatory provisions against women (CEDAW/C/IDN/CO/8, 2021).

A number of articles in the Marriage Law have been recommended for amendment as they fail to provide justice for women. These include: 1) the conditions for a valid marriage; 2) the minimum marriage age for girls being set at 16; 3) polygamy; 4) the codification of gender roles (whereby the husband is the head of the family and the wife is a housewife); and 5) the status of children born out of wedlock (Hukum Online 2015). In addition to the above, Rio Satria raised the issue of prenuptial agreements (Satria 2019). Some of these issues were included in the planning stage for amending the Law in 2015, following a Constitutional Court mandate that a judicial review of the Marriage Law was required. However, the deliberation process stalled. Various parties attempted to challenge the Marriage Law, whose provisions were deemed no longer relevant, by filing judicial reviews with the Constitutional Court. Some of these submissions were successful, leading to substantive changes to the Marriage Law. One such change concerned the proposal to raise the minimum marriage age for women.

Table 5.
Constitutional Court Ruling Affecting the Agenda for Amending Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage

No.	Ruling	Subject
1.	Constitutional Court Ruling 48/PUU-VIII/2010	Status of children born out of wedlock.
2.	Constitutional Court Decision No. 69/PUU-XII/2015	The status of marriage contracts.
3.	Constitutional Court Decision 22/PUU-XV1/2017	Raising the minimum marriage age for prospective brides.

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources

Efforts to challenge Article 7 of the Marriage Law regarding the minimum age of marriage for children through the Constitutional Court mechanism are an ongoing endeavour. In 2014, representatives of women's organisations filed a petition for a substantive review of Article 7. The first case was Case No. 30/PUU-XII/2014, which involved Zumrotin, the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Women's Health Foundation, as the petitioner (Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia 2014).

Following this case, other women's organisations recognised the need to strengthen the arguments for reviewing Article 7. This led to a second petition being filed: Case No. 74/PUU-XII/2014. The plaintiffs in this case were six women's rights activists from the Semarak Cerlang Nusa (SCN) organisation and the Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy (KPI), as well as a children's rights activist from the Children's Rights Monitoring Foundation (YPHA). The seven plaintiffs authorised lawyers from the Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (ICJR). The proceedings for both cases were consolidated. However, Constitutional Court Decision No. 30-74/PUU-XII/2014 dismissed the petition on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence to declare Article 7 unconstitutional, as the regulation of the minimum age constitutes a legal open policy, which falls under the government's remit (Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia 2014).

In response to this rejection, the women's organisations that had initially brought the case before the Constitutional Court formed a coalition known as the 18+ Coalition, also referred to as the Indonesian Coalition to End Child Marriage. The coalition consolidated its efforts and devised a new strategy: strengthening public discourse through various activities, such as discussions, to highlight the impact of early marriage on girls. These activities would either be carried out jointly or integrated into the programmes of the coalition's member organisations. Securing public support was deemed crucial to ensure government backing for the campaign against child marriage. This strategy was evident in press releases highlighting the issue of child marriage (Indonesian Women's Coalition 2021) and in the use of international forums to encourage state commitment to protecting children (ICJR 2021). One statement of position garnered the support of over 100 NGOs and more than 60 individuals (Indonesian Women's Coalition 2021). Alongside the strategy of strengthening public and government understanding, a renewed challenge was made to the Constitutional Court in the form of a new submission. This time, however, the plaintiffs were women who had experienced being married at a young age, rather than NGO activists.

Table 6.
The 18+ Coalition as a Civil Society Movement Coalition Comprising Various Types of Organisations

No.	Organisation	Type	Focus Issue
1.	Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy (KPI)	Feminist Women's Organisation	Women and politics
2.	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography & Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT)	International organisation	Elimination of prostitution, pornography, and child trafficking
3.	Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (ICJR)	Legal NGO	Criminal justice reform
4.	Semerlak Cerlang Nusantara Organisation (SCN)	Transformative education NGO	Consultancy on NGO capacity building
5.	Society for Gender and Intergenerational Justice (MAGENTA)	Feminist organisation	Protection of children and women from violence
6.	Indonesian Family Planning Association (PKBI)	Civil society organisation under a state institution	Reproductive health and sexual rights
7.	Child Rights Monitoring Foundation	Children's NGO	Monitoring of children's rights

The presence of child marriage victims acting as petitioners and interacting directly with the Constitutional Court created a different atmosphere at the hearing (Indonesian Women's Coalition 2018). In Constitutional Court Decision No. 22/PUU-XVI/2017, the Court granted the petitioners' request and declared that the difference in the minimum marriage age for women and men contravenes the 1945 Constitution. The Court deemed this provision to hinder the fulfilment of girls' constitutional rights, including their right to education as stipulated in Article 28D of the Constitution.

In its reasoning, the Constitutional Court emphasised that the provisions of Article 7 of the Marriage Law are discriminatory and inconsistent with government policy on 12 years of basic education, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). However, the Constitutional Court did not set a minimum age for marriage itself, on the grounds that this is the prerogative of the legislature and must adapt to legal developments. The Constitutional Court stated that, if the government and the DPR do not amend Article 7 within three years, the phrase '16 years' will no longer be legally binding and must be interpreted in line with the Child Protection Act as meaning 18 years.

Htun and Weldon (2014) state that the advocacy for women's rights is an initiative launched by the feminist movement in many countries. However, Htun and Weldon (2010) argue that issues and advocacy regarding women's rights should not be limited to the feminist movement. With regard to the Amendment to the Marriage Law in Indonesia, while the women's movement championed this advocacy, it was also part of a shared agenda among children's organisations, women's organisations (including feminist organisations), and human rights organisations — referred to as the 18+ Coalition or the Indonesian Coalition to End Child Marriage (Indonesian Women's Coalition 2017). This is understandable, as the issue of child marriage encompasses the dimensions of women's rights, children's rights, and human rights, making it intersectional in nature. Consequently, the network of advocates is also cross-issue.

Following the Constitutional Court Decision No. 22/PUU-XV1/2017, plans to amend the Marriage Law continued, albeit with discussions limited to amending Article 7, which concerns the legal marriage age for girls. While the 18+ Coalition welcomed the Constitutional Court's ruling, they criticised the lengthy timeframe

for amending the minimum age provision — three years from the date of the ruling (Indonesian Women's Coalition 2018).

Fadli and Subono (2022) argue that the 18+ Coalition's success in advocating for justice and gender equality, particularly for girls, demonstrates the effectiveness of political movements. From the perspective of the women's movement itself, the conflict over raising the minimum marriage age between feminist and non-feminist groups was not particularly evident. Religiously based non-feminist groups that vehemently opposed UU TPKS in 2018 did not appear to voice their dissent as strongly this time. The organisations that firmly opposed the Bill were Islamic organisations, not women's organisations. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) and the Central Executive Board (PP) of Muhammadiyah all rejected the idea of raising the minimum marriage age for women. They argued that the significant difference between a woman's age of maturity and the legal age at which she can marry could lead to pregnancy outside of marriage (Niam 2014).

Interestingly, Aisyiyah, a women's organisation affiliated with the Islamic organisation Muhammadiyah, has expressed its support for the amendments to the Marriage Bill. Aisyiyah falls into the third category of women's organisations, whose ideology or vision lies somewhere between rejecting and supporting patriarchal culture. Aisyiyah urged the government to amend the marriage regulations to align with Constitutional Court Ruling 22/PUU-XV1/2017 (Pebrianto 2019). Another women's organisation in the third group is Kowani, which supported amending the Child Marriage Law to raise the minimum marriage age for women. However, it has not publicly stated this, only doing so in direct discussions with the Ministry of Women's Empowerment. Kowani first raised the issue of child marriage at its Third Congress in 1939, when it opposed the minimum marriage age of 16 (Ardanareswari 2019).

Another religious women's organisation that supported legislative advocacy for raising the minimum marriage age for girls was Fatayat NU (Indrawan 2017). Fatayat NU's firm stance on child marriage was evident in its public statements. Fatayat NU carried out advocacy efforts both within NU and publicly regarding its opposition to child marriage. Fatayat NU identifies itself as part of the feminist movement.

Support from religious women's organisations for raising the minimum marriage age for girls has

facilitated the legislative advocacy process led by the 18+ Coalition. During this process, religious women’s organisations — ranging from feminist to non-feminist — have expressed their support, while non-feminist religious organisations have remained silent, neither opposing nor endorsing the initiative. This silence proved advantageous in the advocacy process. Eddyono et al. (2016) analysed policymakers’ tendency to accommodate demands backed by stronger voices and support. The absence of counter-actors or dissenting parties influenced policymakers to accommodate the promoted agenda. Within four months of its submission, the Amendment to the Marriage Bill was passed. The existence of the Constitutional Court’s ruling and Article 7 certainly facilitated the deliberation process.

UU KIA: Legislative Advocacy Reinforcing the Status Quo and Gender Stereotypes

RUU KIA was initiated by the DPR on 30 June 2022 (Azizah 2024). Following meetings between the DPR and the government on 3 April and 14 June 2023, it was agreed that the Bill would focus on ‘Children in the First 1,000 Days of Life’. This refers to a child’s life from conception to age 2. Unlike the advocacy for the TPKS Law and the Amendment to the Marriage Law, the legislative process for this Bill proceeded more swiftly and was passed by the DPR on 4 June 2024 (DPR RI 2024).

Although the Bill aims to improve health standards and protect women and children, particularly during the first 1,000 days (Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection 2024), it faced opposition during the

drafting process. Opinion was divided on the existence of this Bill. The Bill received relatively strong support from the DPR. Furthermore, it was backed by Islamic women’s organisations, namely Aisyiyah and Nasyiatul Aisyah, both of which are affiliated with the Islamic organisation Muhammadiyah (Suara Muhammadiyah 2024). Muslimat NU also supported the KIA Bill, particularly the provision extending maternity leave to six months (Primanda 2022).

Conversely, the Bill was not supported by employers, trade unions or women’s activists from feminist organisations. From an employer’s perspective, the main issue was the length of maternity leave, which was set at up to six months (Paat 2023). Meanwhile, trade unions emphasised that this provision was making the labour market increasingly uncompetitive for women (KSPSI 2024). Feminist women’s organisations opposed the Bill for several reasons. Firstly, the Bill did not introduce any new provisions beyond existing legal norms. For example, provisions relating to maternity leave, including paternity leave for husbands, are already enshrined in Law No. 13 of 2003 on Labour.

Furthermore, maternal health rights and breastfeeding provisions for infants are also regulated under Law No. 17 of 2023 on Health. Additionally, the Bill was perceived as reinforcing the traditional gender norm that women are primarily responsible for a child’s welfare. There is no evidence of initial efforts to strengthen the father’s roles in caring for children under 1,000 days (Nafi 2024). The Bill attempted to re-domesticate women, which, as analysed, could limit their participation in the public sphere.

Table 7.
Women’s Organisations Supporting and Opposing RUU KIA (KIA Bill)

Initiators	Supporters	Opponents
Members of the DPR (PKB: Luluk Nurhamidah) and (PDIP: Dyah Pitaloka)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection Aisyah Nasyiatul Aisyah Muslimat NU 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Save All Women and Girls (SAWG) KOMPAKS Women’s Health Foundation Kalyanamitra Indonesian Women’s Coalition for Justice Alimat Mahardika Women Women’s Solidarity ASPPUK

However, the efforts of the feminist women's movement to oppose the Bill were limited to expressing their views in discussion and consultation forums. Some opinions were also expressed via social media (ASPPUK 2022). This differs from the mobilisation strategy used to oppose the Pornography Bill in 2008. During the deliberations on the Bill, feminist groups opposed it, while conservative women's groups supported and initiated it.

Eddyono (2016) documented the strategies employed by both sides — those for and against the Bill — which involved significant efforts to mobilise the masses to either oppose or support it. In an informal discussion, two NGO activists who opposed the Bill said they were unsure how to respond to the issue. They knew that the Bill reinforced existing regulations and did not introduce any new progressive or regressive norms. They wanted to express their disagreement, but concluded that if the Bill were passed, it would not pose a significant threat to gender justice, as it contains provisions aimed at protecting women and children. Furthermore, women's labour activists who initially opposed the Bill have since come to support it in the hope that it will be implemented more effectively than existing regulations. Previous studies by Eddyono et al. (2016) analysed how the DPR responded to arguments for and against the Bill, noting that the DPR tends to follow whichever side is most successful in mobilising support for the Bill's rejection or passage. As the feminist movement neither voiced strong opposition to the Bill nor fully mobilised, the Bill was passed.

Conclusion

This paper reinforces various analyses of legislative advocacy movements in the fight for gender-just laws. Women's movements, based on women's organisations that shape legislative advocacy, are highly diverse in terms of both ideology and vision, as well as their forms and affiliations. This diversity influences the issues raised and pursued within national legislation.

Drawing on the three legislative advocacy campaigns — UU TPKS, the Amendment to the Marriage Law (regarding the minimum marriage age for prospective brides), and UU KIA — this research shows that each campaign has its own dynamics, particularly regarding the parties that initiated, supported, and opposed them. Despite all claiming to champion women's issues and act in women's best interests, the women's organisations driving these advocacy campaigns exhibit ideological

diversity. Feminist women's organisations initiated UU TPKS, while the Amendment to the Marriage Law was initiated by organisations with a broader focus, such as human rights and children's rights organisations. In contrast, non-feminist women's organisations initiated UU KIA. These three laws also faced opposition from various women's organisations. In advocating for the TPKS Bill, non-feminist, faith-based women's movements tended to oppose it. In advocating for the Amendment to the Marriage Law, however, these movements tended not to voice their opposition. Meanwhile, in advocating for the KIA Bill, feminist groups actually voiced their opposition.

The diversity of views within the women's movement is influenced by the ideologies of the organisations that form part of it. This research reinforces the findings of Eddyono et al. (2016) that the DPR responds to and refers to the views of whichever party has the strongest voice, whether for or against. Thus, legislative advocacy movements that are pro-law and gender-just are also significantly influenced by the interconnected dynamics of the women's movement in Indonesia, which involves a tug-of-war between ideologies and visions.

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Women Human Rights Defenders: From State Absence to Stigmatisation

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Abstract

The dynamics of the women's movement in Indonesia since the Reform era are inextricably linked to the vital role of women human rights defenders (WHRDs), who have driven the advocacy agenda to achieve gender equality and the protection of women in Indonesia. However, WHRDs face various challenges, ranging from state-imposed obstacles, such as gaps in legal protection, to internal challenges within the movement itself. These challenges hinder advocacy efforts and impact the safety and well-being of WHRDs. This study uses qualitative methods and a feminist legal theory approach to analyse data collected through in-depth interviews with six WHRDs from diverse backgrounds. The findings suggest that the primary needs of WHRDs include legal protection, security, and well-being guarantees, as well as the integration of a gender perspective into every decision and legal instrument. The study details the nature and dynamics of the challenges and legal gaps faced by WHRDs in their struggle in Indonesia.

Keywords: women's movement, Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), legal protection

Introduction

The women's movement in Indonesia is evident in the work of women human rights defenders (WHRDs), spanning grassroots activism to government policy advocacy. A WHRD is defined as anyone who fights to uphold and advance human rights, particularly women's rights. This includes supporting women who are victims of violence, discrimination and exploitation (Komnas Perempuan 2022). WHRDs may be women, men, or people of other genders working together. Every individual and organisation working as a WHRD faces certain risk factors in their work supporting victims, ranging from threats and violence to vulnerability. These risks arise because they are human rights defenders, because they are women, and because of their work supporting victims of violence.

Several studies and findings over the past few years have highlighted the urgent need for legal instruments that protect and support WHRDs. For instance, a 2022 survey by the Indonesia Protection for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) Network, which involved 521 respondents from six provinces, revealed that 5 per cent of WHRDs lacked health insurance and that only 25 per cent had BPJS Ketenagakerjaan. This lack of basic protection for WHRDs is in stark contrast to the various cases of violence they have experienced. The National

Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) recorded seven cases of gender-based violence against WHRDs in 2023, rising to nine in 2024 (Komnas Perempuan 2025). However, these figures likely represent only a fraction of the actual number of cases. Conversely, many cases of criminalisation and intimidation have entered the public sphere.

In this post-Reform era, WHRDs from various backgrounds experience different types of violence. One of the most recent cases occurred in a public space during the May Day protests in 2025, when Jorgiana Augustine, then working as a paramedic paralegal, was threatened by state officials. This aligns with Komnas Perempuan's identification of the state as a perpetrator of violence against WHRDs (Komnas Perempuan 2007).

In a separate incident, a female journalist, Francisca Christy Rosana, received a pig's head and a dead rat. Given that both packages were addressed to a female journalist who was actively investigating national cases and had been subjected to digital attacks in the form of doxxing, this case constitutes a serious threat of violence against human rights defenders.

Environmental WHRDs also face criminalisation when presenting their research. For example, Fatia Maulidiyanti was subjected to legal proceedings after presenting the findings of her study on mining

investments in Papua, which were subsequently reported by Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan. In another case relating to environmental issues, Siti Hawa (also known as Nek Awe), an Indigenous woman from Rempang, highlights the vulnerability of WHRDs. She was deprived of her living space and faced attempts at criminalisation and intimidation after being designated a suspect, although the investigation was ultimately halted.

Within Indonesian social movements, women's participation in the movements' agenda remains minimal and tends to be confined to domestic matters. For example, in participation initiatives, women are often only involved in cooking. This may stem from the deeply ingrained perception of women's role as caregivers (Sigiro et al. 2018). This view is consistent with the traditional role of women as caregivers, a role which is still predominantly undertaken by women, including WHRDs, with as many as 35,588 women working as unpaid family carers (Pratiwi et al. 2024).

In fact, women's participation could be extended further, for instance, through active engagement in ensuring women's rights are upheld within local policies. Furthermore, women face challenges within movements that are still viewed as mere symbols of participation (tokenism), failing to accommodate their needs within the movement's dynamics. Due to societal constructs and perceptions that confine women to domestic affairs and limit their involvement in public matters, women are still often considered less capable of leadership.

WHRDs may come from diverse backgrounds, such as civil society representatives, non-governmental organisations, lawyers, journalists, grassroots activists, or service providers working to ensure the fulfilment of women's rights. The risks faced by WHRDs generally include targeted attacks by state and non-state actors, as well as various threats and forms of violence, including gender-based violence such as rape and sexual violence. These contribute to the stigmatisation and discrimination against WHRDs.

The experiences of WHRDs are often directed at aspects of their reputation and sexuality, particularly

when their existence and expression are perceived as inconsistent with dominant gender stereotypes. This can result in their marginalisation within their communities. In a number of study findings, WHRDs are also reported to face specific labelling, such as being perceived as holding values deemed 'foreign' or different from mainstream views, including those relating to religious expression. Furthermore, WHRDs face a double burden of work when carrying out their duties within their respective organisations. For example, they support victims and empower victim communities, while also carrying out administrative tasks within the organisation. This can lead to burnout and frustration, sometimes resulting in their resignation from the organisation (Service Providers Forum 2018 in Indonesia, Protection for WHRD Network 2022).

Another issue that exacerbates the vulnerability of WHRDs is the absence of national-level regulations that specifically recognise their role. To date, Indonesia has no regulations that explicitly recognise the role of WHRDs or provide comprehensive legal protection for physical, psychological, digital, and socio-economic safety and well-being. The available protection is scattered and non-specific. For instance, journalists are protected under Law No. 40 of 1999 on the Press, but this legislation does not address the specific vulnerabilities faced by WHRDs.

Nevertheless, international human rights instruments such as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998), as well as a number of UN Human Rights Council resolutions on the protection of WHRDs, have provided states with normative guidance on respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of human rights defenders, including WHRDs. The absence of national policies and the limited documentation of cases imply a lack of structural recognition of WHRDs' roles and conditions. This leaves WHRDs in a vulnerable position, exposing them to various forms of violence and the potential for stigmatisation, delegitimation, and criminalisation, all of which hinder their advocacy work. Nevertheless, the work of WHRDs is vital for society and the state, particularly in promoting, respecting and protecting human rights.

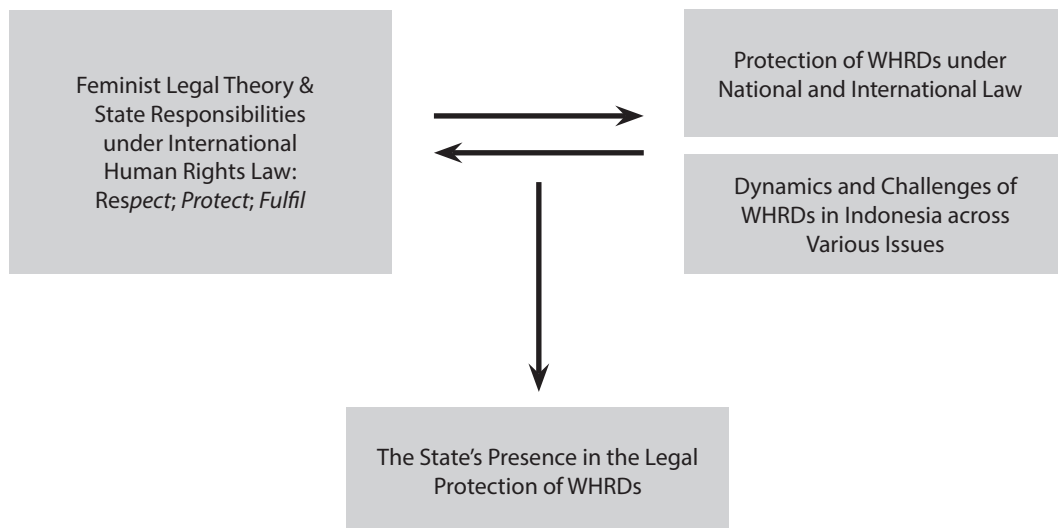


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

This paper examines the challenges faced by WHRDs within organisations and movements, as well as the challenges they face as individuals. Furthermore, the study addresses the state's failure to protect WHRDs, whether due to a lack of legal instruments recognising their work or to actions by state institutions that delegitimise their movements.

As shown in Figure 1 (Conceptual Framework), the study employs a qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews with WHRDs who have long been active in the field of human rights. These interviews aim to provide a clearer picture of the lives and work of WHRDs, as well as the dynamics and challenges they face across various issues. Additionally, the legal instruments and protections already in place for WHRDs under national and international law will be examined in depth. To complement these findings, the study will also compare various countries that have recognised or are set to recognise WHRDs and provide them with protection. Data analysis and conclusion-drawing were carried out using the Feminist Legal Theory (FLT) approach to identify legal innovations in the protection of WHRDs that incorporate a gender perspective and address their needs. This analysis was also combined

with the state's human rights obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights — one manifestation of which is the recognition and provision of legal protection for WHRDs.

Research Methodology

This research takes a qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews with key figures in the women's movement and WHRDs themselves. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with six WHRDs from five different organisations, conducted both in person and online. The WHRDs were selected for their involvement in various areas, including the labour movement, the movement against violence against women, policy advocacy, the rights of Indigenous peoples, gender diversity, and mental health.

In order to identify legal gaps relating to the protection of WHRDs, it is crucial to gain an understanding of the challenges they encounter in their daily lives and humanitarian work. Therefore, in-depth interviews were also conducted with WHRDs figures who have been involved in activism and humanitarian work for a long time.

Table 1.
WHRD Resource People

No	Name	Key Issue/Advocacy Area	Affiliation at the Time of Interview	Year of Activism
1	Isnah Ayunda	Indigenous communities	Women’s AMAN; BRWA	2015
2	Dania Joedo	Gender and sexual diversity	KontraS	2016
3	Uli Pangaribuan	Protection of women and children Legal services	LBH APIK Jakarta	2011
4	Revita Alfi	Women with disabilities	HWDI	2009
5	Jumisih	Labour and domestic workers	FSBPI; JALA PRT	2001
6	Ika Putri Dewi	Psychological support for victims of human rights violations WHRDs	Pulih Foundation	2011

The research aims to understand the experiences, perceptions, and meanings constructed by WHRDs within legal and social contexts. A qualitative approach was chosen as it allows for an in-depth exploration of phenomena through direct interaction with participants (Creswell 2014). The analytical framework employed is Feminist Legal Theory (FLT), which posits that the law is not gender-neutral, but is instead shaped by patriarchal structures that often disadvantage or disregard women (Bartlett & Kennedy 2018).

Although the six WHRDs come from different issue backgrounds, they face similar challenges, particularly with regard to patriarchal dominance in society and gender bias in the legal system. This study uses FLT to focus not only on legal texts, but also on the empirical experiences of WHRDs. This reveals structural practices of discrimination, intimidation, and threats, and shows how such legal biases affect the freedom of movement and safety of WHRDs.

This study uses qualitative methods and the FLT approach to examine the specific experiences of WHRDs as frontline advocates. It does so by investigating their vulnerability to intersecting discrimination, critiquing legal biases and protection policies that lack gender sensitivity, and proposing a more inclusive and just legal perspective for women. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis of the interview results, which were then linked to the FLT framework and triangulated with legal documents and reports from civil society organisations.

Furthermore, the interview results were mapped using indicators that formed the focus of the research: (1) general challenges faced by all WHRDs; (2) specific challenges arising from the background and advocacy context of each WHRD; and (3) challenges relating to the fulfilment of civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, and psychological support. These

indicators were formulated based on the theory of the state’s human rights obligations to assess the extent to which the state respects, protects, and fulfils the rights of WHRDs, and to highlight gaps in legal protection. To provide an overview of the standards for the protection of WHRDs, the study also employed comparative methods, drawing comparisons with the Philippines, Mongolia, and the United States. These comparisons help to identify best practices and legal norms that can inform the development of national regulations.

International and National Legal Protection for Women Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders are individuals or groups who promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, or advocate their protection and enforcement, through peaceful means. Various human rights violations naturally lead to the emergence of activists addressing different issues, each with their own distinct aspirations. Women and female activists face unique vulnerabilities and challenges when carrying out their humanitarian work. In 1999, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/53/144, which set out a declaration on the rights and responsibilities of individuals, groups, and civil society organisations to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Article 1 of this resolution emphasises that everyone has the right to protection when advocating for human rights at national and international levels.

Specifically, UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/181 sets out a declaration outlining the rights and responsibilities of WHRDs when carrying out their humanitarian work. The resolution acknowledges and affirms the importance of protecting the work of WHRDs, while recognising the various challenges and obstacles they face in different countries when trying to advance human rights. Parliamentary Resolution 2554 of the

Council of Europe recommends that its member states implement nineteen measures to ensure the well-being and safety of WHRDs in their respective countries. These measures include training law enforcement officials in gender equality and the work of WHRDs, advocating for the role and work of WHRDs, ensuring WHRDs' mental health, and supporting programmes to ensure their safety. These various international regulations and legal instruments could inform the development of national legislation focused on protecting and supporting the work of WHRDs in Indonesia. The 19 measures demonstrate the Council of Europe's commitment to addressing the needs relating to civil and political rights (CPR), economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR), and the psychological well-being of WHRDs.

Article 28C(2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia guarantees every person the right to advance themselves by collectively striving for rights in order to build society, the nation and the state. This right is further emphasised in Articles 100 to 103 of Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights, which state that individuals, groups, political organisations, community organisations, and non-governmental organisations have the right to participate in, and to submit reports on, human rights violations to protect, uphold, and promote human rights. Human rights defenders, including WHRDs, are entitled to social security, including the right to BPJS, as set out in Law No. 24 of 2011 on the Social Security Administration Agency. This law should form the basis for the fulfilment of the economic, social, and cultural rights of human rights defenders.

If we look more closely, we see that human rights defenders have different professional backgrounds and focus on different issues. For instance, journalists are protected by press freedom under Article 4 of Law No. 40 of 1999 on the Press. Similarly, those from the labour sector who are members of trade unions are protected by Law No. 21 of 2000 on Trade Unions. Those from legal aid institutions are protected by Article 66 of Law No. 18 of 2003 on Advocates. Additionally, Article 11 of Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid states that legal aid providers cannot be prosecuted in civil or criminal proceedings for providing legal aid within their remit, provided it is carried out in good faith. Regarding environmental issues, human rights defenders fighting for a healthy and safe environment cannot be prosecuted or sued in a civil court, as set out in Article 66 of Law No. 32 of 2009 on the Protection and Management of the Environment, as further clarified in Decision No. 36/KMA/SK/II/2013 of the Chief Justice of the Supreme

Court on the Implementation of Guidelines for Handling Environmental Cases. These five legal instruments reinforce the protection of human rights defenders and their civil and political rights.

Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (UU TPKS) does not recognise the term 'women human rights defender'. However, Article 26(2) of the same law states that legal support persons include psychologists, psychiatrists, legal representatives (including lawyers and paralegals), community service provider staff, and other support persons. Regarding persons providing support to victims, Article 29 of UU TPKS explicitly states that they cannot be held legally liable, either criminally or civilly, for providing support or services to victims unless such support or services are provided in bad faith. Article 13 of Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence stipulates that the government shall endeavour to provide protection for support workers.

The National Commission on Human Rights issued Regulation No. 5 of 2015 on Procedures for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, as well as Standard Norms and Regulations (SNP) No. 6 of 2021 on Human Rights Defenders. In October 2022, the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) published the Manual on the Safety and Security of Women Human Rights Defenders in Indonesia. This manual aims to provide WHRDs and women's organisations with the knowledge and tools to enhance their understanding of safety and protection. It also aims to help them develop protection and safety strategies in accordance with the principles of protection and safety (Komnas Perempuan 2022). The manual was published to address the policy gap regarding the protection of WHRDs.

The Dynamics and Challenges Faced by Women Human Rights Defenders in Various Movements in Indonesia

Interviews with six WHRDs revealed the challenges and obstacles they face, despite coming from various backgrounds. An analysis of legal protection at national and international levels shows that legal instruments broadly aim to provide protection for civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, and psychological protection. These were categorised into three groups: "Civil and Political Rights", "Economic, Social and Cultural Rights", and "Psychological Challenges". In-depth interviews with the six WHRDs revealed that they face additional, individual-specific challenges. These will be summarised in a single column labelled "General Challenges" in the table below.

Table 2.
Challenges and Vulnerabilities of WHRDs

	General Challenges	Civil and Political Rights	Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	Psychological Challenges
WHRDs in relation to Indigenous Women	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Structural violence perpetrated by the state exacerbates the challenges faced by WHRDs in carrying out their work. 2. Criminalisation of Indigenous communities by the state and corporations. 3. Stigma against Indigenous women. 4. There is still no recognition of Indigenous Peoples. 5. Law enforcement officials lack a gender and sexuality perspective. 6. Issues raised by queer WHRDs affect not only them, but also other queer communities who are unaware of the problem. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A patriarchal public sphere that leaves no space for WHRDs. 2. Not involved in decision-making. 3. Criminalisation by state authorities and corporations. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A double burden within the household and the movement. 2. Empowered because AMAN Women's Organisation is an empowered organisation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WHRDs experience burnout and depression. 2. WHRDs attempt suicide due to threats and intimidation.
WHRDs on the Issue of Gender Diversity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Symbolic participation (tokenism) for queer individuals and WHRDs. 2. Lack of a gender perspective within internal non-governmental organisations (NGOs). 3. A patriarchal environment. 4. An egalitarian culture. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obstruction of legal aid for victims by law enforcement officials. 2. Unjustified searches by law enforcement agencies. 3. Involvement of thugs by the authorities. 4. Digital attacks against the lives of WHRDs and their queer friends. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Glorification of service and volunteering becoming a culture of heroism within NGOs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Threatening letters in the form of legal notices cause legal advisers to feel frightened and psychologically distressed.
WHRDs on the issue of Legal Aid Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Law enforcement officials lack a gender perspective. 2. The state fails to protect WHRDs when threats, intimidation, and criminalisation occur. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The presence of patriarchy and perpetrators of sexual harassment within the NGO environment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial stability becomes the organisation's strength. 2. WHRDs need support for psychological, physical, reproductive, and sexual health. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is no psychological support available for WHRDs.

	General Challenges	Civil and Political Rights	Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	Psychological Challenges
WHRDs on the Issue of Women with Disabilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Law enforcement officials lack an understanding of the disability community. 2. Limited human and economic resources. 3. Stigma from the community and family regarding the role of women and WHRDs. 4. Communication channels for reporting that do not take into account the needs of people with disabilities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is difficult to recruit WHRD disability cadres. 2. Intimidation by the families of perpetrators of violence. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The double burden of being a caregiver. 2. Limited logistics budget and donor funding. 3. Knowledge gap of movements in rural and urban areas. 4. Lack of funding from donors and the state for case support. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For WHRDs, emotional stress stems from stigma and the double burden, as well as from handling cases of violence and experiencing burnout. There is also a sense of exhaustion resulting from case management due to lengthy procedures and limited human resources.
WHRDs on the Issue of Female Workers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WHRDs lack confidence. 2. Stigma surrounding women being expected to manage the household. 3. Discrimination by law enforcement officials. 4. Verbal abuse from the press. 5. There is currently no recognition or protection for domestic workers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stigma of not being independent (linked to party politics). 2. Erosion of space for expression. 3. Spaces for leadership and discussion are dominated by patriarchal men. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uneven knowledge among women labour defenders. 2. Funding is required to carry out work by WHRDs. 3. Reporting to the police incurs costs, even just for transport. 4. The welfare of women labour defenders varies depending on their affiliation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Verbal abuse that leads to prolonged depression and emotional distress.
WHRDs in relation to Psychological Service	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Insufficient human resources. 2. The state has not yet recognised the presence and importance of WHRDs. 3. The procedures for promoting human rights and the lack of trust in state institutions have an impact on the mental well-being of victims and WHRDs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The state does not recognise WHRD as a profession. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The need to care for caregivers. 2. Economic resilience is sufficient if you are affiliated with an established organisation. 3. The state does not provide WHRDs with funding for mental health services. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WHRDs often adopt a heroic stance, which leads to exhaustion and burnout. 2. WHRDs face internal and external vulnerabilities that affect their well-being.

Source: Compiled by the author from interviews with resource persons (2025)

Several common themes emerge from the various challenges and obstacles faced by WHRDs who served as resource persons for this research. The most prominent challenge is the pervasive nature of patriarchal structures across all human rights issues, including the provision of legal services for cases of violence against women. These structures hinder the work of WHRDs, leading to discrimination within their own organisations and across the broader human rights movement. There are also internal challenges within WHRD-affiliated organisations, such as the stigma surrounding women, which restricts the scope of action and freedom of expression of WHRDs. This stigma also results in many WHRDs lacking the confidence to carry out their humanitarian work.

Additionally, there are challenges closely linked to specific issues. For example, individuals from gender-diverse backgrounds frequently encounter tokenism within Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), which presents its own set of challenges. Strong patriarchal structures and gender biases in societal constructs also influence the internal dynamics of CSOs with regard to WHRDs.

Another significant challenge is the absence of the perspective of law enforcement officials (APHs) on issues related to gender, gender diversity, disability, and Indigenous peoples. As human rights defenders, they interact with numerous law enforcement officials, including lawyers, police officers, prosecutors, and judges. This poses a significant obstacle to their work. For WHRDs with disabilities, the lack of legal accessibility and inclusive perspectives is clear evidence of institutional discrimination within Indonesian law (Wulandari et al. 2024). For those from gender-diverse communities and Indigenous peoples, APHs criminalise and intimidate their work. These examples demonstrate that the patriarchal structure of the legal system constitutes a form of inequality against WHRDs, in terms of its substance, structure, or culture. The law is not neutral; it is shaped by masculine values and patriarchal power structures (Barlett 2018).

Conversely, people with disabilities encounter communication challenges when interacting with law enforcement officials or within the NGO system. In interviews with gender-diverse WHRDs and psychologists, the heroic nature attributed to WHRDs was also highlighted as a double-edged sword, rendering them vulnerable both psychologically and economically. Economic vulnerability arises because

many WHRDs do not have their economic rights fulfilled on the grounds that their work is considered “humanitarian”. Psychologically, WHRDs, particularly those working in legal aid, feel under pressure to constantly push themselves for the sake of the movement’s continuity and the victims’ recovery, often without considering their own needs. This reflects the reproduction of masculine hegemony within the human rights movement, which demands resilience and sacrifice and prohibits the display of vulnerability. Consequently, emotional strain, exhaustion, and economic instability are often considered the inevitable consequences of activism, rather than the result of patriarchal structures. Masculine hegemony’s tendency to involve specific patterns of internal division and emotional conflict stems precisely from its relationship with gender power (Connel in Yang 2020).

The experiences of the six WHRDs provide empirical evidence of the patriarchal structures and gender biases created by the legal system in relation to the issues that WHRDs advocate for in Indonesia. These structures and biases have resulted in specific vulnerabilities for WHRDs in each of these areas. The table above also illustrates aspects of intersectionality. Women’s lives are shaped by a system of layered, intersecting oppression and inaccurate stereotypes. The challenges faced by the six WHRDs highlight the state’s failure to fulfil its general human rights protection obligations, including those relating to civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, and psychological protection. These challenges manifest as forms of layered oppression continuously experienced by women, and specifically by WHRDs in this context.

The main challenges faced by WHRDs relate to their economic, social, cultural and psychological well-being. The double burden of being both a WHRD and a carer is a common theme across all of these issues. Furthermore, there is a knowledge gap between major city movements and large organisations, and grassroots movements and smaller organisations. This poses a barrier to consolidation and large-scale campaigns. Additionally, WHRDs require funding for their work. Some WHRDs are affiliated with established organisations, which resolves this issue. However, many grassroots WHRDs require more support. Finally, WHRDs require psychological support for their highly vulnerable and exhausting work. Ika Putri Dewi also confirmed this in an interview. Having supported many WHRDs with their mental health, she believes that legal protection is needed to ensure they receive the necessary support.

This research indicates that many WHRDs in Indonesia face limited support in carrying out their human rights defence work, particularly with regard to protection and recognition of their roles. On certain issues, such as those concerning Indigenous communities and gender and sexual diversity, WHRDs report that policies and practices do not yet fully support their working environment. This research maps out these various challenges and the need for protection mechanisms for WHRDs through a comprehensive legal framework. A recurring highlight was the need to recognise WHRDs' work as a form of employment with distinctive characteristics and risks, and to provide appropriate support and protection.

In this study, the resource persons emphasised the importance of recognising WHRDs in national law through explicit, stand-alone legislation that does not limit the scope of their advocacy work. This includes recognising Indigenous peoples through the enactment of the Indigenous Peoples Bill, recognising domestic workers through the Domestic Workers Protection Bill, and recognising the rights of gender-diverse individuals through the Gender Mainstreaming Bill. To date, however, these advocacy efforts have not fully achieved their objectives. At the same time, the resource persons emphasised the need for specific, explicit mechanisms to support their work across various issue areas.

According to the resource persons, rather than fulfilling the primary objectives of WHRD advocacy, the state risks neglecting its responsibility to protect the rights of WHRDs. This is evident in the absence of explicit regulations governing the protection of WHRDs across various sectors and the lack of welfare guarantees that account for their vulnerabilities. In fact, the work carried out by WHRDs greatly assists the state in fulfilling its duties. For instance, WHRDs face stigma and a double burden when campaigning for and fighting for their communities. This helps the state to provide services to the public to prevent and address cases of gender-based violence, despite the government's minimal legal aid budget. Furthermore, with regard to disability issues, WHRDs stated that women with disabilities facing legal proceedings require access to healthcare and adequate facilities for legal support, yet receive no government funding whatsoever.

In addition to highlighting the limitations of state protection, the resource persons described incidents that affected WHRDs' ability to fulfil their rights. Some recounted experiences of physical violence at the hands of state officials during demonstrations by women

workers, for example. With regard to disability, the resource persons described the stigma faced by WHRDs providing support at police stations and the lack of internal regulations ensuring appropriate provisions, such as interpreters or security guarantees, for WHRDs with disabilities when providing support until late at night.

The resource persons also highlighted inadequate protection in the digital sphere. For example, WHRDs working on gender diversity issues reported receiving threats, personal attacks and derogatory comments on social media. WHRDs working on various issues reported experiencing negative narratives in the digital sphere when speaking out for the rights of the groups they support.

A Comparison of Legal Protection for WHRDs in Different Countries

The section on country comparisons focuses on three countries selected for their characteristics relevant to the Indonesian context. Mongolia was chosen as an example of a developing Asian country with regulations protecting WHRDs. The United States was chosen as it is a presidential democracy that can provide Indonesia with valuable insights. Although the US currently lacks specific legislation to protect WHRDs, a bill is already in the legislative process, indicating a serious policy shift towards protecting human rights defenders. The Philippines was chosen because it is a Southeast Asian country with similar socio-political dynamics and a legal culture that can serve as an important example for Indonesia to examine regarding protection mechanisms grounded in strong principles.

Mongolia

On 1 July 2021, Mongolia became the first Asian country to enact the Law on the Legal Status of Human Rights Defenders. The Law primarily regulates human rights defenders carrying out human rights protection activities within Mongolia. Mongolia's international treaties protect Mongolian citizens carrying out such activities in a foreign country.

According to Mongolian legislation, Article 4 defines a human rights defender as any individual acting alone or in concert with others to carry out human rights protection activities. The Law stipulates that 'the protection of the rights of human rights defenders' is a state obligation. This includes preventing violations of their rights or freedoms by the state, individuals,

legal entities, or other bodies; restoring violated rights; and providing compensation for any loss or damage incurred.

Furthermore, the Law clarifies that ‘respecting the rights of human rights defenders’ obliges state organisations, individuals and legal entities to refrain from interfering with or obstructing the lawful activities of human rights defenders, and to avoid any unlawful infringement of their rights and freedoms. Judging by the provisions of this Mongolian law, it prioritises safeguarding human rights defenders from criminalisation and threats to their work in protecting human rights.

In addition to the general provisions set out in Chapter II of the Law, it also regulates the rights of human rights defenders, funding and certain prohibitions. Article 7 sets out the sources of funding that cannot be used to finance human rights defenders’ activities. These include funds originating from international intelligence agencies, front organisations or their affiliates, and organisations or individuals engaged in activities detrimental to national unity. Funds from those involved in money laundering, terrorism or extremism are also prohibited. Funds from unknown donors are also prohibited. Receipt and use of funds are subject to restrictions that could affect human rights defenders’ access to the resources needed to carry out their activities.

Several Mongolian civil society organisations and human rights defenders have raised concerns about the Law, particularly Article 8.1.3, which criminalises the defamation of ‘another person’s honour or reputation’. The Law’s broad wording is considered potentially misused to silence or criminalise human rights defenders, particularly those working on issues related to the extractive industries.

The protection mechanism for human rights defenders is with the Human Rights Defenders Committee of the National Human Rights Commission. The Committee is authorised to conduct investigations, risk assessments, analyses and research, and to draw conclusions regarding existing risk assessments. Article 10.5 stipulates that the Committee’s membership must reflect gender equality and the diversity of human rights defenders working at the national level. Other provisions for selecting committee members include having a minimum of seven years’ experience in human rights protection, as well as the relevant knowledge and experience. They must also not have held a senior

position in a political party during the past five years. However, despite this group often facing multiple layers of vulnerability in carrying out their roles, the Law has not yet introduced specific provisions to protect WHRDs.

United States

On 31 January 2024, a group of US senators introduced the Human Rights Defender Protection Act of 2024 (S.3705), which aims to safeguard human rights defenders who are under threat for their work defending human rights and democracy worldwide. The Act reaffirms the US’s commitment to protecting human rights defenders both within and beyond its borders. The Alliance for Land, Indigenous and Environmental Defenders (ALLIED), a URG member, has long advocated for the vital work of human rights defenders, particularly environmental human rights defenders.

The second section of this draft legislation, titled ‘Findings’, outlines the challenges faced by human rights defenders in different sectors. It outlines the various risks reported, including threats, violence, torture, enforced disappearance, and sexual violence. It identifies individuals advocating for land rights, environmental issues, Indigenous peoples, freedom of expression, assembly and association, minority communities, gender-diverse groups, women, youth, and religious communities as being among those experiencing the highest levels of violence. In particular, Article 8 highlights the risks faced by women human rights defenders, including gender-based violence, threats involving family members, disinformation campaigns in the digital sphere, and stigmatisation from their social circles.

This draft bill recognises that the United States lacks an overarching strategy to prevent and address attacks on human rights defenders. While various instruments exist, such as sanctions, visa restrictions, export controls, and diplomatic pressure, they are considered inconsistent and not fully integrated into a comprehensive protection framework.

Section 3, Article 3: A human rights defender is defined as an individual who promotes or protects human rights and fundamental freedoms, either alone or as part of a group, using non-violent means and in a manner consistent with the principles set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. This may include members of civil society organisations, journalists, activists, lawyers, community leaders, land and environmental defenders, labour leaders and

activists, anti-corruption campaigners, whistleblowers, political prisoners, and members of opposition political parties, as well as any other individuals involved in advocacy, action, or peaceful political protest. The Bill defines 'reprisals' as acts or omissions that violate, are intended to violate, or encourage the violation of the rights of human rights defenders or otherwise hinder them from carrying out their work.

This Bill sets out several elements of a global strategy for human rights defenders. These include assessing the availability of tools and resources at US embassies and missions, strengthening the capacity of diplomatic representatives to respond to risks to human rights defenders, and reducing impunity by holding perpetrators of reprisals accountable. Implementation of the strategy is coordinated by a National Security Council official. The draft legislation also contains provisions regarding the United States' role in multilateral and regional forums. These include enhanced monitoring and reporting of reprisal cases, support for the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, preparation of annual reports, training programmes for foreign service officials, and allocation of funds to support the implementation of the strategy and the protection of at-risk human rights defenders.

Philippines

On 23 September 2021, the Philippines enacted the Act Defining the Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Human Rights Defenders, Declaring State Responsibilities, and Instituting Effective Mechanisms for the Protection and Promotion of These Rights and Freedoms as a form of legal protection for human rights defenders in general. The Philippine Parliament recognised the importance of protecting human rights defenders due to their work in safeguarding, promoting, and realising human rights. The Senate acknowledged that human rights defenders are vulnerable to intimidation, persecution, arbitrary execution, enforced disappearance, and prosecution, and that legislation was therefore required to protect their work. The Act establishes 11 rights for human rights defenders:

- 1) The right to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- 2) The right to form groups, associations and organisations;
- 3) The right to peaceful assembly;

- 4) The right to seek, receive and impart information;
- 5) The right to privacy;
- 6) The right to develop and advocate human rights ideas;
- 7) The right to mobilise, receive and utilise resources;
- 8) The right to access, communicate with, and cooperate with international and regional human rights bodies and mechanisms;
- 9) The right to an effective remedy and full reparation;
- 10) Freedom from intimidation and reprisals; and
- 11) Freedom of movement.

This Law establishes the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, an independent body responsible for protecting human rights defenders and their work. In addition to recognising human rights defenders, the Law imposes obligations on the government and public authorities to comply with 17 key principles relating to their protection:

- 1) The obligation to respect, promote, protect and fulfil the rights of human rights defenders;
- 2) The obligation to facilitate the activities and work of human rights defenders;
- 3) The obligation to provide free access to materials relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- 4) The obligation not to disclose confidential sources;
- 5) The obligation to prevent intimidation or reprisals and ensure protection from them;
- 6) The obligation to punish intimidation or retaliation;
- 7) The obligation to refrain from derogatory and unfounded labelling;
- 8) The obligation to ensure protection from arbitrary or unlawful interference;
- 9) The obligation not to participate in violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- 10) The obligation to conduct investigations;
- 11) The obligation to guarantee an effective remedy and full compensation;
- 12) The obligation to enforce and institutionalise command responsibility;
- 13) The obligation to adopt human rights-based governance;

- 14) The obligation to strengthen protection programmes;
- 15) The obligation to respect the principle of non-refoulement;
- 16) The obligation to promote and facilitate human rights education; and
- 17) Discipline in addressing reports and complaints regarding human rights violations.

A distinctive feature of Philippine legislation is its commitment to protecting human rights defenders, as evidenced by the penalties imposed for violating the Law's provisions. With regard to WHRDs specifically, the Law states that, when formulating rules and regulations for its implementation, due consideration must be given to the risks and challenges faced by WHRDs, as well as to issues of women and gender diversity that require further attention (Article 51(2)(h)). Future regulations in Indonesia and this research could be informed by the various laws and regulations concerning human rights defenders and WHRDs in Mongolia, the United States, and the Philippines.

Addressing Contemporary Challenges and Obstacles for WHRDs and the Urgency of Legal Protection for WHRDs

WHRDs face vulnerabilities that differ from those experienced by other groups. Consequently, they require specific protection that takes into account the above-outlined challenges and their needs. Under international human rights law, states have a duty to fulfil the three core obligations: to respect, to protect, and to fulfil. The first of these is the obligation to respect: the state must not act in a manner that causes individuals or citizens to lose their rights, be unable to fulfil them, or face difficulties in accessing them. Secondly, the state must ensure that law enforcement agencies provide protection when human rights violations occur. Thirdly, the state must formulate legal policies and allocate budgets to fulfil its citizens' human rights (OHCHR 2016).

The extent to which the state fulfils its obligation to respect human rights, including those of WHRDs, can be seen in its failure to restrict access to justice or their rights. Based on the results of the interviews conducted for this study, the resource persons described the criminalisation experienced by various groups of WHRDs on a range of issues, including Indigenous communities and gender-diverse groups. In some cases, law enforcement was reported to have acted arbitrarily

towards gender-diverse groups. The resource persons also highlighted the limited capacity of law enforcement officials to understand issues such as gender diversity, disability, and indigenous peoples. By contrast, draft legislation in the United States focuses on enhancing officials' capacity to address human rights issues by training on the rights of human rights defenders.

The Indonesian state is responsible for protecting the rights of WHRDs, who face different risks and vulnerabilities compared to human rights defenders in general. Risks to the civil and political rights of WHRDs include defamation, stigmatisation, digital attacks and intimidation by non-state actors. These risks affect not only the WHRDs themselves, but also their families and close associates. For example, WHRDs working on Indigenous peoples' issues may be criminalised when third parties or companies take legal action against them. The state should establish safe reporting mechanisms for WHRDs that lead to state-provided protection. Secondly, the state must ensure the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights. This could include ensuring that WHRDs are paid a fair wage, particularly those affiliated with foundations or non-governmental organisations. It would also involve ensuring that their social security and basic labour rights are met, including maternity leave, sick leave, and menstrual leave.

In order to fulfil the rights of WHRDs, the state is expected to develop a regulatory framework that explicitly includes protection mechanisms for WHRDs and takes into account their specific vulnerabilities, such as gender-based violence and sexual offences. Although Mongolia has not yet addressed WHRDs specifically, draft legislation in the United States and existing laws in the Philippines acknowledge the risks faced by WHRDs. However, they have not yet formulated affirmative action provisions. Therefore, when drafting regulations, Indonesia must consider the specific needs of WHRDs on various issues. The direct participation of WHRDs in the regulatory drafting process is also crucial to ensuring an intersectional approach.

The draft law in the United States includes provisions on funding human rights defenders. This is a crucial section, given that human rights defenders, whether acting individually or as part of non-governmental organisations, receive little financial support from the state and experience financial instability within their institutions. Nevertheless, their work helps the state achieve its objectives in line with human rights principles. This funding is also closely linked to the economic well-being and psychological health of human rights

defenders. Regulations or legal instruments that ensure the availability of funds for human rights defenders and their organisations, or guarantee the fulfilment of their basic economic needs, would demonstrate the state's commitment to realising human rights.

The Indonesian government has sought to establish protection mechanisms for human rights defenders, including rapid response mechanisms, through independent institutions such as the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), the National Commission on Women (Komnas Perempuan), and the Witness and Victim Protection Agency (LPSK). These independent institutions operate within various constraints regarding their activities. Nevertheless, the state is required to explicitly grant WHRDs status, rights, and protection mechanisms through an intersectional approach, whilst strengthening the involvement of state institutions — including the executive, legislative and judicial branches — in addressing complex, intersectional challenges. This would ensure that WHRDs experiencing various issues can benefit from comprehensive state protection of their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

The above findings are analysed through the methodological frameworks of Feminist Legal Theory (FLT) and the theory of state obligations regarding human rights (respect, protect, and fulfil). FLT highlights how gender bias and patriarchal structures are embedded within legal texts, institutional practices and the dynamics of civil society organisations, and how these shape the vulnerability experienced by WHRDs. Meanwhile, the framework of state obligations helps determine the extent to which the state is present in, or absent from, its respect for, protection of, and fulfilment of the rights of WHRDs through regulation, policy, or resource allocation. Together, these two frameworks present the demand for legal protection for WHRDs as a structural gender justice and human rights issue, rather than a mere technical regulatory matter.

Conclusion

Drawing on empirical findings and an analysis through the lens of FLT, this study demonstrates that protection for WHRDs must be designed holistically. This should encompass aspects of welfare, digital security, physical security, and recognition of WHRDs' work as legitimate and of public value. FLT reveals how patriarchy and gender bias operate within the state and civil society organisations. This means the vulnerability of WHRDs cannot be understood as merely an individual

risk, but rather as a consequence of legal and social structures that are not gender-neutral.

Within the framework of the state's obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights, interviews with six WHRDs suggest that recognition of their issues (e.g., the enactment of the Indigenous Peoples Bill and the Domestic Workers Protection Bill) is crucial before their status and rights can be formally recognised. The absence of specific regulations recognising and protecting WHRDs at the civil, political, economic, social and cultural levels demonstrates that the state has not yet fully and comprehensively fulfilled these obligations.

This research reveals that WHRDs are not yet comprehensively protected in terms of welfare, digital, and physical security, or formal recognition of their work. WHRDs consider the recognition of their respective issues crucial: for example, Indigenous communities require the passage of the Indigenous Peoples Bill, while labour groups need the passage of the Domestic Workers Bill. The state's limited role in addressing the need for legislation on various human rights issues in Indonesia has led many WHRDs to deprioritise their interests and protection as WHRDs and as women. Six WHRDs were interviewed, and all provided testimony regarding the state's absence and even state-perpetrated crimes against WHRDs through existing legal vacuums (by omission) and actions (by commission).

This research explores the various forms of anxiety and vulnerability experienced by each WHRD from different intersectional perspectives. Aside from the state's absence, it can be concluded that patriarchy, gender bias, and the hegemony of masculinity persist. Indeed, even within the civil society organisations with which WHRDs are affiliated, various issues are overlooked by the government, and WHRDs face challenges within these organisations. This demonstrates that such issues can occur at both the state level and the most grassroots level of civil society organisations. Deeply ingrained patriarchal social constructs hinder the work of WHRDs and Indonesian women, and gender bias has a detrimental effect on the mental health of WHRDs.

The state's failure to protect various human rights in Indonesia has led to a fragmented movement, with each group focusing on its own specific issues. Consequently, the protection, interests, and well-being of WHRDs are not prioritised. The unclear status of WHRDs, coupled with the state's failure to protect them by respecting, protecting, and fulfilling their fundamental rights, remains a significant issue. WHRDs require specific and

holistic legal frameworks to harmonise the roles of state institutions in protecting their rights. Regulations concerning WHRDs could consolidate the movement and address recurring patterns of violence and complex challenges. This would enable WHRDs to carry out their humanitarian work more safely and effectively.

Both the state and organisations must accommodate the needs of WHRDs in Indonesia. This would benefit the movement for the fulfilment of human rights in Indonesia, both directly and indirectly, whether on gender issues or other matters. Advocating for legal instruments proposed by WHRDs from a gender perspective can assist WHRDs and represent a necessary step forward. From an organisational perspective, an internal audit is needed to assess performance and the needs of WHRD members, and to advocate for issues championed by civil society organisations. Ultimately, the state must recognise the work of human rights defenders, particularly WHRDs, and provide them with the protections and fundamental rights they have yet to receive. This is essential for progress and the fulfilment of human rights in Indonesia.

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From Physical Space to Cyberspace: Hashtags, Feminist Digital Activism, and Counterpublics

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Abstract

The feminist movement in post-Reform Indonesia has undergone a transformation with the emergence of digital spaces as arenas for advocacy. Through digital ethnography, analysing conversations, hashtags, and interviews with survivors, members of the PPKS Task Force (Task Force on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence) and the academic community at 28 campuses, this study shows that social media acts as an alternative public sphere. It enables people to share experiences, reduces isolation, and fosters solidarity. The #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and #SahkanRUUTPKS campaigns have raised public awareness and pressured the state to take action. However, key challenges include reliance on virality, digital security risks, and patriarchal backlash. This study highlights the importance of linking digital campaigns with grassroots structural work to ensure the movement's sustainability.

Keywords: digital feminism, sexual violence, social movements, counterpublic space

Introduction

During the pre-Reform era, the women's movement in Indonesia relied heavily on taking action in public spaces. Activism took the form of demonstrations, street protests, joint statements, and petitions submitted directly to the government. Such activities often entailed significant risks, including being silenced, intimidated and repressed by the state apparatus (Oey-Gardiner & Sulastri 2000; Suryochondro 2000; Wieringa 2010; Suryakusuma 2011; Muchtar 2016; Saptari & Holzner 2016). During the New Order era, the scope for civil society was severely restricted. Women who spoke out against the state were often labelled as disruptors of stability. This meant that much advocacy was forced to take place through informal channels, community networks or small, low-profile organisations. Resistance in the physical sphere became a symbol of courage, yet it also faced numerous constraints.

Significant changes began to be felt following the 1998 Reform. The collapse of the New Order regime created a more democratic environment, providing the women's movement with new opportunities to address marginalised issues. Topics such as sexual violence, migrant workers' rights, reproductive health and women's political representation began to enter public discourse. While the streets remained a crucial arena, as evidenced by the large-scale demonstrations

on International Women's Day, press freedom and the expansion of the media meant the women's movement's voice became increasingly audible (see Satriyo 2008; Dewi 2022; Taufiq & Ali 2023; Fahadi, Winarnita & Dirgantoro 2024; Hidayatulloh 2024; Wieringa 2024). However, at this stage, advocacy still largely relies on physical meetings, conferences, networking events, and mass demonstrations.

The widespread adoption of information technology in the early 2000s transformed the movement's landscape (Hatherell 2019; Susanto & Irwansyah 2021; Khomsani & Soetjipto 2022; Perkasa 2025). The presence of the internet and social media began to transform the way women organise and convey their messages. What previously required posters, leaflets, and long marches can now be achieved more swiftly and widely through a single online post. This change is not only about the medium but also about strategy: how to transform victims' personal experiences into a collective narrative that can be read, shared, and debated publicly. The digital space provides opportunities for women to connect across geographical and bureaucratic boundaries.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram have emerged as new spaces for activism (Engdahl, Nyman & Ekbrand 2021; Trott 2021; Rovira-Sancho 2023; Tan & Xu 2023; Werner 2023). Hashtags such

as #KampusAman or #NamaBaikKampus have become a simple yet powerful way of bringing thousands of people together around a single issue. Victims of sexual violence no longer have to fight alone or rely solely on a small support network; they can now find solidarity with people they have never met in person. This is a new form of advocacy: the digital space bears witness to the fact that previously marginalised voices can now resonate widely, putting pressure on universities, state institutions, and parliament. From here, the struggle to enact UU TPKS gains additional momentum.

The shift from physical to digital spaces does not diminish the importance of street protests; rather, it enriches the movement. While mass actions remain vital symbols of political pressure, the presence of technology expands their reach. Women can now speak out without having to be on the streets, as they can write posts, make videos or share anonymous testimonies. Advocacy now has two facets: physical and digital, local and global, swift yet profound. Post-Reform, the landscape of the women's movement in Indonesia has truly transformed, with the digital space becoming one of the strongest pillars in fostering solidarity, empowering victims and driving policy change regarding sexual violence.

The digital space that emerged after the Reform has evolved into more than just a medium of communication; it has also become a space for solidarity. For many victims of sexual violence, the online world provides a platform on which they can share their experiences without facing direct scrutiny or significant physical risk. The cases of A at UGM, MS at KPI, and NW at UB are compelling examples of how social media has become a platform for collective solidarity. Anonymous testimonies shared via social media have served as a gateway for exposing long-hidden violence. Unlike the often rigid and bureaucratic environments of university administrations or legal institutions, the digital sphere enables victims to tell their stories more honestly and swiftly. It is from here that solidarity begins to grow, as others who read these accounts can offer support, share similar experiences, or acknowledge the survivors' courage.

Digital campaigns evolve into collective movements through the use of hashtags. For instance, the hashtag #KampusAman was used by students, lecturers, and activists alike in order to urge universities to fulfil their obligation to establish a Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence on Campus (Mutiah 2022; Ardiani & Saraswati Putri 2023; Noer, Kusmawati & Agustian 2024; Noer 2025). Meanwhile, the hashtag

#NamaBaikKampus emerged as a sharp critique of the victim-blaming practices often employed by university bureaucracies, which frequently cover up cases of sexual violence in order to protect the institution's reputation. These hashtags united thousands of people in a single public conversation and were not merely symbols. The more frequently a hashtag is used, the greater the likelihood that the issue will enter the mainstream media and garner widespread public attention.

Digital solidarity also fosters a new sense of courage. Seeing so many others speak up gives victims who previously chose to remain silent the confidence to speak out. This creates a domino effect: one story triggers another until a collection of mutually reinforcing experiences is formed. This solidarity is not only about empathy; it is also an advocacy strategy. By uniting many voices, the feminist movement creates a moral impact that forces the public and policymakers to address the issue of sexual violence.

One of the greatest strengths of the digital feminist movement is the courage of survivors of sexual violence to share their personal yet anonymous experiences. In the past, stories like this were almost unheard of in the public sphere due to stigma, shame, and the fear of retaliation. However, social media has created new spaces where survivors can speak out more safely, even anonymously, without having to navigate lengthy bureaucratic processes that often only complicate matters further. Personal testimonies provide a human perspective on statistics, transforming the issue of sexual violence from mere numbers into real stories of suffering, courage, and resilience.

These personal narratives play a vital role in evoking public empathy. Reading first-hand accounts from survivors can create a moral shock that compels people to take action. Previously perceived as an abstract issue or distant from daily life, the issue suddenly feels close and real. This is what makes digital campaigns more powerful than formal reports: they authentically present the unvarnished, emotional voices of victims. The public does not merely observe; they feel involved because these stories touch on the most fundamental aspects of humanity.

On the other hand, personal narratives can foster a sense of solidarity among survivors. Reading about others' experiences makes victims feel they are not alone. They realise that many others have gone through similar experiences. This sense of "not being alone" is important because isolation is a common effect

of sexual violence. Digital spaces allow survivors to connect, share experiences, and offer support. This solidarity, born from personal narratives, becomes a powerful force in challenging the deeply entrenched culture of silence. These narratives act as a catalyst, spreading outward and transforming the movement's landscape, bringing it to a turning point in history.

This article explores the significant changes experienced by the feminist movement in Indonesia since the Reform era, particularly with regard to the utilisation of digital spaces to advocate against sexual violence. The key question is how the movement has used social media and digital platforms to increase its influence, foster solidarity, and put pressure on state institutions and universities. This shift from traditional strategies, such as street demonstrations and direct advocacy, to digital strategies indicates a significant transformation in women's struggles. However, the effectiveness of using digital spaces and the factors that determine its success or limitations still require further exploration.

Furthermore, this paper highlights the strategies employed by digital feminists and the challenges they have encountered. The research aims to identify effective digital campaign strategies to raise public awareness and drive the creation of new policies, such as the enactment of UU TPKS and the establishment of the PPKS Task Force in higher education institutions. However, the various forms of resistance faced by the digital feminist movement cannot be ignored, ranging from backlash from patriarchal groups and digital security issues to the phenomenon of 'slacktivism', which makes public participation appear massive yet superficial. This section will focus on how the feminist movement addresses such resistance and its implications for sustaining advocacy against sexual violence in Indonesia.

Research Methodology

This study employs a digital ethnography methodology, positioning digital spaces as the primary sites of observation and interaction. This approach was selected because the post-Reform feminist movement has predominantly evolved through digital platforms, particularly in terms of advocating for issues related to sexual violence. Rather than relying solely on written archives or documentation of physical actions, the study focuses on the dynamics of digital conversations, technology-based interactions, and narratives

constructed through social media. In this way, the study captures how digital spaces function as a new arena for advocacy, solidarity, and resistance.

Data collection was conducted using a variety of techniques. Firstly, in-depth interviews were conducted with reporters and/or survivors of violence, representatives of the Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence, and members of the academic community at 28 Indonesian universities between July 2024 and September 2025. These interviews aimed to explore how individuals and universities responded to public pressure, much of which was driven by digital movements. Secondly, participatory observation was employed to analyse digital conversations on platforms such as Twitter/X, Threads, Instagram, and TikTok, focusing on discussions related to the #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and other pertinent hashtags. A total of 437 Twitter/X and Threads threads and 172 short videos using the hashtags #MeToo, #KekerasanSeksual, #KampusAman, and #NamaBaikKampus were examined.

In addition, an analysis was conducted of technology-based interactions, such as online petitions, digital forums, and webinars, in which feminist activists discussed sexual violence. Data were collected as screenshots, uploaded archives, and documentation of hashtag trends during the research period. A thematic approach was used to analyse this data and identify patterns in the strategies employed, narratives constructed, public responses and challenges faced by the digital feminist movement. Through a combination of in-depth interviews and digital ethnography, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Indonesian feminist movement by examining the perspectives of its members and public interactions in digital spaces.

Social Media as a Space for Solidarity

Social media has become an important space for survivors of sexual violence, many of whom feel isolated and alone after experiencing trauma. For years, many survivors chose to remain silent out of fear of stigma, victim blaming, and even threats from their attackers. However, the digital space offers new opportunities: survivors can share their experiences anonymously and in their own words with people willing to listen. For some, writing their stories on platforms such as Twitter/X, Instagram, or online forums is the first step in breaking their silence.

Feminist activists use social media to support and empower victims. By sharing information about victims' rights and reporting procedures, or simply offering words of support, they create an atmosphere in which survivors know they are not alone. Simple interactions, such as comments like 'we believe you' or 'it's not your fault', can have a significant impact on rebuilding victims' self-confidence. This demonstrates how digital solidarity works: it is immediate and transcends distance to provide the emotional support that victims so desperately need.

Furthermore, social media enables victims to find each other. Often, when one person shares their story, it encourages others to do the same. This creates a chain of solidarity that grows as more stories emerge, eventually forming a strong digital community. This community is not just a place to share pain; it is also a place to learn that these experiences are part of a pattern of structural injustice rather than personal failure. Thus, the isolation that was once an inherent and personal aspect of the victim's experience begins to erode as a sense of togetherness emerges.

For activists, social media is a unifying tool that brings together disparate voices. They archive testimonies, construct collective narratives, and transform personal experiences into broader social movements. Viral stories of survivors, for example, are often used as campaign material to drive policy change on campus or at a national level. These narratives, born from individual experiences, connect with structural advocacy, ensuring that the digital space is not only a place to express oneself but also a strategic arena for political resistance.

In this way, social media has succeeded in reducing victims' isolation while strengthening networks of solidarity between survivors and activists. Although risks remain, ranging from demeaning comments to backlash from anti-feminist groups, the digital space offers victims greater opportunities to feel seen, heard and supported. The solidarity born of social media is an active force that continues to drive the Indonesian feminist movement in its challenge of the culture of silence and its demand for justice for victims of sexual violence.

Concrete examples can be seen in the cases raised through the #NamaBaikKampus campaign between 2020 and 2022. Many students chose to share their experiences on Twitter/X because they felt that formal reports to the university administration would

be ignored (Noer et al. 2022; Nurtjahyo 2024; Noer, Kusmawati & Agustian 2025). This wave of voices forced a number of initially silent universities to address issues of sexual violence and establish ad hoc teams. This shows that digital spaces are not merely places to share stories, but also tools for overcoming the inertia of slow-responding formal institutions.

Furthermore, the digital space increases access for victims facing geographical and social barriers. Many survivors from areas lacking counselling services or official support organisations turn to social media to seek help. Considerable research has examined how digital participation among women brings together victims from various regions, ranging from major cities to remote areas. This fosters solidarity through collective conversations (Riskiyah & Al-Uyun 2022; Azijah & Asriani 2023; Noer, Purwardani & Latifah 2025). Thus, the digital space overcomes limitations in access to formal services, which remain heavily concentrated in major cities.

Although digital spaces are generally considered to be safer than formal institutions, they are not risk-free. Various studies have found that victims who share their stories in these spaces may face backlash in the form of demeaning comments and online threats (Branch, Johnson & Dretsch 2015; Reich, Anderson & Maclin 2022; Nurdin 2023; Uldbjerg 2023). These risks demonstrate that digital solidarity spaces remain fragile and require stronger protective mechanisms. Our research survey found that only 9 per cent of victims reported violence, of which only 2 per cent surfaced via social media. Furthermore, 46 per cent of these individuals feared retaliation in the form of derogatory comments or threats from parties supporting the perpetrator (Noer, Kusmawati & Agustian 2024). Nevertheless, for many survivors, the digital space still offers a more restorative alternative to navigating formal channels, which are fraught with obstacles. These findings suggest that the digital space has become a sort of 'third space': neither a formal institution nor a fully private space, but rather an alternative public sphere where solidarity, validation and support can be obtained more quickly and safely.

Hashtag-based digital campaigns have become one of the most effective strategies employed by the feminist movement in Indonesia to effect policy change. One example is the #KampusAman campaign, which gained momentum from 2019 onwards as cases of sexual violence in higher education institutions became more prevalent. The hashtag is used to urge universities to establish the Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence (Satgas PPKS), as required

by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology's Regulation No. 30/2021.

The #NamaBaikKampus hashtag originated from a single hashtag: #KitaAgni, which emerged from UGM after the university mishandled a female student's report of harassment during a community service programme (Titah 2018). The public perceived the university as prioritising its own image over the victim's protection. In mid-2019, the #NamaBaikKampus hashtag emerged, triggered by stories from other students whose cases of sexual harassment had also been covered up by the university to protect its reputation. Posts related to these cases were widely shared under the #NamaBaikKampus hashtag, prompting thousands of responses indicating that similar patterns were occurring at many other Indonesian universities.

The issue was not confined to UGM: cases from the University of Indonesia (UI) and Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) also emerged in digital conversations under the same hashtag. Students reported that the mechanisms for reporting sexual violence on their campuses were ineffective and that victims were often blamed. For instance, at UI, a student was pressured not to file a report because the perpetrator held an important academic position. Meanwhile, at ITB, several posts highlighted how victims were asked to protect the faculty's reputation and prevent the case from becoming public knowledge. This hashtag has made the public increasingly aware that institutional betrayal is not confined to a single campus but is a systemic problem across various universities.

The issue became even more complex when complainants reported being intimidated by lecturers or the university administration when attempting to report harassment (Dema UIN Saizu 2025; Komnas Perempuan 2025). In many posts, students stated that sanctions were more often imposed on the victim — for example, by restricting their academic rights — than on the perpetrator. The hashtag #NamaBaikKampus, therefore, symbolised resistance and serves as a collective archive documenting how universities in Indonesia continue to fail to protect their students from sexual violence.

Many of these posts revealed a recurring pattern: victims' reports were ignored, they were blamed for the way they dressed or behaved, and some were even threatened with having their studies obstructed if they continued to report incidents. Voices highlighting the seriousness of victim-blaming within Indonesia's higher education bureaucracy quickly filled the digital space. This institutional betrayal demonstrates that

the problem lies not only with individual perpetrators, but also with a system that protects perpetrators and silences victims (Renn 2020; Pinciotti & Orcutt 2021; Prior & de Heer 2021; Gómez 2022; Reinke 2022). This digital pressure has forced a number of universities to issue official statements and establish dedicated reporting channels. Unsurprisingly, there is a public perception that many cases would likely remain unreported without such digital pressure, in the interest of 'the university's reputation' (Noer 2025; Noer Kusmawati & Khusnaeny 2025).

The hashtag movement was also closely linked to the enactment of UU TPKS in 2022, when the consolidation of digital campaigns played a key role in accelerating the legislative process (Pratiwi 2023; Setyarahayu, Ekantoro & Pratiwi 2023; Silalahi 2023; Arnez & Nisa 2024). Hashtags such as #SahkanRUUTPKS received widespread support from students, academics, and public figures, with over 25,000 posts in a single month. This digital pressure made it difficult for the House of Representatives (DPR), which had repeatedly postponed discussions on the TPKS issue, to ignore it. Thus, hashtags proved capable of serving a dual purpose: providing a space for survivors to show solidarity and pressuring the state to take concrete action.

However, hashtag-based campaigns also have limitations. Not all universities that were initially supportive ultimately established effective PPKS Task Forces. Our research data indicates that only around 28 per cent of higher education institutions have PPKS regulations, and just 12 per cent have clear standard operating procedures (Noer, Kusmawati & Agustian 2024). This means that, while the hashtag successfully opened the door to advocacy, sustained effort is still required for implementation on the ground.

Nevertheless, these findings confirm that hashtags such as #KampusAman and #NamaBaikKampus have become crucial for linking victims' voices to public policy and bridging the digital and bureaucratic spheres, which were often previously disconnected. Limitations in campus-level implementation do not diminish the importance of the digital feminist movement as part of a global trend. Indeed, despite the obstacles they face, these local experiences demonstrate how digital campaigns in Indonesia are connected to a broader international struggle. Cyberspace is being used to expose sexual violence and demand institutional accountability.

The feminist digital movement in Indonesia is inextricably linked to broader global dynamics,

particularly the #MeToo movement, which has spread worldwide since 2017. Inspired by this hashtag, many women in various countries have revealed experiences of sexual violence that were previously hidden (Engdahl, Nyman & Ekbrand 2021; Shin 2021; Trott 2021; Nath 2023; Rovira-Sancho 2023; Tan & Xu 2023). In Indonesia, the resonance of #MeToo is evident in digital campaigns such as #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus and #SahkanRUUTPKS. Although these campaigns originated in a local context, they share a common goal: to create a space where victims can speak out, challenge the culture of silence, and pressure institutions to take responsibility. Thus, global interconnectedness provides additional impetus for local feminist movements to further strengthen their advocacy.

However, the Indonesian movement is not just a replication of #MeToo. Feminist activists adapt their strategies to the country's unique social, cultural and political conditions. For instance, the #NamaBaikKampus campaign addressed the issue of institutional betrayal by university authorities — an issue that is highly specific to the context of higher education in Indonesia. Similarly, when advocating for UU TPKS, hashtags were used to put pressure on legislators, which was something rarely seen in #MeToo campaigns in Western countries. This shows that global connectivity drives adaptations that enhance the movement's relevance in Indonesia.

While global interconnectedness fosters solidarity, it also presents challenges. Feminist narratives from abroad are sometimes seen as incompatible with Indonesian cultural or religious values. Conservative groups often accuse the digital feminist movement of being a mere 'Western import' that undermines the nation's morals. Such counter-attacks highlight the tension between global solidarity and local resistance. However, Indonesian feminist activists have often successfully countered these accusations by emphasising the real-life experiences of victims and adapting campaign narratives to make them relevant to the Indonesian context.

Cyberfeminism and the Democratisation of the Public Sphere

In the context of the post-Reform feminist movement, the digital space can be understood as a form of 'counter-public sphere' (Mulyaningrum, Ahmad & Sahib, 2007; Daniels 2009; Alatas & Sutanto 2019; Toto & Scarinci 2022; Noer 2025). While state institutions and universities have long been biased towards patriarchy,

tending to silence victims, cover up cases for the sake of reputation or reinforce the status quo, the digital space offers an alternative in which women can create their own narratives. On social media, survivors and activists can craft their own language, symbols and strategies, free from the bureaucracy that is often discriminatory and which they would otherwise have to navigate. Thus, the digital space challenges the state's monopoly on defining the official discourse surrounding sexual violence.

The purpose of this counter-space becomes clear when cases of sexual violence covered up by institutions are first exposed on social media. In a university context, for example, the #NamaBaikKampus movement demonstrated how digital spaces could highlight institutional betrayal. Issues that could not be revealed through official channels could spark widespread conversations in digital spaces. Therefore, digital spaces are not just an additional tool; they form a counter-current that forces the state and universities to address issues they have ignored. Without public pressure from these spaces, many cases would likely remain buried within a patriarchal system that blocks access to justice.

Furthermore, digital spaces also facilitate the development of new collective identities among women (Milan 2015; Treré 2015; Khazraee & Novak 2018). According to social movement theory, solidarity often arises from publicly articulated shared experiences (Polletta & Jasper 2001; Tilly 2004). Digital spaces accelerate this process: victims' testimonies, hashtag campaigns and advocacy visuals create a collective narrative that challenges the state's official narrative, which tends to normalise violence. This collective identity confers political power by transforming scattered individual voices into a solid, hard-to-ignore community. Thus, digital spaces expand the arena of feminist politics from closed spaces to the open public sphere.

As a counter-public sphere, the digital space is not without its challenges. It is shaped by broader power dynamics, including social media algorithms, backlash from conservative groups, and limited access to technology for women in remote areas. In many cases, the digital space reflects the socio-economic inequalities present in society. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the digital space offers more opportunities than the state's highly restricted official sphere. The strength of the counter-public sphere lies in the fact that, while it is not entirely free from repression, it provides a more democratic space in which to

champion marginalised issues. In this context, I refer to it as a 'contested public sphere.'

Prior to the existence of social media, feminist discourse in Indonesia was largely confined to academic circles, NGOs, and senior activists. Advocacy took place through seminars, limited discussions or policy reports, which were often inaccessible to the wider public. The younger generation, particularly students, generally occupied a peripheral position, acting merely as supporters rather than key drivers of the movement. However, the emergence of social media post-Reform transformed the movement's landscape. Digital platforms enabled students to engage directly in feminist discourse, share personal experiences, and forge connections independently of formal organisations or academic authorities.

The #KampusAman and #NamaBaikKampus campaigns are concrete examples of students becoming the primary driving force. These campaigns were not just fleeting reactions; they were collective movements that united diverse student communities across campuses. By using social media, students succeeded in turning previously taboo issues into a national conversation and even compelled ministries and university administrations to respond. Student involvement became increasingly evident, with on-campus organisations taking strategic positions in anti-sexual violence campaigns. The UI Student Executive Board (BEM UI), for instance, launched a digital campaign to raise awareness of harassment on campus. Through their official Instagram and Twitter accounts, they have shared infographics on victims' rights and reporting guidelines, as well as openly criticising the university administration for being slow to handle cases. In 2021, BEM UI organised a campaign titled #ReformasiDikorupsi, which incorporated the issue of sexual violence and signalled that gender advocacy had become an integral part of the student political agenda. Students' creativity in using social media has also enriched the strategies of the digital feminist movement. They utilise critical memes, short TikTok videos, and educational Twitter/X threads to communicate issues of sexual violence in a lighter and more accessible way.

One of the most tangible achievements of the digital feminist movement in Indonesia was the passing of UU TPKS in 2022, after almost a decade of deadlock in the DPR (Lita & Siscawati 2022; Fridayani 2023). The #SahkanRUUTPKS campaign, which generated over 25,000 posts in just one month, succeeded in creating

significant public pressure. Support from students, academics, activists, and public figures meant that discussions about the TPKS dominated both online conversations and the mainstream media. This created a legitimacy crisis for the DPR, which was under pressure not to delay deliberations any further. Ultimately, this digital pressure accelerated the passage of the TPKS Bill in April 2022. At the university level, the #KampusAman hashtag also played a key role in driving the implementation of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology's Regulation No. 30/2021.

Digital pressure also prompted a faster response from the bureaucracy, which typically acts slowly. The #NamaBaikKampus campaign of 2020 was a case in point: thousands of student testimonies forced major universities to issue official statements and set up ad hoc teams, albeit largely for show. Without public pressure, such cases would probably have been ignored in the name of safeguarding reputation. Furthermore, the digital space served as both a tool for pressuring institutions and a medium for public education. Infographics detailing the contents of UU TPKS, victims' rights, and technical guidelines for setting up the PPKS Task Force have been widely shared on Instagram and Twitter/X. This shows that the digital space not only encourages the state and universities to act, but also fosters a wider public understanding of the law.

Public pressure in the form of digital campaigns has transformed the relationship between civil society and the government. Issues of sexual violence, which were previously often regarded as marginal concerns discussed only in limited forums, have now become a national topic that is difficult to ignore. With thousands of victims' testimonies circulating via hashtags such as #NamaBaikKampus and #SahkanRUUTPKS, the government risks losing legitimacy by remaining passive. The collective voice of victims in the digital sphere provides tangible evidence that sexual violence is systemic and requires state intervention. Beyond shaping policy, digital pressure also accelerates the government's response to individual cases. For instance, after a student's testimony went viral following her harassment by a supervising lecturer at a state university, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology promptly established a special investigation team to support the victim. However, in many previous cases, victims' reports were often ignored or drawn out. This demonstrates how virality in the digital sphere can function as a social alarm, forcing institutions to act swiftly.

Redefining the Women's Movement

In theory, a social movement is defined as a collective effort by a group of people to challenge, oppose or drive change in social, political or cultural conditions that they perceive as unjust. According to Tilly, social movements emerge when there is tension between societal demands and the state's or institutions' perceived inadequate response. The primary aim of social movements is therefore to create new spaces in which marginalised groups can voice their interests. They also foster critical awareness within society, ensuring that the changes achieved touch upon perspectives and social values, not just policy (Tilly 2004; 2019).

In addition to their structural objectives, social movements also have a cultural dimension. Modern social movements demand policy changes and seek to create new meanings and redefine collective identities (Polletta & Jasper 2001; Fominaya 2010; Milan 2015). In other words, social movements aim to change how society interprets certain issues. For instance, sexual violence was once considered a private matter, but is now recognised as a public issue requiring state intervention. This dual purpose of structural and cultural change is what makes social movements dynamic, multi-layered, and sustainable.

From a sociological perspective, social movements possess several key characteristics: organised collectivity; rooted in collective identity; a primary objective of either effecting change or maintaining the status quo; and long-term sustainability (Buechler 1995; Morris 2000; Sen & Avcı 2016). Based on this, feminist social movements also possess a number of specific characteristics. Firstly, they are based on collective action involving the solidarity of many individuals with shared experiences or goals. Secondly, they typically operate outside formal political mechanisms, yet can significantly influence the course of state policy. Thirdly, social movements present a counter-narrative that challenges the dominant ideology; for example, the feminist movement challenges patriarchy. Finally, social movements tend to be long-term, though they may emerge in waves or brief moments of momentum that subsequently transform into more permanent change.

According to Tarrow, social movements evolve through a 'repertoire of collective action' (Nash 2014; Minkenberg 2022; Riedl et al. 2024). This encompasses demonstrations, public campaigns, the use of symbols, and the formation of cross-group coalitions. In the digital age, this repertoire has expanded further with

the presence of social media. Activities that were previously confined to the streets have now migrated to the digital realm, taking the form of hashtags, infographics, personal narratives, and online petitions. This shows the flexibility of social movements in adapting to technological developments while retaining their primary function of mobilising and advocating. Furthermore, the development of this repertoire of collective action in the digital sphere has laid the groundwork for a new framework of thought within feminism.

Although social media has undoubtedly changed the way social movements are organised, cyberfeminist theory provides a valuable perspective for examining how women, in particular, use digital technology as a political arena to challenge patriarchy, not merely as a communication tool. The theoretical framework of cyberfeminism first emerged in the 1990s in response to the rise of the internet and digital technology. The term was popularised by activist groups such as Sadie Plant and VNS Matrix, which was founded by Virginia Barrett, Francesca da Rimini, Julianne Pierce, and Josephine Starrs. These groups viewed cyberspace as a potential arena for dismantling patriarchal domination (Daniels 2009; Paasonen 2011; Toto & Scarinci 2022). Cyberfeminism emphasises that digital technology is not neutral, but rather a political arena that can be used to challenge existing power structures. In other words, the digital realm opens up new possibilities for women to create discourse, solidarity and identities that were previously difficult to realise in physically controlled spaces.

In the context of campaigning against sexual violence, cyberfeminism is important because it shows how women use digital spaces to raise their voices and foster a sense of solidarity. While formal institutions often silence victims' voices, digital spaces offer a more democratic alternative. The #NamaBaikKampus campaign, for example, shows how survivors can share their experiences directly, bypassing the complex, convoluted reporting mechanisms that often lead to secondary victimisation. From a cyberfeminism perspective, this practice shows that digital technology can serve as a tool of resistance, enabling victims to challenge the culture of silence and encourage the public to engage in broader conversations.

Furthermore, cyberfeminism emphasises the formation of collective identity through digital spaces. Social media enables victims and feminist activists to build mutually supportive virtual communities, even

if they never meet in person. This shows that feminist identity is not only formed within formal organisations or academia, but also flourishes within fluid, inclusive digital networks. It is this collective identity that provides political power by transforming personal experiences into structural issues that garner public attention and drive policy demands.

However, cyberfeminism also reminds us that digital spaces still pose risks. For example, the internet is still influenced by patriarchal power relations in the form of cyber-harassment, doxxing, and the dissemination of misogynistic narratives (SAFEnet & OXFAM 2022; Bintari 2024). Cyberfeminism, therefore, not only celebrates the potential of technology but also critiques how it can become a new arena of repression. In the Indonesian context, this is evident in the backlash against digital feminist campaigns, where many victims have faced renewed online harassment. Consequently, cyberfeminism demands digital security strategies and ethical safeguards in all advocacy practices.

This theoretical framework helps us understand that the digital feminist movement in post-Reform Indonesia is part of a broader political strategy, not merely a new form of communication. Campaigns such as #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and #SahkanRUUTPKS are manifestations of cyberfeminism. Technology is used to challenge patriarchy, build solidarity and push for policy change. Put simply, cyberfeminism enables us to view the digital space as a feminist arena — a counter-public sphere created, maintained and utilised by women to fight for justice.

One of the main challenges facing the digital feminist movement in Indonesia is the perception of fragmentation. Although hashtag campaigns such as #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and #SahkanRUUTPKS have succeeded in generating significant momentum, the strategies employed by each group have differed. Some emphasise policy advocacy, some focus on survivor solidarity, and some highlight education and public engagement. These differences in approach are evident among large NGOs, grassroots communities and student groups. For instance, during the debate on the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology's Regulation No. 30/2021, some groups emphasised the consistent implementation of the regulation on campus, while others countered conservative narratives accusing the regulation of 'legalising adultery'. The fast-paced and reactive nature of social media exacerbates this issue, as new campaigns can emerge spontaneously and without

proper coordination, resulting in an overwhelming amount of information that risks confusing the public.

Fragmentation can have a number of negative consequences. Inconsistent messaging can make it difficult for the public to understand a movement's priorities, thereby reducing collective pressure. In political advocacy, the strategic differences between political compromise and moral pressure can create an exhausting tug-of-war, as was evident in the discussions surrounding the TPKS Bill. Internal friction between organisations can manifest as criticism of strategies deemed too symbolic or lacking in substance. Although these tensions are rarely exposed, they can slow down collaboration. Therefore, fragmentation must be carefully managed to prevent it from turning into counterproductive conflict.

However, fragmentation is not always negative. In literature on social movements, different strategies are often seen as a diversity that enriches the narrative and broadens participation. This seems to be deeply rooted in the tradition of feminism itself: contradictory and at odds with one another, yet overlapping. This also aligns with the multidimensional nature of sexual violence— which is legal, cultural, psychological and educational— making it only natural that it be approached in diverse ways. This plurality enables advocacy to occur on multiple levels simultaneously, such as lobbying parliament, monitoring campus regulations or educating the public. With a variety of strategies, more people can contribute according to their abilities, whether through street protests or academic research. This makes the digital feminist movement more inclusive and resilient: if one avenue is blocked, others can still proceed. Therefore, diversity is a strength, not a weakness, in the fight against deeply entrenched patriarchy.

One of the greatest challenges facing the digital feminist movement is its reliance on viral momentum. Campaigns based on hashtags, personal narratives, or visuals often depend on how quickly the issue can attract public attention. When a victim's story or a hashtag goes viral, public support pours in, the mainstream media covers the story, and institutions are pressured to respond. However, once the initial wave of attention subsides, public interest tends to shift to other issues. This leaves the movement vulnerable to losing momentum, even though substantial issues such as case handling or policy implementation remain unresolved. This phenomenon was clearly evident in the #NamaBaikKampus campaign. Initially, students' posts sharing their testimonies sparked a wave of

criticism against universities perceived to be covering up cases of sexual violence. However, after a few weeks, the intensity of the conversation dropped dramatically whilst many universities still lacked adequate reporting mechanisms (Tirto 2020; Dema UIN Saizu 2025; Noer, Kusmawati & Khusnaeny 2025).

Reliance on viral momentum also risks the issue being dismissed as a “fleeting trend”. While dramatic, emotional stories can easily move the public, long-term commitment is often lacking. Consequently, the digital feminist movement faces challenges in maintaining consistent support. It is not uncommon for survivors to feel abandoned once their stories are no longer widely discussed. This raises the serious question of how we can ensure that victims’ voices continue to be heard, even when they are no longer trending on social media.

Furthermore, reliance on virality leaves the feminist movement vulnerable to manipulation by social media algorithms. Changes to these algorithms can affect the reach of posts, meaning an overwhelming amount of information can drown out important campaigns. Even worse, issues that are not considered emotionally engaging enough may struggle to gain traction, despite their critical importance. Technical debates about implementing the PPKS Task Force, for example, rarely go viral, even though they are crucial for protecting victims on campus. This demonstrates that movement strategies cannot rely solely on virality, but must also involve consistent structural work.

The digital feminist movement has enjoyed some success in creating momentum, but this will not be enough without a long-term strategy to underpin it. While going viral is effective in opening public conversations and putting pressure on institutions, resolving the issue of sexual violence requires more in-depth work. It is essential that the digital movement is linked to grassroots, structural work such as supporting victims, providing community-based gender education, and campaigning for local policies. This integration is essential to ensure that the energy generated by digital campaigns translates into tangible changes in survivors’ daily lives rather than merely symbolic solidarity.

One way to build this bridge is to strengthen the collaboration between digital communities and local civil society organisations. Online campaigns can identify issues and raise awareness, while local organisations can provide concrete support, such as counselling services, legal assistance, and training for campus-based sexual violence prevention task forces. A strategy that bridges the gap between viral momentum and long-term

advocacy work is required for the sustainability of the digital feminist movement. Virality must be viewed as an entry point, not an end in itself. Once an issue has successfully captured public attention, the next step is to channel the energy of solidarity into institutional mechanisms. This could involve advocating for the formation of task forces, monitoring the implementation of UU TPKS or establishing victim support services. This ensures that the energy from digital campaigns is not quickly forgotten, but instead becomes part of a more systematic struggle. Sustainability poses a major challenge for the digital feminist movement: will it be a mere fleeting wave, or will it instil long-term change?

Furthermore, a long-term strategy requires capacity-building mechanisms for young people who are active in the digital sphere. To ensure their influence is sustained over time, students, community activists and social media volunteers must be provided with legal literacy, digital security skills and formal advocacy capabilities. This will prevent the digital feminist movement from relying solely on virality and will help it to establish a network of empowered grassroots supporters. This will connect the energy of solidarity in the virtual space to the real-world struggle, ensuring the resulting change is firmly rooted in the social structure rather than merely symbolic.

Conclusion

The digital feminist movement in Indonesia has proven itself to be a key force in advocating against sexual violence in the post-Reform era. By using social media, survivors and activists have successfully created a new advocacy space that is more democratic, faster, and more inclusive than the formal mechanisms that have long been slow and often restricted in access. Hashtag-based campaigns, such as #KampusAman, #NamaBaikKampus, and #SahkanRUUTPKS, demonstrate that the digital space can function as a counter-public sphere that challenges patriarchal dominance within state institutions and higher education. Here, the digital space provides opportunities for victims to be heard, for activists to speak out, and for the public to demand justice.

Although the digital feminist movement in Indonesia has succeeded in creating new spaces for advocating against sexual violence, there are still a number of serious challenges that cannot be ignored. Digital security is a key concern. Survivors and activists often face cyber harassment, doxxing, and online threats, which exacerbate their trauma. Furthermore,

patriarchal backlash from conservative groups often attempts to delegitimise the feminist movement by using moral or cultural narratives, which slows down its consolidation. Additionally, the risk of fragmentation among groups with different strategies can make the movement appear less cohesive, ultimately diminishing the effectiveness of collective pressure on state institutions and universities.

Rather than dampening the movement's spirit, these challenges underscore the need for a more robust consolidation strategy. Moving forward, the digital feminist movement cannot rely solely on viral momentum or symbolic solidarity. A bridge is needed to connect digital energy with practical work on the ground, such as supporting victims, providing gender education, and monitoring policy implementation on campuses and in communities. This will ensure that every digital campaign has a direct impact on social behaviour change and victim protection mechanisms, rather than merely existing as public discourse.

For the long-term success of feminist advocacy in Indonesia, it is essential to integrate digital activism with grassroots community work and strengthen public policy. The digital space must continue to be cultivated as a platform for solidarity and resistance. Local communities must be empowered to provide support, and public policy must be monitored to ensure that victims are genuinely prioritised. This synergy will ensure that feminist advocacy remains strong not only when issues go viral, but also becomes deeply rooted in the social, legal and cultural structures of society. With an integrative strategy, feminist advocacy in Indonesia could become a sustainable movement capable of challenging patriarchal dominance while strengthening democracy.¹

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Footnote

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State Violence in Digital Spaces: Digital Feminism, Repression, and the Struggle of Women's Civil Society Organisations

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Abstract

This article analyses state violence in the digital sphere and its impact on women's civil society organisations (CSOs) in Indonesia. It also examines how feminist digital solidarity is formed and why it is fragile. Employing a critical feminist lens, this qualitative study uses cross-CSO online focus group discussions (involving urban, youth, progressive religious, disability, indigenous and LGBTIQ+ groups) and social media content analysis. The findings suggest that repression occurs through the intersection of lawfare (the ITE Law and the Criminal Code), surveillance, doxxing, moral stigma, and algorithmic discipline, resulting in a chilling effect and self-censorship. CSOs respond by implementing digital security measures, diversifying funding, adopting low-profile strategies, and establishing solidarity networks. However, transformative solidarity requires protection, equitable resources, and cross-issue alliances.

Keywords: state violence, digital feminism, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, digital solidarity, women's civil society organisations

Introduction

The 1998 Reform paved the way for various progressive legal policies that recognised women's rights. However, two decades later, Indonesian democracy has shown signs of regression. Rather than operating through overt physical repression, state violence now takes the form of legal operations and digital technologies that systematically enforce social hierarchies and control. Under the digital governance regime, the state is shrinking the public sphere by introducing various regulations, including the Criminal Code (KUHP), the Criminal Procedure Code (KUHP) and the Electronic Information and Transactions Act (ITE Law). These regulations are open to multiple interpretations and are being used as instruments of lawfare to criminalise victims of online gender-based violence (OGBV) rather than protect them.

Regulations that were originally intended to protect citizens are often used to discipline and silence critical voices, including activists, journalists, and victims of sexual violence. Consequently, gender-based violence is taking on new forms in the digital sphere. Campaigns such as #KitaAgni, #SavelbuNuril and #SahkanRUUPKS

reflect the efforts of women and their supporters to seek justice when the law fails to provide protection.

The digital space is therefore neither neutral nor free. It is rife with social stigma and criminalisation through the ITE Law, with patriarchal logic being reinforced by technological and legal infrastructure (Pratiwi 2021). Consistent with this, Wibisono et al. (2025) show how platform algorithms, digital capitalist interests and legal frameworks work together to silence women, create an exclusionary, masculine online environment, and control women's bodies and self-expression.

In the Indonesian context, Ufen (2024) defines digital repression as the use of information technology to monitor, manipulate, or intimidate social groups that challenge the state. He identifies five main instruments used by the Indonesian government: 1) surveillance and cyber-policing, including spyware such as Pegasus; 2) censorship and shutdowns, including blocking social media access; 3) social manipulation and disinformation, including paid online influencers; 4) lawfare and criminalisation, including the ITE Law, KUHP, and KUHP; and 5) targeted prosecution of academics, journalists and activists. These instruments demonstrate how

digital repression is carried out as an institutionalised state practice through law and technology.

From a feminist perspective, de Alwis (2024) views the internet as a new battleground for women. Online gender-based violence (OGBV) encompasses cyberstalking, online harassment, disseminating intimate images without consent, doxing, slut-shaming, trolling, sending sexual content without permission, gender-based hate speech, misinformation and disinformation campaigns, threats of sexual violence and murder, image manipulation, and the proliferation of AI-generated sexual content. These forms of violence evolve alongside technological advancements, exacerbating existing gender-based power imbalances within legal regimes and digital platforms.

Amidst these pressures, the digital space has given rise to various new forms of resistance. Hermanto (2021) shows how women in Indonesia use social media to advocate for digital feminism, cultivate a collective political identity, create safe spaces, and foster solidarity within communities. The emergence of organisations such as Jakarta Feminis (JakFem) since 2014, the impact of online campaigns on the Women's March Jakarta, and the advocacy of the PKS Bill all demonstrate the digital space's capacity to support the political mobilisation of feminists.

However, digital solidarity has its limits. Azzahra et al. (2025) demonstrate that virality is fleeting and prone to decline in the absence of sustained organisational support. An example of this is the #JusticeForAffan campaign, which followed the death of an online ride-hailing driver who was run over by a Brimob vehicle in August 2025. Criticism of slacktivism also highlights the risk that digital activism can be performative and superficial, resulting in minimal structural impact (Tong & Botts 2020). Solidarity that relies solely on collective emotion and short-lived virality risks becoming an 'emotional circus', particularly amid intensifying legal repression and declining international funding for civil society.

In light of the above, this article aims to address three key questions: 1) How does state violence/repression operate in the digital sphere?; 2) How do women's civil society organisations (CSOs) adapt in repressive and underfunded situations?; and 3) How does feminist digital solidarity emerge in the face of challenges? The article analyses state violence against women in the digital space through legal instruments and digital repression practices, while exploring the

adaptation strategies of women's CSOs in response to such situations. Due regard was given to the diversity of experiences among urban, grassroots, Indigenous, disabled, LGBT, and youth groups in conducting the research. Drawing on the diversity of experiences and vulnerabilities of women's CSOs, the paper concludes with recommendations and strategies to strengthen these organisations and prevent them from becoming trapped in superficial 'slacktivism', which could lead to the regression of the women's movement.

Research Methodology

This research takes a qualitative approach, focusing on the experiences of women's CSOs in confronting state violence mediated by law and digital technology, including repression and criminalisation, as well as dynamics of solidarity, in Indonesia. Data were collected via online focus group discussions (FGDs) due to the diverse backgrounds and geographical locations of the various organisations involved in the study.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were chosen as the method to explore participants' collective experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of how state power, law, and digital infrastructure influence their advocacy work (Bryman 2012; Neuman 2014). This method allows exploration of contextual and reflective perspectives while maintaining the focus and depth of the discussion through a structured discussion guide. Participants were grouped according to social, institutional and status contexts, as suggested by Neuman (2014), to minimise power relations that could prevent open discussion.

In addition to FGDs, this study employs qualitative content analysis of women's CSO social media accounts (Instagram), where state repression, political visibility, and solidarity practices intertwine. This approach allows us to interpret the narratives, visuals, and digital communication strategies used by CSOs to respond to state repression, build solidarity, and negotiate the boundaries between public advocacy and criminalisation.

The unit of analysis comprises social media posts (including text, visuals, and interaction contexts) from 2021 to 2025. Content was selected based on three criteria: 1) representing the CSO's advocacy mandate and identity, 2) relating to relevant national issues or state policies, and 3) serving as a means of public education or collective empowerment. Each post was coded qualitatively according to analytical categories such as issue framing, language choices, visual style, forms

of calls to action and activism practices (repression, adaptation and solidarity). These results were then analysed comparatively across CSOs to identify narrative patterns and differences in communication strategies, as well as structural factors such as state pressure, donor dependency and platform algorithmic logic that shape the dynamics of feminist digital activism.

In line with the intersectional framework used in the analysis (MacKinnon 2013), this study treats differences in identity, location, and social position as analytical variables rather than merely background factors. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of how state violence and the risk of criminalisation are experienced differently by women's CSOs operating within diverse contexts, including urban, rural, coastal, disability, religious and sexual identity contexts.

Nine women's CSOs were involved in the FGDs: Jakarta Feminist; Halmahera Women's Coastal School; Puspita Bahari; the Centre for Inclusion and Disability Advocacy (SIGAB); Perempuan Mahardhika; Arus Pelangi Foundation; the Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI); Lingkar Studi Feminis; and the Indonesian Young Women's Activists Forum (FAMM-I). For analytical purposes, these organisations were grouped into categories based on identity and advocacy work: urban feminists; progressive religious groups; disability groups; LGBTIQ+ groups; youth groups; and regional groups. This classification was used to examine differences in the experiences, bargaining power, and strategies of CSOs when confronting digital repression and state violence.

Table 1.
Grouping into the respective categories

Organisation Category	Organisation Name	Organisation's Location
Feminist Urban	Jakarta Feminist	Jakarta, Indonesia
	Perempuan Mahardhika	Jakarta, Indonesia
Progressive Religion	KUPI	Nationwide (Jakarta, Indonesia)
LGBTIQ+	Arus Pelangi Foundation	Jakarta, Indonesia
Youth Group	Lingkar Studi Feminis	Tangerang, Indonesia
	Indonesian Young Women's Activists Forum (FAMM-I).	Nationwide Jakarta, Indonesia)
	Halmahera Women's Coastal School (Sekolah Pesisir Perempuan Halmahera)	Halmahera, Maluku, Indonesia
Community-Based Groups	Halmahera Women's Coastal School (Sekolah Pesisir Perempuan Halmahera)	Halmahera, Maluku, Indonesia
	Puspita Bahari	Demak Regency, Central Java, Indonesia

Source: Compiled by the authors from FGD 2025 data

A Feminist Lens: State Violence and Contemporary Digital Activism

To understand how state violence operates and evolves in the digital sphere, and how feminist activism responds to, negotiates with, and challenges it, this paper takes a critical feminist approach. It combines feminist legal theory, human rights-based digital feminism, and an intersectional perspective. Rather than viewing the digital space as neutral, this framework considers it a space of law, technology, and power, in which the state, platform corporations, and patriarchal norms determine who can speak and be seen in public, and who can survive there.

In feminist legal theory, state violence is not merely understood as physical repression; it is also understood as the legal operations and state institutions that systematically enforce gender hierarchies. Catharine MacKinnon (2020) shows that inequality is not a matter of difference, but of the institutionalised relations of domination and subordination that underpin the law. Under the logic of formal equality, women can be raped, stigmatised, or impoverished, yet still be considered equal under the law, as it treats them as equal to the dominant group in theory. According to Jackson (1992), law and legal methods are gendered tools of social organisation. Thus, claims of legal neutrality mask

the fact that the state favours masculine perspectives and interests. Consequently, the criminalisation, silencing and delegitimisation of women and women's organisations are not anomalies, but rather forms of state violence institutionalised within the law.

This approach is further developed through 'intersectionality as method' (MacKinnon 2013), which asserts that the law should be interpreted from the perspective of individuals situated at the intersection of racial, gender, class and locational hierarchies. The state and the law not only fail to protect marginalised groups, but also actively produce categories that determine who is recognised as a legitimate victim and who may be criminalised or ignored. In the context of women's sexual and reproductive health, legal and political repression operates differently, placing a heavier burden on women in specific locations and with specific identities and social positions.

In the digital sphere, these legal mechanisms are extended through platform infrastructures. de Alwis (2024) notes that online gender-based violence (OGBV) and other forms of technology-mediated violence occur within a structural continuum of gender-based violence linking online and offline spaces. Data, algorithms, reporting systems, and content moderation are not neutral technical tools; rather, they are forms of power that determine who remains visible and who can be erased from the public sphere. Doxxing, mass reporting, account blocking, and criminalisation based on online posts are expressions of this continuum of violence in the context of women's activism and civil society organisations (CSOs). Therefore, state violence in the digital sphere must be recognised as more than just a misuse of technology; it is a legal and political project that enforces patriarchal norms and moral order through platform-based mechanisms. The state uses cyber laws, law enforcement agencies, and regulatory frameworks to discipline, silence, and delegitimise women's CSOs. Meanwhile, platform companies provide the infrastructure that enables this power to be exercised more quickly, more widely and more effectively.

In this context, digital feminism is met with ambivalence. Networks of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg 2013) enable women to raise their profile, awareness, and solidarity without the need for formal organisational structures, as evidenced by the #MeToo movement. However, this connectivity also leaves women's activism vulnerable to surveillance, criminalisation, and digital attacks. While criticism of 'slacktivism' remains relevant, the issue in the context

of state violence is not merely the superficiality of participation, but the significant legal and political risks faced by women who speak out.

An intersectional approach allows for a sharper analysis of these non-uniform vulnerabilities. The challenges experienced by women and women's organisations in relation to activism depend on location, class, race, religion, sexual identity and access to technology. Within this framework, feminist solidarity is based not on sameness, but on a political commitment that recognises differences and structural inequalities.

This framework draws on feminist legal theory to explore domination and hierarchy (MacKinnon 2020), uses intersectionality to interpret law from a grassroots perspective (MacKinnon 2013), and analyses OGBV as part of the broader spectrum of gender-based violence (de Alwis 2024). It positions state violence in the digital sphere as legal, technological, gendered and social. This analytical framework ties together all the empirical findings on the repression, criminalisation, and silencing of women's CSOs as part of a single regime of state violence mediated by platforms.

Narrative as a Tool of State Control: Digital Repression, Law, and Women's CSOs

The digital space, once considered a platform for political expression and participation, has evolved into a domain of surveillance and control. Instead of promoting 'digital security' and 'moral protection', the law has become a means of expanding repression, operating as an instrument of state power that enforces a patriarchal social order. According to feminist legal theory (MacKinnon 2020), this digital space cannot be viewed as neutral; rather, it is an arena of law and technology in which the state decides who can speak and who can be silenced. In this context, the digital space operates as a mechanism of state power. Laws and platform infrastructures are used to monitor, discipline and delegitimise women activists within civil society organisations (CSOs).

The patterns of repression experienced by CSOs demonstrate the continuity of violence in both the offline and online worlds, which de Alwis (2025) refers to as a 'continuum of structural violence'. Within this continuum, the state, platforms, algorithms and social actors collaborate to create new forms of violence, including doxxing, surveillance, trolling, data extortion and the criminalisation of women who speak out. All of these constitute forms of online gender-based violence

(OGBV). de Alwis emphasises that, just like other forms of gender-based violence, violence facilitated by technology is rooted in power imbalances and control. Within the state context, these power dynamics manifest through legislation, digital policies and state–platform collaborations that enable such violence to be perpetrated and normalised without punishment.

In this context, technology acts as a double-edged sword. While it opens up new spaces for advocacy and solidarity, it also poses the risk of systemic violence. According to focus group discussions with representatives of several women's NGOs, at least two forms of OGBV are commonly encountered: legal measures and digital repression. From a legal standpoint, a JakFem spokesperson recounted how one of their members had been deported and denied a visa by the Indonesian government. The JakFem member was accused of being affiliated with Intelligence Australia and Human Rights Watch. This incident had implications for other members and reinforced the government's stigma against Indonesian women, portraying them as unable to resist and merely following 'foreign influence'.

The use of legal instruments as tools of repression has become increasingly evident in the context of the criminalisation of activists in August 2025. According to AR, the state employs these instruments when activists, including women, express political opinions on social media. This suggests that the state is inclined to prioritise criminalisation without a clear legal basis. This practice targets not only activists but also civilians who express their views in the digital sphere.

"We are now seeing a pattern emerge whereby the government is becoming increasingly comfortable with criminalisation in the absence of a clear legal basis. This is evident from the arrests of several women between 25 August and early September. Most of those arrested were ordinary citizens who were simply voicing their opinions on social media; they were not activists. In these cases, the state has employed various legal instruments, including the ITE Law and the incitement clause in the Criminal Code. As the new Criminal Code is implemented, I anticipate that such practices will lead to an increase in self-censorship, particularly among women, due to the fear they experience" (AR, Jakarta Feminis 2025, FGD, September).

The criminalisation of activists demonstrates how the law functions as a patriarchal mechanism of state power. According to feminist legal theorist Catharine A. MacKinnon (2020), neither the state nor the law is neutral; rather, they operate from and for the perspective of male domination. Through the law, the

state organises social relations based on a hierarchy of domination and subordination. Consequently, violence against women is not recognised as a systemic violation, but rather as an individual aberration that can be overlooked or even justified. Jackson (1992) argues that the law and legal methods are gendered tools of social organisation, actively shaping and reproducing masculinity while disguising it as 'neutrality'. In other words, legal objectivity actually conceals the fact that the state sides with dominant groups' perspectives and interests.

In the Indonesian context, the ITE Law and the Criminal Code are used as instruments of state power to intimidate, discipline, and silence critical voices, particularly those of women and groups challenging patriarchal norms and moral order. Rather than simply failing to protect, the law actively engenders fear and self-censorship, forming part of the state's means of controlling who is permitted to speak and who must remain silent. In line with this, Smart (1989) demonstrates that the law is not a neutral normative apparatus, but rather a mechanism that determines who is worthy of protection and who can be sacrificed. Within Indonesia's ambiguous and repressive legal regime, women activists and CSOs who challenge authority are more readily perceived as a threat to order than as citizens entitled to protection.

The experience of repression becomes even more complex when faced by CSOs advocating for groups with dual vulnerabilities. EW, from the Arus Pelangi community, highlights how power structures determine who is worthy of protection and who is to be sacrificed. These mechanisms have exacerbated vulnerabilities and legitimised violence against groups whose sexual orientations are considered deviant in the digital sphere. This experience of repression is further compounded when it is faced by CSOs advocating for groups with multiple vulnerabilities. As a community advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues, Arus Pelangi continues to be subjected to control primarily due to its members' sexual identities.

"Three photos of Arus Pelangi staff members were posted online, after which they became the target of doxxing, accompanied by truly horrifying comments. They were subjected to a huge amount of abuse, including degrading caricatures and hate speech such as 'LGBT people are deviants' and 'just die'. It was absolutely horrifying; I couldn't bring myself to read the comments section. There is now a sense of fear and trauma" (EW, Arus Pelangi, 2025, FGD, September).

This experience shows that law and technology do not work in the same way. Rather than providing protection, legal instruments actually create vulnerability, particularly for marginalised groups. From an intersectional feminist perspective, digital repression demonstrates how state violence operates in a situated manner, influenced by sexual identity, social position and the moral stigma attached to certain groups.

Progressive faith-based women's organisations also experience digital repression. The Indonesian Congress of Women Ulama (KUPI), the Rahima Association and the Qirā'ah Mubādalah movement are under pressure in the digital sphere for challenging patriarchal interpretive authority through their counter-narrative initiatives. The stigmatisation of feminism as both 'Western' and 'un-Islamic' leaves activists and alternative media managers vulnerable to new threats. ZA from Mubādalah explains how progressive religious content often triggers mass reporting, accusations of heresy, and attempts to close social media accounts.

Mubādalah has also been stigmatised by a charismatic female cleric in East Java who labelled it a secular, non-Muslim platform. This prompted the female cleric's supporters to report Mubādalah's Instagram account in an attempt to have it closed. ZA said that several major Islamic boarding schools in East Java often consider the fatwas or views of the KUPI religious consultative body to be at odds with their own interpretations. ZA explained further:

"It is not only the followers of a charismatic cleric who react when we disseminate KUPI's fatwas or religious deliberations that conflict with their beliefs. Several major Islamic boarding schools in East Java do too. For example, they have reacted to the P2GP issue. We are up against authorities such as the MUI, as well as Islamic boarding schools that are perceived as having a deeper understanding of classical Islamic texts and legal arguments. Therefore, whenever we intend to produce or disseminate potentially sensitive or controversial content, we consult the MMKUPI and the Mubādalah founders to assess its strategic value" (ZA, Mubādalah 2025, FGD, September).

In this case, the struggle occurs on two levels: religious interpretation and control over women's bodies and experiences. The latter includes female genital mutilation (FGM) and attacks on media management teams. Digital violence is an extension of the social and religious power that regulates women's bodies, and it also serves to legitimise symbolic and psychological violence. In the context of OGBV, Mubādalah's experience exemplifies the merging of the

online and offline realms that women's CSOs encounter, as outlined by de Alwis (2024).

Furthermore, technology-enabled violence is an increasingly prevalent form of both interpersonal and structural violence. For instance, KUPI has been involved in digital advocacy for the Sexual Violence Crimes Law since 2019, continuing until 2021. These efforts culminated in a counter-narrative against those who opposed the Law. PS, a representative of Swara Rahima, noted that a piece of content published by Swara Rahima — an engaging infographic based on KUPI's religious fatwa — also garnered significant public attention. The post was widely shared, including by influencers, leading to Swara Rahima facing attacks from groups opposed to KUPI's religious fatwa. Consequently, Swara Rahima was subjected to various stigmas and accusations, including being labelled a 'Western media outlet', 'pro-LGBT+ media', and 'media inconsistent with Islam'. Unfortunately, the same pattern recurred, with attacks being directed not only at the media but also at individuals.

Stigmatisation, accusations, and attacks show that bias is rife on the internet and social media platforms, leading to symbolic violence. The presence of alternative media disrupts the 'echo chamber' referred to by de Alwis. Previously, individuals or groups would interact within patriarchal discourse, reproducing misogynistic content to reinforce their existing views through repetition within isolated bubbles (de Alwis 2024). In a state-mediated regime of violence, these echo chambers function as social mechanisms that determine who is protected and who can be attacked without facing legal consequences. These echo chambers exacerbate vulnerability, particularly among groups deemed expendable, who challenge the status quo by presenting counter-narratives from civil society organisations.

These experiences highlight the fact that technology-facilitated violence has not yet been widely recognised as a form of systemic and structural violence. Digital violence is not separate from the law and social norms; rather, it forms part of a broader architecture of power. Therefore, as de Alwis argues, the response to OGBV cannot stop at punishing individual perpetrators. Rather, it demands a revision of the legal framework and policies capable of dismantling the structures of power inequality that produce violence against women in the digital sphere.

Omnipresence, Chilling Effect, and the Experiences of Women's CSOs

In a regime of state violence mediated by digital technology, surveillance does not necessarily result in direct arrest or prosecution. Instead, it creates a constant sense of being watched. In the digital space, this logic operates more subtly yet pervasively, shaping what many women's CSOs perceive as latent fear and self-restraint. To analyse this experience in a more contextualised and gender-sensitive manner, this paper draws on the intersectional feminist framework developed by de Alwis.

To interpret this experience from a feminist and contextual perspective, the paper employs the concept of 'omnipresence' (de Alwis 2024), which demonstrates that technology-based violence is shape-shifting and transcends the boundaries between online and offline spaces. In a datafied and digitally connected world, perpetrators of violence, stalkers and the authorities do not need to be physically present to exert control. Instead, their presence is felt through notifications, mass reporting, anonymous threats, data trails and the ever-present possibility of surveillance that can never be definitively confirmed or denied.

In these conditions, technology-based violence does not operate as an isolated event, but as an atmosphere that pervades women's lives and political work. Women's organisations face actual attacks and live with the constant fear of potential attacks. This has a chilling effect, whereby individuals and organisations proactively self-censor, erase their digital footprints or alter their advocacy strategies to survive.

This was the experience of Swara Rahima, whose office was visited by a group of women in 2020. In addition to facing surveillance, social punishment, stigmatisation, accusations, and digital attacks, women's organisations are vulnerable to other forms of violence in the real world. PS recounted Rahima's experience during the FGD:

"Towards the end of 2019, strangers visited our office in South Jakarta. Most of the people around us were supporters of a certain religious party, and the women who visited us were strangers. They wanted to come in... asked us questions, and took photos. We took steps to remove all addresses and contact details posted on social media. For security reasons, we do not include Rahima's addresses or contact details" (PS, Swara Rahima 2025, FGD September).

This response is not merely a technical choice, but a form of adaptation to perceived ever-present violence. Women's CSOs have learned that public visibility, which has long been the primary asset of digital advocacy, can also be a source of serious vulnerability.

Findings from the FGDs indicate that almost all women's CSOs involved reported experiences or perceptions of exposure to various forms of technology-mediated violence (OGBV). These include doxxing, sexual threats, account hacking and mass content reporting, as well as concerns and suspicions about potential digital surveillance by state authorities. This violence and pressure have a direct impact on the mental health of activists, causing trauma, emotional exhaustion, paranoia and insecurity. It also has structural impacts on organisations, including the cessation of campaigns, reduced visibility and a narrowing of advocacy space.

Table 2.
Women's CSOs' Experiences and Perceptions of Technology-Based Violence and Its Impacts (based on FGD 2025)¹

CSOs	Key Issues	Forms of Digital Violence	Effects on Individuals	Effects on Organisations and Advocacy	CSO Adaptation Strategies
Arus Pelangi (AP)	LGBTIQ+ and issues of identity and equality in Indonesia.	Doxxing of personal details and sexual orientation, threats to delete Instagram accounts, extreme trolling, and concerns about the tracking of digital activity.	Trauma, fear, the urge to withdraw, prolonged stress.	Public campaigns halted, Instagram set to private.	Strict screening, body system, changing phone numbers, separating work and personal phones.
FAMM Indonesia	Women and Indigenous communities.	Suspected digital surveillance and tracking, sexting and symbolic intimidation (e.g., threatening GoFood deliveries).	Paranoia, physical exhaustion, hyper-vigilance.	Fieldwork disrupted, office address changed.	Digital security training, digital teams, solidarity funds, and relocation.

CSOs	Key Issues	Forms of Digital Violence	Effects on Individuals	Effects on Organisations and Advocacy	CSO Adaptation Strategies
Jakarta Feminists	Feminist movement, democracy, freedom of expression.	Threats of sexual violence and rape on social media, misogynistic trolling, attacks on conservative accounts, the stigma of being labelled a “foreign stooge”, and concerns about state surveillance of interviews and dealings with foreign media.	Personal fear, emotional exhaustion, a sense of insecurity when speaking in digital public spaces.	Institutional self-censorship, extreme caution in media interviews (particularly with foreign media), narrowing of public participation.	Strict selection of issues and platforms for discussion, division of speaking roles (giving space to grassroots voices), avoidance of risky exposure.
Feminist Study Circle (Lingkar Studi Feminis) (LSF)	Feminism and diversity.	Hate speech, ideological stigma, account reporting.	Emotional burnout, the normalisation of stress.	The discussion was adjourned; sensitive issues were postponed.	Narrative adjustments, phased strategy.
SIGAB Indonesia	Disability and legal justice.	Repeated website hacking, threats via social media, allegations of defamation.	Fear amongst support workers and families, psychological pressure.	Case advocacy not publicised.	Minimising digital footprints, focus on litigation.
Mubādalāh	Islam and gender justice.	Mass account reporting, <i>doxing</i> , stigmatisation as “kafir/ secular”, attacks by online trolls.	Administrators under attack, emotional crisis, burnout.	Accounts are temporarily suspended, and content is strictly moderated.	Administrative restrictions, email and organisation number checks, multi-tiered consultation.
Swara Rahima	Feminist Islamic Media.	Digital and offline harassment, ideological stigma, reporting.	Sense of security under threat, high alert.	Addresses & contact details removed, content taken down.	Reduced visibility, security mitigation.
Halmahera Coastal Women’s School (Sekolah Perempuan Pesisir Halmahera)	Environment and mining.	Anonymous TikTok attacks, digital and offline intimidation, tracking.	Acute fear, disruption of activities, going into hiding.	Campaigns continue but networking is limited.	Collaboration with national NGOs, strengthening of local bases.
Puspita Bahari	Women fisherfolks and climate crisis.	Suspected surveillance by state authorities.	Exhaustion, fear, the desire to stop.	Self-censorship.	Economic self-reliance, cooperatives, community solidarity.

Source: Compiled by the authors from FGD 2025 data

As summarised in Tables 1 and 2, experiences of violence are not uniform. CSOs focusing on LGBT issues, disability issues, Indigenous communities, and progressive Islamic feminism face layered vulnerabilities influenced by their identities, locations, and social positions. The ‘politics of location’ approach is useful for analysing how state violence operates in a situated, non-neutral and uneven manner in digital spaces.

The omnipresent nature of online gender-based violence demonstrates that technology is not merely a medium but an integral component of the power infrastructure. Through laws, social norms, and the architecture of digital platforms, technology becomes the arena in which control, restriction, and discipline are enforced. In this context, the freedom of expression and political participation of women’s CSOs in

Indonesia is restricted not only by explicit bans, but also by the creation of fear, excessive vigilance and constant exhaustion. Thus, OGBV (also known as KBGO) undermines women's advocacy work by impacting the individuals involved and the organisation's sustainability and capacity.

Repression in the Digital Platform Ecology: Algorithms, Visibility, and the Disciplining of Feminist Activism

The development of social media has transformed patterns of interaction and political participation, including those within digital feminist activism. While it initially relied on the virality of hashtags, characteristic of fourth-wave feminism, in recent years, it has shifted towards solidarity-based activism across CSOs that utilise account collaboration and platform algorithms strategically to broaden the reach of issues. In the context of digital media consumption in Indonesia, where short, light-hearted content dominates, feminist narratives have evolved into easily shareable content that goes viral. However, alongside the state's adoption of surveillance capitalism, discipline is now enforced not only through legislation and the state institutions, but also through algorithms, mass reporting, and a network of paid influencers that restrict the circulation of certain

political issues in the digital sphere.

To understand how this mechanism works, a content analysis was conducted on Instagram posts from ten women's CSOs between 2021 and 2025. This period was chosen because, since the onset of the global pandemic, social media has become the primary arena for advocacy, public education and organising, and this coincides with the crucial phase of enacting and monitoring the Law on Sexual Violence Crimes (UU TPKS). Instagram's collaboration features, such as reels and joint posts, enable CSOs to build solidarity networks across issues and extend the reach of their messages.

Three posts from each account were purposively selected to represent the CSO's identity, advocacy focus, and communication strategy. The relevance of the issue and the level of public engagement were also considered. The posts were analysed based on their text, visuals, and calls to action. Thematic categories such as repression, adaptation and solidarity were considered to be expressions of power relations rather than merely communication choices. This approach enables us to analyse how CSOs navigate a digital platform ecology rife with surveillance, while also revealing the structural limitations of feminist solidarity in a space shaped by algorithms and state control.

Table 3.
Communication Patterns and Digital Feminism in the Framing of Women's CSOs

Main Themes	Thematic Indicators	Women's CSOs in Indicators	Communication Patterns and Digital Strategies
Framing of legal and policy advocacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on legal issues using argumentative language grounded in moral and constitutional legitimacy: the PKS Bill, the KIA Bill, Women Workers' Rights. Prioritising the principles of victim justice and feminist legal theory. 	Perempuan Mahardhika, KUPI/ Mubādalāh, Akara Perempuan.	Using evidence-based framing and the reproductive justice framework. Legal narratives are combined with critiques of gender bias in regulation. Visuals range from formal to semi-popular; the language is argumentative, calling for structural change.
Cross-issue digital solidarity.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration between CSOs and cross-sectoral movements (labour, environment, human rights, and others). Calls for public solidarity through digital visual campaigns or collaborative posts with other CSOs. 	Jakarta Feminist, Arus Pelangi, FMM-Indonesia, Lingkar Studi Feminis (LSF).	Using affective solidarity framing — empathetic language, collaborative visuals, and Instagram's "collab" feature. Prioritising public participation and cross-issue empathy.

Main Themes	Thematic Indicators	Women’s CSOs in Indicators	Communication Patterns and Digital Strategies
Public education and knowledge production.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simplifying feminist theory into popular language. 2. Use of microblogs and educational Reels. 	LSF, SIGAB Indonesia, FAMM-Indonesia, KUPI.	Knowledge activism strategy: disseminating feminist theory and public policy through non-academic language and inclusive visuals. The primary aim is to expand digital feminist literacy.
Resistance to digital repression and the state.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Criticism of the ITE Law, state repression, and patriarchal policies. 2. Rejection of state control over women’s bodies and vulnerable groups. 	Perempuan Mahardhika, LSF, Arus Pelangi, Jakarta Feminist.	Counter-discourse and gendered resistance framing. Content rejecting criminalisation and state control over women’s bodies (including abortion rights). Strong visuals, political language, and collaboration with human rights movements.
Adaptation to platforms and algorithms.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Utilisation of collaboration features, live discussions, and Reels. 2. Shift from one-way publishing to digital interaction. 	SIGAB Indonesia, Jakarta Feminist, FAMM Indonesia.	Adaptive digital strategy: leveraging trends and algorithms (short videos, Reels, collaborative posts). A participatory approach that adapts to digital user behaviour.
Inclusive and discursive language and style.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A shift from legal/academic language to popular language. 2. Use of humour, empathy, and personal narratives to challenge gender bias. 	Arus Pelangi, Jakarta Feminist, LSF.	Conversational advocacy: combining popular styles with serious issues such as reproductive rights, gender identity, and body justice. Light-hearted language is used to open up political conversations.
The 4th wave of digital feminism (Structural transformation and collective care).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integration of education, solidarity, and critique of the patriarchal system. 2. An emphasis on sustainability, support networks and body justice. 	All CSOs (particularly post-2022).	Fourth-wave digital feminism: combining mutual care, reproductive justice, and solidarity across differences. Digital activism is directed towards social transformation and the liberation of women’s bodies.

Source: Adapted from an analysis of social media data from women’s CSOs

The cross-CSO analysis in the table above shows that feminist digital communication strategies are not autonomous but are intertwined with socio-political and cultural structural contexts. These communication dynamics are primarily influenced by three key factors: 1) state pressure through digital regulation; 2) dependence on donors and external resources; and 3) the algorithmic logic of digital platforms, which determines the reach and form of messages.

Firstly, state pressure mediated by regulations such as the ITE Law, the Criminal Code, and the broadcasting regime creates a climate of vigilance and self-restraint in digital advocacy work (de Alwis 2024). Several CSOs,

including Arus Pelangi and Perempuan Mahardhika, have reported that content relating to sexuality, the body, and criticism of moral norms is often considered to carry a risk of triggering digital attacks, reporting, or legal pressure. Consequently, the use of symbolic language, humour, or educational formats serves as a strategy for negotiating restrictive digital power structures that limit feminist discourse.

Secondly, resource inequalities and dependence on donors affect the visibility of organisations within the digital movement. CSOs with limited capacity, such as Sekolah Perempuan Pesisir Halmahera and Puspita Bahari, tend to collaborate extensively with

larger organisations to engage the public. This creates a hierarchy of representation in the digital space.

Thirdly, the algorithmic logic of platforms such as Instagram encourages the oversimplification of structural issues to fit the brief, visual format of digital media consumption. However, some CSOs have developed adaptive strategies involving account collaborations, live discussions, and educational content. This enables them to maintain political substance without losing reach.

On average, patterns of feminist digital activism transformed across the ten CSOs after 2022, particularly following the enactment of the Sexual Violence Crimes Law (UU TPKS). Since 2021, the campaign to monitor the Sexual Violence Bill (RUU PKS) has seen increased collaboration among CSOs, both offline and online. Updates to Instagram's collaborative features have reinforced this. By creating joint posts, CSOs with fewer resources can enhance their legitimacy and public trust whilst raising the profile of feminist issues in the long term. This shift marks a transition from fourth-wave digital feminism, which relies on short-term virality, to fifth-wave feminism, which emphasises cross-issue solidarity and sustaining public attention.

However, the greatest obstacle to feminist digital activism today is the intensification of intense algorithmic and platform discipline, whether through state intervention or the direct repression of individuals within CSOs. This situation restricts the scope of activism in raising broader collective awareness. The caution that CSOs exercise when selecting narratives, managing content visibility and locking social media accounts constitutes a form of collective vigilance that highlights how digital solidarity can also function as a mechanism for collective protection.

Digital Solidarity under a Regime of State Surveillance and Repression

Digital activism is a defining feature of 21st-century social movements. Social media timelines are filled with posts about various issues, each functioning as a strategic tool to raise awareness, shape collective opinion and mobilise public support. In this ecosystem, visibility is the currency of politics, with competing narratives vying for recognition, amplification and dissemination.

Tong and Botts (2024) demonstrate that since the third wave of feminism, technology has prompted feminists to consider the connections among the body,

subjectivity, and machinery. Meanwhile, in the fourth and fifth waves, the internet has become the primary infrastructure for political mobilisation. Feminist hashtag movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, as well as the 2017 Women's March, which involved millions of people worldwide, demonstrate the capacity of digital spaces to foster solidarity and inspire collective action (Tong & Botts 2020). However, these spaces also serve as battlegrounds for digital violence against women. The GamerGate case (2014-2015) and the emergence of misogynistic online subcultures such as incels, the alt-right and anti-women trolls reveal that digital spaces have become venues for organised attacks against women and minorities (Tong & Botts 2024).

These dynamics are reinforced by the way in which the platforms operate. Algorithms prioritise content that drives engagement, including narratives targeting women and vulnerable groups. In the context of digital governance, mechanisms such as mass reporting, monitoring, and law enforcement — including under the ITE Law — create conditions in which feminist activism is vulnerable to moral delegitimation and suppression. Consequently, digital feminist praxis and solidarity must continually be negotiated within spaces conditioned by algorithmic logic and surveillance. Conversely, digital feminist activism is often criticised as 'slacktivism', or as online practices considered to have little structural impact (Tong & Botts 2024). Examples include posting hashtags, 'likes', or online petitions, which are often considered merely symbolic. However, this criticism is not entirely adequate. Digital spaces remain capable of raising awareness, broadening the reach of issues, and shifting public opinion. Therefore, viewing digital politics solely as superficial participation risks overlooking how movements have evolved in the platform era (Mirani 2016; Tong & Botts 2024).

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) explain this shift through the concept of 'connective action'. Unlike traditional collective action, which relies on formal organisations, shared ideologies, and hierarchical leadership structures, connective action operates within fluid networks of digitally connected individuals (Bennett & Segerberg 2013, p. 35; Loader & Dutton 2012; Stohl 2014). These networks are formed through the sharing of personalised content, such as stories, testimonials, and emotional responses. This creates affective resonance and opens up possibilities for mobilisation, eliminating the need for rigid organisational structures. In other words, it creates opportunities for forming new solidarity.

In Indonesia, this pattern is evident in the #SahkanRUUPKS campaign. Developing through digital connections across regions and social classes, this movement combined survivors' testimonies, online petitions, hashtag monitoring, and offline actions. Ultimately, this led to the enactment of UU TPKS (Law No. 12 of 2022). In this process, personal experiences of the body and trauma become a shared political resource when these experiences are politicised as structural issues rather than merely as individual stories (Mohanty et al. 1995; BBC News Indonesia 2019; Dewi 2025).

Findings from the FGDs organised by Jurnal Perempuan reinforce the idea that digital activism cannot automatically be equated with political apathy. For CSOs working on queer issues and with vulnerable groups, the digital space often serves as the primary medium for expanding the reach of advocacy when physical spaces are restricted by stigma, persecution, and threats. It is therefore more useful to view online and offline campaigns as complementary practices than as two mutually exclusive modes. E from Arus Pelangi rejects the idea that digital campaigning is a lazy form of activism.

"In my view, any social media campaign is a form of support, no matter how small. We must understand why people choose not to join protests. Everyone has their own reasons... and I believe social media campaigns are effective at conveying messages. Especially now, when it's 'no viral, no justice'. No matter how small, people's support deserves appreciation. Through social media campaigns, people in other regions can learn about the cause we are fighting for. Online and offline activism are therefore interconnected and complement one another" (EW, Arus Pelangi 2025, FGD 19 September).

This perspective suggests that 'slacktivism' does not adequately reflect the complexity of the digital feminist movement in Indonesia. The digital space acts as an amplifier, strengthening links between real-world activism and bridging the gap among awareness, visibility, and sustainability.

However, as Zuboff (2019) warns, this digital space is also embedded within the surveillance infrastructure of the state and corporations. The digitalisation of solidarity is inextricably linked to the emergence of new forms of vulnerability. When personal experiences are shared online, the resulting data and digital traces can be exploited for surveillance, control, and potential criminalisation within the digital governance regime. In this regime, visibility becomes both a political resource and a source of risk. The FGDs revealed that doxxing, threats, and the dissemination of personal data have

compelled CSOs such as Arus Pelangi to privatise their accounts. Digital solidarity thus creates a paradox between the need for visibility and the need for security.

This situation reflects the exercise of disciplinary power within the ecology of digital platforms. Surveillance practices employed by the state, law enforcement agencies, and intolerant social actors intertwine to create digital authoritarianism. In response to this, digital solidarity evolves from symbolic expression into collective care and protection. Activists such as myself from FMM-Indonesia emphasise the importance of digital defensive and preventive mechanisms. Having experienced symbolic terror via food deliveries ordered through online ride-hailing services, FMM-I removed its office address from its website, formed an internal digital security team, organised training sessions, and compiled security guidelines for activist networks. These measures demonstrate that transformative digital solidarity requires ongoing efforts to protect individuals and organisations.

Nevertheless, digital solidarity also has structural limitations that must be critically acknowledged. In Indonesia, for example, online feminist campaigns often perpetuate urban and middle-class biases, inadequately representing the experiences of rural women, migrant workers, Indigenous communities, the elderly, and women with limited digital access. The dominant visual and discursive language on social media often reflects an urban, middle-class aesthetic that is not always inclusive.

This finding is supported by EV of the Feminist Studies Circle (Lingkar Studi Feminis/LSF), who explained that many women in Banten, particularly housewives, lack adequate digital access due to limitations in infrastructure or digital literacy. She explained that many women in Banten, particularly housewives, lack adequate digital access due to limitations in infrastructure or digital literacy. "Sometimes, the language of our campaigns is not easily understood by housewives," she said. In response to this issue, the LSF balances online campaigns with offline organising on campuses and within communities. In this way, digital solidarity acts as an amplifier that must be linked to grassroots organising work to avoid perpetuating urban bias.

Furthermore, the logic of virality and algorithms prioritises sensational content, causing public solidarity to dissipate quickly and marginalising the voices of affected groups. As noted by Tong & Botts (2024), stigma against women and queer activists further narrows the

safe space within digital politics. Within the framework of critical feminism, transformative digital solidarity requires three things: awareness of the politics of location, accountability for privilege, and concrete action. All three are necessary to ensure that digital connectivity extends beyond visibility and becomes a sustainable collective endeavour.

Within this framework, transformative digital solidarity requires an awareness of the politics of location, accountability regarding privilege, and concrete action. Awareness of the politics of location involves a reflective understanding of one's position within unequal social and digital structures. Accountability regarding privilege means using visibility and access to create space for those marginalised by algorithmic logic and social hierarchies, not merely to amplify one's own voice. Concrete praxis involves translating online connectivity into forms of mobilisation and collective work that extend beyond the screen.

Within this framework, digital feminist activism must utilise online platforms in a conscious, reflective, and strategic manner. This is not merely to enhance visibility but also to expand the space to be heard and to exercise political influence. As emphasised in the theory of disciplinary power, digital surveillance is not only repressive, but also productive in shaping subjects and the scope for action (Hass 1996). Recognising this productive dimension allows the digital feminist movement to engage with and utilise algorithmic logic to create alternative subjectivities and discourses. This enables women and minority groups to collectively increase their visibility, build solidarity, and develop the capacity to resist within the surveillance ecology itself.

From Solidarity to Sustainability: Adaptation Strategies of Women's CSOs

Digital solidarity should not be viewed merely as a 'campaign mode', but rather as ongoing political work that involves continual negotiation with risk. In a surveillance regime, visibility serves a dual purpose: it facilitates mobilisation while simultaneously opening the door to doxxing, criminalisation, and censorship. As virality is fleeting and digital spaces are not always safe, external funding is also dwindling. Women's CSOs must therefore develop political survival strategies, such as managing exposure, building collective protection, and maintaining the infrastructure of solidarity, to ensure that advocacy work can continue.

In situations involving multi-layered pressure through law, moral stigma, and platform infrastructure,

repression does not always take the form of direct prohibition, but rather the 'risk of punishment' fosters vigilance and self-restraint. These conditions have prompted CSOs to renegotiate their modes of operation, including communication strategies and organisational governance. Findings from the FGDs reveal four prominent clusters of adaptation strategies: funding diversification, strengthening digital security, adopting a low-profile approach, and strengthening networks and cross-organisational solidarity.

Firstly, regarding funding. Research by Boangmanalu and Aprilia (2022) suggests that the reduction in funding for feminist CSOs is not only linked to shifts in global donor priorities, but also to the way in which certain issues, such as sexuality, reproductive rights and freedom of expression, are situated within policy and regulatory frameworks that are considered politically sensitive. In this context, feminist funding is not neutral; it is intertwined with power dynamics that influence the scope of action, security, and sustainability of feminist work at the grassroots level.

For example, Jakarta Feminis withdrew from a funding programme after being asked to submit documents to a state security agency and clarify their work on gender and sexuality, as they believed this would endanger community safety. They also ceased cooperating with another donor when their regional partner was restricted and censored for strongly criticising government policy. These decisions demonstrate that an organisation's sustainability is inextricably linked to political security and independence in advocacy. Other CSOs build financial independence through community-based mechanisms, such as membership fees, cooperatives, and productive enterprises that support safe houses, as practised by Puspita Bahari. FAMM Indonesia has also developed a members' savings scheme to provide solidarity funding and support for members facing threats.

Secondly, public fundraising becomes a vital survival strategy when the state is absent or inadequate. For instance, during the pandemic, Arus Pelangi relied on solidarity campaigns to help meet the community's basic needs when many trans women lost their livelihoods. Similar practices are evident in the LSF Banten art exhibition initiative, which was set up to raise solidarity funds. However, rising political risks have also prompted some organisations to exercise caution in their fundraising, using more neutral programme terminology to avoid scrutiny from the authorities or online trolls. This pattern of resilience is consistent with

the findings of LBH APIK Jakarta during the pandemic. Cuts in foreign donor funding directly impacted services for victims, while administrative requirements often made things more difficult for victims and their support workers (Kurnia 2022, pp. 146–147). This demonstrates how CSOs continue to support victims despite minimal funding.

Thirdly, cyberattacks and physical threats have prompted women's CSOs to design digital security protocols as part of their survival strategy. Experiences of hacking, doxing, and symbolic terror have forced organisations to develop multi-layered protection mechanisms, ranging from drafting digital security standard operating procedures (SOPs) and providing security literacy training to separating work and personal communication infrastructures. Some CSOs have moved internal coordination to more secure platforms, while others have developed innovative strategies, such as masking websites, to enable survivors to access services without leaving a digital footprint. These practices demonstrate that digital security is not only a technical issue, but also part of collective care work in repressive conditions.

This step is taken as an alternative, informal protection mechanism when civil society organisations face difficulties carrying out advocacy (Kurnia 2024). Kurnia (2024) also observed this in her research on formal and informal protection mechanisms for women human rights defenders (WHRDs). Online violence (OV) can affect the sense of safety and performance of service providers working within these CSOs (Kurnia 2022).

Physical, social, and political threats have also prompted CSOs to adopt a low-profile strategy. Some organisations have reduced the publication of sensitive cases, removed office addresses from digital platforms and scaled back the frequency of social media posts. Others have changed the format of their advocacy to discussions and seminars in order to avoid political stigmatisation and dissolution. This strategy reflects efforts to selectively manage visibility to protect members and the communities they support.

Amidst this pressure, collaboration and network solidarity have become the main pillars sustaining the movement. CSOs share resources, funding support and security information through cross-organisational consolidation and psychosocial networks for young activists. This solidarity enables CSOs to continue their advocacy work despite facing funding crises and multi-layered repression.

These findings suggest that the sustainability of women's CSOs depends not only on access to funding but also on their ability to build collective protection, manage political visibility, and strengthen solidarity networks. A resilience ecosystem comprising financial strategies, digital security measures, a low-profile approach, and intercommunity cooperation enables the women's movement to survive and thrive amid state pressure and the logic of digital platforms.

Conclusion

The findings in this paper demonstrate that state violence in the digital sphere does not operate in isolation. Rather, it operates through a convergence of law, technology, moral stigma and the logic of digital platforms, all of which reinforce one another. Women's CSOs experience repression in the form of direct criminalisation, as well as through surveillance, layered threats and the reduction of safe spaces. This leads to self-censorship and collective exhaustion. In this context, digital solidarity cannot be viewed as a neutral practice or merely as a campaigning tool. Instead, it must be recognised as a constantly negotiated political arena with inherent risks. Therefore, the sustainability of the feminist movement cannot depend on fleeting virality, but rather on the capacity to establish a protective, caring, and supportive infrastructure that transcends differences.

This article also shows that digital spaces are a fraught feminist battlefield that simultaneously opens up new political possibilities. Women's organisations in Indonesia are not only confronting legal pressures, algorithmic bias and a global funding crisis, but are also actively developing their resilience through collective work, strategic innovation and solidarity networks.

For women's CSOs, this reflection highlights the importance of strengthening collective, sustainable adaptation strategies. Digital security must be recognised as an integral part of feminist care work rather than merely a technical issue. This can be achieved by establishing shared protocols, disseminating knowledge on risk mitigation, and strategically managing visibility. In the face of shrinking international funding, political steps to safeguard independence and advocacy include diversifying resources through community-based schemes, fostering solidarity between organisations, and strengthening the collective economy. Building alliances across issues, such as feminism, labour, the environment, disability, Indigenous peoples, and the

queer community, is also crucial in challenging the fragmentation of movements, which is often reinforced by algorithmic logic and donor funding.

The findings of this research require policymakers to fundamentally change their approach to freedom of expression and the protection of citizens in the digital sphere. Legal instruments such as the ITE Law and the Criminal Code have proven more effective as tools of discipline than of protection, particularly for women and vulnerable groups. Revising problematic regulations, limiting vague interpretations and recognising the diversity of civil society movements are prerequisites for preventing layered political criminalisation. The state must acknowledge that technology-based violence is structural violence, not merely an individual issue, and therefore policy responses must be oriented towards gender justice and human rights.

For donors and global partners, these findings highlight the urgent need for sustainable, equitable and context-sensitive feminist funding. Reliance on short-term project logic, quantitative indicators and urban biases risks undermining the work of grassroots women's CSOs operating in the most vulnerable conditions. Donors must therefore provide long-term, flexible and trust-based funding while respecting the political autonomy of CSOs and avoiding the imposition of security agendas or bureaucratic structures that endanger communities. Feminist funding should strengthen the movement's critical capacity and sustainability, rather than merely acting as a stabilisation tool.

Amidst these pressures, women's CSOs respond not merely defensively, but through creative and politically adaptive strategies. These include managing visibility, establishing collective protection mechanisms, fostering solidarity networks and developing community-based sustainability initiatives. These practices demonstrate that digital solidarity is more than just a form of symbolic expression; it provides a tangible space for resistance against state and platform discipline.

However, transformative digital solidarity — not just clicks, hashtags or virality — requires connectivity combined with collective care, political courage and a commitment to continually challenging unequal power structures. Adopting a feminist perspective, this essay affirms the strength and resilience of these women's CSOs. It asserts that the future of the women's movement depends on our capacity to cultivate solidarity as an ongoing, reflective political endeavour.

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Footnote

1 The data in this table represent the experiences and interpretations of FGD participants regarding the situations they face in the digital space. These data form part of the qualitative findings of this research and do not constitute legal claims against any specific party.

AUTHOR GUIDELINES

Jurnal Perempuan (JP) is a quarterly interdisciplinary publication in the English language that aims to circulate **original ideas in gender studies**. JP invites critical reflection on the theory and practice of feminism in the social, political, and economic context of Indonesian society. We are committed to exploring gender in its multiple forms and interrelationships.

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