

## Filtering Patriarchal Culture: The Path to Equality and Change

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### ABSTRACT

The study illustrates women's struggles in achieving political participation in Yogyakarta, a region still deeply rooted in a strong patriarchal culture. It is clear that society's assumption that politics is exclusive to men, coupled with women's lack of political knowledge, poses a significant obstacle to women's involvement in politics. Although the government mandate emphasizes the need for women's representation in politics, the level of women's participation in Yogyakarta's political institutions remains low, especially regarding the decision-making process. The focus of this research is on the role played by Kinasih Women's Solidarity (SP) in helping women in DIY to overcome patriarchal barriers and increase their involvement in politics. Through various empowerment programs and political education initiatives, SP Kinasih supports women in understanding the intricacies of politics and strengthening their ability in political decision-making. However, these efforts often met resistance from local religious and community leaders. A case study of a woman named Ulil, despite not successfully securing a legislative position, managed to influence women's political perspectives by advocating for women's viewpoints in candidate selection. This study concludes the importance of increasing women's capacity through empowerment programs to represent women's interests in political decision-making and overcome the patriarchal culture that still exists in Yogyakarta's political structure.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality; Patriarchy; Women's Empowerment; Women's Organization.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The combination of women's involvement in politics and patriarchal cultural barriers that are still deeply rooted in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY) is an important issue to be examined. People often still view politics as a typical stage for men, while women's lack of knowledge about politics is an obstacle to their participation in politics, either directly or indirectly. This phenomenon creates gender inequality in contravention of government policy which sets a 30% quota for women's representation in politics (Pancaningtyas, 2015). The low number of women in political institutions in DIY reflects the strong application of patriarchal culture in society, which results in women being marginalized from the decision-making process, as reflected in prevailing norms, customs, and beliefs.

The long history of women's involvement in Indonesian politics, including the first women's congress in 1928 in Yogyakarta which was attended by hundreds of women, is not in line with current conditions that show the lack of women's involvement in politics, especially in formal institutions such as the DPR / DPRD (Huda & Dodi, 2020). Although the female population is larger than men in DIY, women's political representation is still relatively small, followed by a strong patriarchal culture in some districts that further hinders women's participation in various social and political aspects. This article focuses on the Kinasih Solidarity for Women (SP) organization as the object of study because of the vision of this organization which is committed to empowering women, through the struggle to fight for women's rights with the principles of democracy, emancipation, egalitarianism, and non-sectarianism, with the aim that people have fair access and control over economic, political, and cultural resources.

Women's empowerment in Islam highlights the strong foundation in providing equal rights to women in society. Islamic teachings affirm equal rights, brotherhood, and equal responsibilities between women and men in seeking good, economic rights that provide independence, and pressure on the importance of education for women ('Aisyiyah, 2022; Bakry, 2023; Sany, 2019). In addition, Islam also encourages women's participation in social activities that promote justice, strictly prohibit violence against women, and provide strong protection of their rights (Ilyas, 2020). It describes women's empowerment in Islam not just as a rhetorical concept, but rather a principle recognized and embodied in this religion, providing space for women to become agents of change in society and play an active role in sustainable social, economic, and spiritual development.

In Islam, women's empowerment lies on the foundation of equal rights, educational opportunities, and protection against violence (Rudolf, 2020). These religious teachings provide the basis for equal rights and responsibilities between women and men, economic rights that provide independence, and emphasis on the importance of education for women ('Aisyiyah, 2022; Bakry, 2023; Sany, 2019). Moreover, Islam also emphasizes women's participation in social activities aimed at promoting justice, prohibiting violence against women, and providing strong

protection of their rights (Ilyas, 2020). This approach affirms that women's empowerment in Islam is not just a discourse, but a principle recognized and embodied in this religion, providing space for women to play an active role in the development of society as a whole.

Women's empowerment spans goals that cover key areas critical to their progress and well-being as well as society as a whole (Woolcock, 2019). The main focus is gender equality, ensuring women have the same rights as men in various aspects of life, from education to employment to important decision making (Razavi, 2016). Other goals include improving women's economies by providing access to employment and training opportunities, as well as supporting quality education to strengthen their independence. In addition, empowerment efforts are also focused on women's health and well-being, including better access to reproductive health services and information to reduce maternal and child mortality (Saud et al., 2020). Women's empowerment also seeks active participation in decision-making at various levels, supports the elimination of violence against women, as well as assists in the development of women's spiritual and emotional aspects, provides psychological support and builds confidence so that they are able to face life's challenges better (Adhha, 2020).

Many studies discuss women's struggles in achieving political participation, especially in the context of a strong patriarchal culture, similar to the findings in this study that describe conditions in Yogyakarta. Literature such as "Women and Politics in Contemporary Yogyakarta" or "Gender and Power in Affluent Asia" provides similar insights into the obstacles faced by women in politics in the Yogyakarta region (Astuti, 2016; Stivens, 2002; Tickamyner & Kusujarti, 2012; Waites, 2009). However, the emphasis on societal assumptions about politics as the exclusive domain of men, along with the lack of women's political knowledge, found in this study, can add a layer of more specific understanding of the challenges women face in politics in regions with strong patriarchal cultures such as Yogyakarta.

The purpose of this study is to investigate and document the challenges and struggles faced by women in achieving political participation in Yogyakarta, a region that remains attached to the dominant patriarchal cultural values. Through this research, we will explain in more detail how society's assumption of politics as an exclusive domain for men, along with the lack of political knowledge experienced by women, is a major obstacle to their involvement in the political sphere in this region which is still strongly influenced by patriarchal culture.

## **METHODS**

The method used in this article is a qualitative methodology with a descriptive analysis approach (Creswell, 2015) to describe in depth the efforts to filter patriarchal culture carried out by the Kinasih Women's Solidarity (SP) organization through women's empowerment to provide community empowerment,

especially for grassroots women and women who want to actively participate in politics.

This research focuses on the challenges of women's political participation in Yogyakarta, an area that is thick with patriarchal cultural values. To gain a comprehensive understanding, data is collected through two main methods. First, recorded interviews with three informants who have backgrounds as activists and activists of women's organizations in the region. This interview provides firsthand insights and experiences from actors involved in the women's movement in the political sphere. Furthermore, the author also conducts an extensive literature review by collecting data from books, journals, and other sources that have close relevance and relevance to the focus and objectives of the research. This approach provides a strong theoretical foundation by exploring related literature to deepen understanding of Yogyakarta's political and cultural context that influences women's political participation in an area that is still heavily influenced by patriarchal culture.

The steps in data analysis began with the collection of data and information from informants, consisting of activists and activists of women's organizations in Yogyakarta. The collected data is then processed and analyzed qualitatively. This analysis process involves an in-depth examination and review of the interview recordings that have been conducted. In addition, the focus of the analysis also leads to examining the empowerment efforts carried out by SP Kinasih. The aim is to understand how this organization seeks to bring about changes that lead to the achievement of gender equality in the region. The qualitative analysis made it possible to explore more deeply the role and strategies used by SP Kinasih in its efforts to achieve the goals of women's empowerment and fight for gender equality amid a strong patriarchal culture in Yogyakarta.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The discussion about women must intersect with efforts to advance democracy because every citizen in Indonesia has equal rights in the social, cultural, economic, political and legal fields. Patriarchal cultures have universal characteristics, often manifesting as violence and injustice, but women often do not perceive these as injustices, seen in things like stereotypes, labeling, violence, and the double burden placed on women. Factors such as religious doctrines that teach wives to obey their husbands are thought to perpetuate patriarchal culture in society. In most parts of Indonesia including DIY, there is a strong patriarchal culture that further marginalizes the role of women, especially in decision making.

In politics, women often do not have a strong bargaining position. They are rarely given space to have a voice, and even when provided with a platform, often have difficulty voicing opinions, hindering women's participation in politics to reach their maximum potential (Alfiyani & Zulfikar, 2021). Historical evidence of women's involvement in Indonesian politics does exist, seen in the first women's

congress held in 1928 in Yogyakarta, attended by around 600 women. But contemporary realities are not so encouraging.

### **Feminism and the Critique of Patriarchy**

Feminism is a social and political movement that highlights the role and rights of women in society, while Patriarchal Criticism is a theory that analyzes patriarchal structures and mechanisms in society. The feminist approach and patriarchal critique both reveal how patriarchal culture influences behavior and thinking, both women and men, and causes gender inequality in various aspects of life such as politics, economics, and health (Dahlerup, 2018).

Feminism and Patriarchal Critique are used together to show how patriarchal culture influences the behavior and thinking of women and men, as well as causing its inequality in society (Rawat, 2014). This is due to norms balanced by patriarchal culture, such as the norm that men should be more dominant than women in various aspects of life.

The history of women in Indonesia illustrates the great influence of patriarchal culture that has influenced behavior and outlook on life for both women and men. In the colonial period, social norms and structures based on patriarchal culture limited the role of women, reinforcing the belief that male dominance was considered the norm in various aspects of life (Dahlerup, 2018). This limitation is reflected in gender inequality, hindering women's participation in politics, economics, and health in Indonesia (Intentilia, 2020).

Now, in the modern era and globalization, the impact of patriarchal culture is still very strong in determining people's behavior and perceptions of the position of women and men in Indonesia (Fitrianti et al., 2023). Gender inequality is still a reality that continues to be faced by women, both in the political, economic, and health contexts. The dominant role of men and greater control in various aspects of life confirms that the struggle for gender equality remains a significant challenge for women in Indonesia.

### **Constructivism**

Constructivism is a theory in the social sciences and education that emphasizes that knowledge is not only understood as something that is taken for granted, but is also a construct made by individuals through interaction with their experiences and environment (Fosnot, 2013). The constructivist approach in the context of feminism is an interesting point of view. This allows us to see gender as something formed by social, cultural, and linguistic interactions, rather than something that has been established from birth or biologically. This opens the door to a deeper understanding of gender identity roles and identities as a result of evolving social norms and structures.

In this case, the concept of gender becomes a social construct that can be changed, not something that is embedded naturally (Bonvillain, 2020). The idea that men should have certain traits and women should have certain characteristics is a product of culture and norms that have been imprinted in society (Bonvillain, 2020). Therefore, with this constructivist understanding, we can question and tear down patriarchal structures that institutionalize gender inequality.

How we perceive gender and its associated roles not only reflects the mindset of individuals, but is also reflected in society as a whole. With constructivist thinking, we can build a more inclusive society, where unjust norms can be corrected and changed towards gender equality. This requires critical reflection, collective support, and sustained efforts to counter patriarchal norms that generate gender inequality.

### **Women and Politics in DIY**

Women's involvement in formal political institutions such as parliament is far from the expected level. Given the larger female population compared to men in DIY, the number of women involved in politics is very small. The formidable patriarchal culture in some districts of Yogyakarta makes it increasingly difficult for women to participate in various social and political activities.

Examining the reality surrounding these grassroots women, SP Kinasih uses a women's empowerment approach and political education for women to overcome patriarchal culture and increase their involvement in politics. Through strengthening women's personal capacity through feminist training, SP Kinasih produces women leaders. Internalizing gender and feminist perspectives, the organization found that this had an impact on women's maturity and independence in decision-making. Yuniarta, who was previously active in SP Kinasih, revealed that when they helped women victims of the earthquake in Bantul in 2006, they saw that women were hardly involved in the decision-making process. Their help gave birth to influential women who dared to speak out, observe, criticize and even engage in political space.

“Our review of women's participation at the grassroots level includes the approach used by SP Kinasih in strengthening women's position in the political realm. The approach to women's empowerment and political education that has been promoted has succeeded in overcoming patriarchal cultural obstacles that prevent women from being actively involved in politics. Through feminist training, this organization has succeeded in creating a number of female leaders. The instillation of gender concepts and feminist views has had a significant impact, increasing women's independence and maturity in the decision-making process.” (Interview, Yuniarta, DIY, 2022)

Earlier in 2004, SP Kinasih had provided political education focused on imagining outcomes, but stopped this due to self-reflection that it did not lead to

practical politics. The result is a Memorandum of Understanding (the fact of integrity between the public and the legislative candidate/political contract). This MoU is woven not only with female candidates but all candidates contain promises that elected legislators must be ready to fight for a political agenda agreed upon together with the community.

Ulil is one of the grassroots women who attended SP Kinasih's feminist training. With gender and feminist concepts, SP Kinasih teaches the importance of sharing family and public roles between genders. In the public sphere, women must influence policies because non-involvement causes women to only be objects, whereas involvement in policymaking produces results that meet women's needs (Banuarli et al., 2022). In addition to feminist training in 2009, Ulil also attended political education that taught that women should participate in legislative nominations. This feminist and political education motivated Ulil to contest the 2009 elections under the Sovereign Democratic Party (PDK), rejecting money politics to practice proper political education for herself and the community. Due to the lack of party funds for the campaign, Ulil's friends helped make stickers and campaign materials.

Ulil obtained 6th place for individual candidate votes in Bantul district but lost due to the party's low rating, caused by running individually under Indonesia's open proportional system where party rank determines the outcome despite personal votes. Another external factor is people's enthusiasm for money politics while Ulil strongly avoids it. Her 3500 votes came purely from women's groups, although many wives had to oppose different husbands' political choices. Some women admit to following their husband's choice, but many steadfastly maintain support for Ulil.

"My struggle in the election can be seen from the sixth rank I obtained as an individual candidate in Bantul. Despite winning votes individually, I lost because of the party's low ranking. This is a consequence of the open proportional system in Indonesia, where the final result is determined by party ranks, even though my vote is quite significant." (Interview, Ulil, DIY, 2022)

Ulil's campaign educates women that they should be involved in the budgeting process so that regional development planning forums can produce budgets that uphold women's interests, as previous budget allocations were heavily focused on local football teams. Before obtaining political education, their activities revolved around schools and neighboring women's associations (*dasawisma*). Political choices simply follow party lines based on loyalty. If their party represents a particular Islamic organization, they support candidates from that background rather than assessing individual abilities or perspectives. After receiving political education and frequent communication with local women's groups, women finally accepted invitations to development planning discussions. Previously having no provisions for daycare, maternity clinics or early childhood education, women's

involvement contributed to budget allocations for books in kindergartens and other women-friendly policies.

Women's groups also invite lawmakers for dialogue and public discussion with all community groups, slowly changing the perception that politics is exclusively for men. Ulil and the Bantul women's group took about 4-5 years to reshape the patriarchal mindset that limits women's aspirations and leadership. The processing of gender education and politics of SP Kinasih opened new horizons of thinking throughout Bantul society. Efforts were made to occupy strategic government positions such as the Village Administration Office Section (Kaur) and Village Secretary to institutionalize the involvement of women outside the legislature into bureaucratic policymaking. They pass mandatory tests to qualify for this administrative role.

Through the election, most Bantul women have understood the importance of assessing a candidate's vision and perspective rather than gender. They tend to support candidates who uphold women's interests regardless of whether they are women. This shift recognizes some elected female legislators do not represent women's aspirations, hence the focus on perspectives rather than markers of identity. Communicating with politically educated women therefore required an ingenious rhetorical strategy during the campaign.

### **Women's Political Transformation**

Success over patriarchy is not easily achieved by SP Kinasih. Ulil described facing backlash alongside fellow women activists when deciding to engage the organization. They endured accusations of Christianization and forced discussions with religious leaders who interrogated their motives and warned about SP Kinasih's alleged hidden Christian agenda. Some even circulated misleading photos of SP members to various villages labeling them as covert Christian movements. To ease tensions in his region allowing space for open communication, Ulil invited a conservative religious leader's wife to participate in SP Kinasih's activities and meetings so that doubts could be instantly clarified with the observation that the actual discussion revolved around women's roles and rights. Maintaining good relations, Ulil also often led Islamic hymns and prayers in front of suspicious religious leaders as proof of his Muslim faith and identity.

"We at SP Kinasih face a big challenge in fighting for patriarchal change. When we, the women activists, chose to join, we were faced with accusations of Christianization and intense discussions with religious leaders. Some spread misleading photos to demonize our image. To ease tensions, we invited wives of religious leaders to participate, proving that our focus is on women's roles and rights. We try to maintain good relations by leading prayers and Islamic hymns as proof of our identity." (Interview, Yunnarta Vuspita, DIY, 2022)



The above information shows how deeply patriarchal culture influences women's activities, especially political opportunities and decision-making – both from the candidate's perspective and societies. However, various groups such as SP Kinasih are making efforts to address this challenge. By providing political education, feminist training and capacity building for women, they have succeeded in empowering women to take active political roles. It involves changing societal and masculine mindsets to recognize women's vital participation in decision-making. Although major barriers such as proportional open systems and money politics remain, political education and women's empowerment demonstrate the ability to spur positive change. Women who undergo this empowerment process become better able to participate in politics and influence policies that uphold women's interests.

The information provided emphasizes the pervasive influence of patriarchal culture, particularly its impact on the political engagement of women and their involvement in decision-making processes. It highlights the challenges encountered by women, both as political aspirants and within the broader societal context. However, initiatives such as SP Kinasih have emerged to confront and address these prevailing obstacles. Through tailored programs encompassing political education, feminist training, and capacity-building efforts specifically designed for women, these initiatives have played a pivotal role in empowering women to actively participate in political domains.

These efforts necessitate a paradigm shift in societal attitudes and the traditional male-centric mindset to acknowledge and appreciate the significant role played by women in shaping decision-making processes. Despite persistent hurdles, such as proportional open systems and the prevalence of monetary influences in politics, the amalgamation of political education and women's empowerment endeavors has emerged as a catalyst for positive transformation (Fosnot, 2013; Tickamyer & Kusujarti, 2012; Wingood & DiClemente, 2002). Women who partake in these empowerment initiatives are better equipped to engage in politics, advocate for their rights, and influence policies that prioritize women's interests.

SP Kinasih's approach represents a notable step towards bridging the gender gap within political spheres. The organization's emphasis on feminist training and capacity-building exercises has fostered leadership among women, inspiring them to voice their opinions, critique existing norms, and actively engage in political discourse. This transformative process is essential in reshaping the narrative surrounding women's roles in decision-making processes, as seen in the emergence of influential female voices willing to challenge the status quo.

However, despite these strides, systemic barriers persist, hindering women's full participation in politics. The prevalence of proportional open systems and the dominance of money-driven politics pose considerable challenges. Nevertheless, the combined efforts of political education and women's empowerment initiatives provide a promising foundation for effecting substantial and sustainable change. Women empowered through these programs are better equipped to navigate and

influence political landscapes, ensuring their interests are adequately represented and advocated for in policymaking arenas.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion on women's empowerment and gender equality in Indonesia has very significant implications, not only as a human right, but also in strengthening democracy to build a more just society. The strong patriarchal culture in regions such as the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY) has long hindered the role of women, especially in the realm of decision-making. Although history records women's involvement in Indonesian politics since the first women's congress in 1928, contemporary realities show that barriers such as patriarchal mindsets and money politics continue to hinder women's leadership and substantial political participation.

In-depth observations by SP Kinasih reveal that the deep patriarchal culture in Yogyakarta often limits women's personal and political decision-making roles. Many times, their political choices depend only on the loyalty of external parties, not on an assessment of the candidate's vision, perspective, and policies. However, through political education and feminist training, women's awareness is enhanced, giving them the capacity to actively participate in decision-making processes. This, in turn, changes women's perceptions and roles in the family and society, strengthening their understanding of gender roles, women's rights, and political agency. Despite being faced with money politics and systemic hurdles, increasing women's capabilities through phased empowerment programs will enable broader participation, representing women's interests as a whole in politics.

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