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## Women's Political Representation in the Palu City DPRD: Access, Participation, and Structural-Cultural Barriers

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## Abstract

This study examines the existence of women legislators in the Palu City Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), which remains a crucial issue in local democracy practices despite the normative guarantee of gender equality. This study aims to examine the presence of female legislators in the Palu City DPRD, in terms of representation, political roles, and the structural and cultural challenges they face. The study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a sociological and phenomenological approach, through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies of DPRD members, institutional leaders, and relevant institutional documents. The results show that Palu City has the potential socially, demographically, and in human resources for women's involvement in politics, but this potential has not been optimally realized. Women's representation in the Palu City DPRD remains low, access to strategic commissions is limited, and there are no women in the leadership structure, so women's participation tends to be symbolic. The findings reveal that patriarchal culture, weak political party support, and limited strategic positions hinder the substantive role of women legislators. Therefore, strengthening affirmative policies, transforming political culture, and enhancing institutional capacity are essential to enable women legislators to promote fair and gender-responsive public policies more effectively.

## Keywords

Access, Local Democracy, Representation, Women Legislators, Women's Participation.

## 1. Introduction

Women's participation in the political arena, particularly in legislative institutions, remains a crucial issue in Indonesian democracy. Although the principle of equality is constitutionally guaranteed, reality shows that women's involvement in public decision-making processes does not reflect the principle of representative justice (Mandasari, 2023). The low representation of women in parliament is not simply a quantitative issue but also relates to the quality of democracy and the bias of policies toward vulnerable groups, including women themselves (Bagaskara & Ma'ruf, 2025).

Sociologically, the limited role of women in the political sphere cannot be separated from the cultural construction of Indonesian society, which is still dominated by patriarchal values. This cultural system forms gender stereotypes that place women in the domestic sphere, while public spaces, including politics, are identified with men (Iriansyah, 2017). These cultural attributes indirectly limit women's mobility, hinder access to political resources, and contribute to low self-confidence and structural support for women to emerge as equal political actors (Pujiriyani, 2025).

The imbalance in gender representation in legislative institutions has a serious impact on the substance of public policy. Male dominance in parliament tends to produce regulations that are less sensitive to gender issues, as women's experiences and perspectives are not adequately represented in the legislative process (Anjarsari, 2025). This situation has led to the birth of various affirmative policies, one of which is the implementation of a minimum quota of 30 percent female representation, which is then reinforced through the zipper system mechanism in legislative nominations. This policy is the result of a long struggle by women activists to open up a more inclusive political space (Tias et al., 2023).

The idea of increasing women's representation stems from the perspective of substantive representation, which emphasizes that women's presence in parliament is not merely symbolic but is also expected to bring women's agendas, interests, and experiences into state policy (Ningsih, 2025). Women are believed to possess stronger sensitivity, empathy, and gender awareness toward women's issues, so their presence in legislative institutions is expected to more effectively oversee regulations related to women's protection and empowerment (Pujayanti, 2025).

However, reality shows that women's presence in parliament has not yet fully transformed into a significant political force (Wahyudi, 2018). The lack of courage and capacity to articulate ideas, as well as the suboptimal role of the Indonesian Parliamentary Women's Caucus (*Kaucus Perempuan Parlemen Republik Indonesia/KPPRI*), pose challenges. Women's caucus activities remain largely focused on procedural aspects, such as the Election Law and Party Law, and have not yet addressed the grand strategy of strengthening women's political positions (Tias et al., 2023). Moreover, opportunities for women to occupy strategic positions such as faction leadership remain very limited (Umagapi, 2020).

This situation is also reflected at the local level, particularly in the Palu City Regional Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah/DPRD*). The Palu City DPRD, a unicameral legislative body partnered with the Palu City Government, has 35 members from 10 political parties, with the Great Indonesia Movement Party (*Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya/Gerindra*) securing the majority of votes (Sakaria et al., 2018; Husain et al., 2020). For the 2019–2024 period, the Palu City regional people's representative council comprised 31 men and only four women, resulting in a female representation rate of only 11.4 percent. These four female members came from the National Democratic Party (*Partai Nasional Demokrat/Nasdem*), Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrat*), Prosperous Justice Party

(*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera/PKS*), and National Mandate Party (*Partai Amanat Nasional/PAN*).

Based on this reality, a research gap exists between normatively established affirmative action policies and the practice of women's representation, which remains low and substantively underrepresented, particularly at the regional level. Therefore, this study aims to examine the presence of female legislators in the Palu City DPRD, in terms of representation, political roles, and the structural and cultural challenges they face. The findings of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of gender and local politics studies, as well as practical implications for the formulation of policies and strategies to strengthen women's roles in regional legislative institutions.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Women's Representation in Legislative Institutions**

Various studies have shown that women's representation in legislative institutions is an important indicator of the quality of democracy and representational justice (Bintari, 2021). The theory of political representation states that women's presence in parliament is not merely descriptive (numbers), but also substantive, namely, the extent to which women are able to advocate for the interests and needs of their groups in public policy. Previous studies have emphasized that low female representation is often caused by structural barriers, such as political party recruitment systems, patriarchal culture, and minimal institutional support for female cadres (Aspinall et al., 2021). This condition places women in less strategic positions in the political decision-making process (Anjarsari, 2025).

Several studies have also highlighted that although affirmative action policies such as the 30 percent quota have been implemented, their implementation has not been fully effective in increasing women's political power (Firdaus & Wulandari, 2023; Lestari & Kurniawan, 2025). Women are often positioned merely as supplementary candidates on legislative lists without being accompanied by capacity building and access to strategic positions (Damayanti et al., 2024). This finding is relevant to the situation in the Palu City regional people's representative council, where women's representation remains at 11.4 percent, thus failing to achieve gender balance in the legislative process (Srifridayanti et al., 2023). This literature emphasizes the importance of not only increasing the number of women but also ensuring their political roles and influence are substantive.

### **2.2. The Role and Challenges of Women Legislators at the Local Level**

Studies on women legislators at the regional level indicate that the challenges faced by women in local parliaments tend to be more complex than those at the national level. The local political environment remains heavily influenced by gender-based power relations, political patronage, and conservative societal cultures (Putri, 2025). Previous research has revealed that women legislators often face limited opportunities to voice their ideas, both due to male dominance in parliamentary structures and due to stereotypes that doubt women's leadership capacity (Itzkovitch-Malka & Oshri, 2024). As a result, women's presence in regional parliaments is often not optimally reflected in policies and legislative agendas (Manik et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the literature also notes that women legislators have significant potential to advocate for more gender-responsive policies, particularly those related to social welfare, the protection of women and children, and public services (Miruka et al., 2021). However, this potential is often hampered by weak political bargaining power, a lack of strategic networks, and the suboptimal role of collectives such as women's parliamentary caucuses (Tias et al., 2023). These

findings align with the situation in the Palu City regional people's representative council, where women legislators have not yet fully established themselves as a solid political force. Therefore, previous studies emphasize the need for capacity building, political solidarity, and institutional support so that the existence of women legislators at the local level is not merely symbolic but is able to provide a real impact in the policy-making process.

### **2.3. Gender Representation and Institutional Barriers**

Based on the theory of political representation and empirical findings regarding women's representation in legislative institutions, the presence of women legislators is determined not only by quantitative representation but also by their capacity, participation space, and structural support within the parliamentary institution (Salamon, 2023). The low percentage of women in the Palu City DPRD, at only 11.4 percent, indicates a representational imbalance that has the potential to limit women's influence in the legislative and decision-making process. This situation indicates that without institutional support and strategic positions, the presence of women legislators tends to be symbolic and unable to optimally promote gender-responsive policies.

Furthermore, the literature indicates that patriarchal cultural factors, internal political party mechanisms, and weak women's solidarity and political consolidation are the main obstacles to strengthening the role of women legislators at the local level. In the Palu City DPRD, the small number of women and limited access to leadership positions weaken women's political bargaining power in advancing the agendas of women and vulnerable groups. Therefore, strengthening the presence of women legislators is believed to depend heavily on improving the quality of political participation, courage in articulating interests, and sustained institutional support (Khasanah & Sasana, 2022).

### **3. Methods**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research type with a phenomenological and sociological approach, which aims to understand in depth the existence of women legislators in the Palu City DPRD institution as a socio-political phenomenon that occurs within a specific cultural and institutional context (Moleong, 2017). This approach is employed to explore the experiences, perceptions, and social dynamics surrounding women's political participation in the institution. The research location was determined at the Palu City Regional People's Representative Council, with informants selected purposively, including the Chairperson of the Palu City DPRD and the Secretary of the Palu City DPRD as the main informants, as well as legislative members of the Palu City DPRD, especially women, as key informants.

The data sources in this study consist of primary data, obtained through direct observation and in-depth interviews using an interview guide as a research instrument, as well as secondary data derived from official DPRD documents, laws and regulations, institutional reports, and relevant scientific literature. The choice of qualitative methods is based on the need to explore the meaning, experiences, and dynamics of the role of women legislators that cannot be explained quantitatively alone, so that data analysis is carried out through the stages of factual description, analytical description, interpretation with substantive theory, and the formulation of relationships between categories systematically (Fadli, 2021). The urgency of this research lies in the effort to reveal the gap between affirmative policies for women's representation and political practices at the local level, while its implications are expected to provide academic contributions to gender and political studies, as well as serve as a practical reference in formulating strategies to strengthen the role and capacity of women in regional legislative institutions.

To ensure data validity and credibility, this study applied source triangulation by cross-checking information obtained from in-depth interviews, direct observations, and institutional documents of the Palu City DPRD. This process was conducted to minimize researcher bias and to strengthen the consistency of findings across different data sources. In addition, research ethics were upheld by obtaining informed consent from all informants prior to data collection and ensuring the confidentiality of their identities and responses throughout the research process.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Socio-Political Context of Women's Legislative Representation**

Palu City is geographically located in the Palu Valley and Palu Bay plains, with an average elevation of 0–700 meters above sea level, located at 0°.36"–0°.56" South Latitude and 119°.45"–121°.1" East Longitude. Palu City covers an area of 395.06 km<sup>2</sup>, divided into 8 sub-districts and 46 villages. This geographic location shapes the diverse social character of the community and influences local political dynamics, including patterns of representation and women's access to regional legislative institutions (Alfiandy et al., 2020). Administratively, Mantikulore District is the largest, at 206.80 km<sup>2</sup>, and has the largest number of neighborhood units (*Rukun Tetangga/RT*) and community units (*Rukun Warga/RW*) (60 RW) and 216 RT, respectively. North Palu District has the fewest, at 20 RW and 77 RT. The distance between the center of Palu City and the sub-districts ranges from 2 km to 17 km (Farid, 2025). This situation has implications for political accessibility, voter mobilization, and the reach of legislative members, including women, in carrying out their representative functions. From a governmental perspective, Palu City has a fairly large bureaucratic structure, with a total of 4,845 Civil Servants (*Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN*) in 2021, consisting of 1,278 men and 3,576 women. Quantitatively, women dominate the ASN composition, with an average education level of 69.08 percent at the bachelor's level. This data indicates that in terms of human resources, women in Palu City possess sufficient educational capital and capacity to participate in the public and political sphere, including the legislative body (BPS, 2023).

From a demographic perspective, the population of Palu City, based on aggregate data as of December 31, 2020, reached 373,218, with 187,389 men (50.20 percent) and 185,829 women (49.80 percent). This relatively balanced composition provides strong normative legitimacy for demands for proportional representation of women in regional legislative institutions. However, political realities indicate that this demographic balance is not yet reflected in the legislative power structure (BPS, 2023). Furthermore, Palu City's heterogeneous socio-cultural environment, inhabited by various ethnic groups such as Kaili, Bugis, Toraja, Mandar, Javanese, Arab, and Chinese, creates complex social dynamics. Although Palu City is often associated with conflict, community social activities are relatively stable (Jefrianto, 2023). However, patriarchal culture remains deeply rooted and indirectly influences public perceptions of female leadership. This context provides an important background for understanding the existence and challenges of women legislators in the Palu City regional people's representative council.

The Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) is the ratio of the number of students, regardless of age, currently attending school at a particular level of education to the population of the corresponding age group. A high GER indicates a high level of school participation, regardless of the appropriateness of the school age for the level of education. The School Participation Rate (*Angka Partisipasi Sekolah/APS*) is the proportion of all children still in school in a particular age group to the population of the corresponding age group. A high APS indicates greater opportunities to access education in general, as shown by the size of the APS in each age group.

**Table 1.** School Participation Rate by Age Group and Gender, 2018 to 2021

No	Years	7-12 Years			13-15 Years			16-18 Years		
		M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F
1	2018	18.528	17.686	36.214	9.392	8.779	18.171	-	-	-
2	2019	16.219	15.376	31.595	8.504	8.065	16.569	-	-	-
3	2020	17.465	16.297	33.762	7.256	6.813	14.069	-	-	-
4	2021	17.420	16.349	33.769	7.277	6.810	14.087	711	435	1.146

Note: M=Male, F=Female.

Based on Table 1, it can be concluded that Palu City has a relatively conducive social, geographic, and demographic context for strengthening women's representation in regional legislative institutions. Regional diversity, an established government structure, adequate female human resources, and a relatively high level of educational participation indicate significant potential for women to play an active role in the public and political sphere (Fatimah et al., 2025). However, this potential has not been fully realized in the practice of political representation, due to the persistent influence of patriarchal culture and the unequal distribution of power in legislative institutions. Therefore, the socio-political context of Palu City serves as an important foundation for understanding that the challenge to women's legislative representation lies not in women's capacity per se, but rather in the political structures and culture that still limit women's leadership roles.

#### 4.2 Access of Women Legislators to Council Functions

Women's access to legislative institutions is a crucial prerequisite for realizing an inclusive democracy. In the Palu City regional people's representative council for the 2019–2024 period, the total number of legislative members is 35, consisting of 31 men and only 4 women. Therefore, women's representation is only 11.4 percent, a figure that falls far short of the 30 percent affirmative action quota (Yunus, 2025). This situation indicates that women's access to regional legislative institutions remains structurally very limited. Women's representation in the Palu City DPRD comes from four political parties: Partai Nasdem, Partai Demokrat, Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, and Partai Amanat Nasional, each with one woman. Meanwhile, Partai Gerindra, with the most seats, 6 legislative members, has no female representation. This distribution reflects that political parties' commitment to a gender perspective is uneven and remains highly dependent on their respective electoral interests.

In carrying out its council functions, members of the Palu City regional people's representative Council are divided into three commissions: Commission A, Commission B, and Commission C. According to the data, women are only distributed across two commissions, Commission A and Commission B, while Commission C is entirely male. This imbalance indicates a gender segmentation in the division of legislative labor, potentially limiting women's space in certain strategic sectors. This situation aligns with sociological gender analysis, which states that patriarchal culture remains a major obstacle to women's participation in the public sector (Anto, 2023).

Women's limited access is not only due to limited representation but also to a limited perspective on gender justice and equality within institutional structures (Damayanti et al., 2024). As a result, women are often excluded from positions with significant influence in the legislative and oversight processes. The implication of this limited access is the development of public policies that tend to be less gender-sensitive. With male dominance in the Palu City DPRD structure, issues related to the specific needs of women and vulnerable groups are potentially marginalized.

Therefore, women's access to legislative institutions must not only be understood as a formal presence, but also as a real opportunity to participate substantively in legislative, budgetary, and oversight functions.

**Table 2.** Access of Women Legislators in the Palu City DPRD Structure

Discussion Aspect	Factual Condition in Palu City DPRD	Implications for Women's Access
Composition of DPRD Members	In a male-dominated society, women are very limited in number	Women's access to the legislative body remains minoritarian
Political Party Affiliation	Women come only from a small number of political parties	Party commitment to gender representation is uneven
Commission Distribution	Women are only in Commission A and B, absent in Commission C	Gender-based segmentation occurs in legislative work allocation
Political Structure and Culture	Institutional structure dominated by a patriarchal perspective	Women find it difficult to occupy strategic and influential positions

Based on Table 2, it can be concluded that women's access to legislative positions in the Palu City DPRD still faces significant structural and cultural limitations. Male dominance in membership, unequal political party support, and a gender-biased division of labor within commissions indicate that women's presence has not been fully accompanied by equal opportunities. This situation has implications for the weak substantive role of women in the legislative and oversight processes. Therefore, strengthening women's access is not sufficient through formal representation alone, it also requires structural and cultural changes that are more responsive to gender equality (Lwamba et al., 2022).

#### 4.3 Structural and Cultural Challenges to Women Legislators' Participation

The participation of women legislators in the Palu City DPRD is determined not only by their numerical presence but also by their active involvement in commission work and leadership structures. Based on commission data, Commission A has only one female member, while Commission B has three female members, and Commission C has no female representation at all. This composition indicates that women's participation remains concentrated and unequal across all DPRD work areas (Damayanti et al., 2024).

In practice, women legislators in the Palu City DPRD often serve as commission members without access to strategic positions. This is reinforced by the leadership structure of the Palu City DPRD for the 2019–2024 period, which is entirely male: the Chairperson from Partai Gerindra and two Deputy Chairpersons from Partai Golkar and Partai Keadilan Sejahtera. The absence of women in leadership positions indicates women's weak political bargaining power within the DPRD's highest decision-making structure (Kamindang, 2025).

Nevertheless, interviews and observations indicate that women legislators tend to be more active in listening to community aspirations and demonstrating sensitivity to social issues. This aligns with literature findings that women tend to have greater empathy for issues of welfare, education, and social protection. However, limited numbers and structural positions prevent these contributions from significantly influencing policy. Women's participation also faces internal challenges in the form of limited political support and strategic networks. The lack of consolidation among female members and the suboptimal role of collectives such as women's caucuses at the regional level mean that women's struggles remain individualistic (Putri, 2025). As a result, women legislators' ideas and perspectives

are often hampered in decision-making processes dominated by male political interests.

For the 2019–2024 period, the leadership structure of the Palu City DPRD was entirely filled by male legislators, each from a different political party. The DPRD Speaker was held by MIK from the Partai Gerindra, while the position of Deputy Speaker I was held by EL from the Partai Golkar, and Deputy Speaker II by RDS from the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera. Access of women to strategic positions within the regional legislative power structure. This situation indicates that despite the presence of female representation as DPRD members, they do not yet have adequate space to play a role in decision-making at the leadership level, thus reinforcing the indication that women's presence in the Palu City DPRD remains symbolic and not fully substantive. Women's legislative participation in the Palu City DPRD remains symbolic and not fully substantive. Despite the presence of sufficient potential and capacity, structural limitations, patriarchal culture, and minimal institutional support are the main factors hindering the optimization of women's roles. Therefore, increasing women's legislative participation requires not only increasing numbers but also strengthening strategic positions and political capacity to be able to promote fairer and gender-responsive policies (Suryani & Wardana, 2024).

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that, from a social, geographical, and demographic perspective, Palu City possesses strong prerequisites for encouraging women's participation in local politics. Social diversity, relatively stable socio-political conditions, and a balanced population structure between men and women create an open space for women's engagement in the public sphere. This condition is reinforced by statistical data showing high levels of educational participation and the dominance of women within the local government bureaucracy, which reflect adequate capacity and quality of women's human resources in Palu City (BPS, 2023). These findings align with previous studies emphasizing that education and bureaucratic experience are important forms of social capital for women's political participation (Wahyudi, 2018; Mandasari, 2023).

However, this potential has not been optimally translated into the regional political power structure. The low representation of women in the Palu City DPRD demonstrates a clear gap between women's social capital and their actual access to political office. This finding is consistent with earlier studies that highlight the persistent disparity between affirmative gender policies and their practical implementation at the local level (Tias et al., 2023; Damayanti et al., 2024). As argued by Anjarsari and Pustaka (2025), the problem of women's political underrepresentation does not primarily lie in women's competence, but rather in political mechanisms and institutional structures that remain insufficiently inclusive and gender-responsive.

In terms of institutional access, this study found that women's involvement in the Palu City DPRD remains limited both numerically and structurally. The concentration of women legislators in a small number of political parties and their absence from certain commissions indicate a gendered division of legislative labor. Similar patterns have been observed in other regional legislative institutions, where women tend to be positioned in commissions perceived as less strategic (Bintari, 2021; Bagaskara & Ma'ruf, 2025). This situation reinforces the argument that political parties often treat gender representation as an electoral requirement rather than an integral part of their ideological and organizational commitment (Huda, 2020; Umagapi, 2020).

Furthermore, the findings reveal that women legislators' substantive participation in the Palu City DPRD remains weak. The absence of women in leadership positions reflects limited political bargaining power and restricted access

to strategic decision-making processes. This condition mirrors the “glass ceiling” phenomenon commonly faced by women in political institutions, where formal inclusion does not necessarily lead to real influence (Iriansyah, 2017; Manik et al., 2025). Although female legislators demonstrate strong concern for community aspirations and social issues, their limited structural space constrains the translation of these concerns into gender-responsive policies. This finding is consistent with international studies showing that women’s parliamentary presence only produces substantive policy outcomes when supported by leadership access and institutional authority (Salamon, 2023; Suryani & Wardana, 2024).

This study confirms that the presence of women legislators in the Palu City DPRD remains largely symbolic rather than substantive. Strengthening women’s roles in the legislature requires more than increasing numerical representation. It necessitates structural transformation through changes in political culture, stronger institutional support, and broader access to strategic and leadership positions (Mutijima & Terzi, 2025). Without these efforts, women’s potential as agents of change in promoting just and inclusive public policies will continue to be constrained by masculine and patriarchal political structures, as widely documented in studies on women, politics, and patriarchal culture in Indonesia.

## **6. Conclusion**

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the presence of women legislators in the Palu City DPRD remains limited and tends to be symbolic. Although Palu City has a relatively conducive social, demographic, and human resource context for women to promote political representation, the reality at the institutional level shows a low number of women, limited access to strategic commissions, and the absence of women in the DPRD leadership structure. This condition reflects the strong influence of patriarchal political structures and culture that limit women’s substantive roles in legislative, budgetary, and oversight functions. As a result, women’s participation has not been able to significantly influence the gender-sensitive policy-making process. Therefore, strengthening the presence of women legislators in the Palu City DPRD requires not only an increase in quantitative representation, but also changes in structure, political culture, and institutional support so that women can participate more equally, strategically, and empowered in the local political system.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis is confined to the institutional context of the Palu City DPRD and is based on qualitative data from a limited number of informants, which may not fully capture broader variations across regions or political settings. Nevertheless, the findings provide important implications for efforts to strengthen women’s political representation by emphasizing the need for inclusive institutional arrangements, greater access to strategic and leadership positions, and sustained support from political parties, local governments, and civil society. Future research is encouraged to adopt comparative or mixed-method approaches across different regions, explore the role of political parties and electoral systems in greater depth, and examine strategies to enhance women’s substantive influence in legislative decision-making processes.

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### ***Data Disclosure Statement***

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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