

The Presence of Padmasari Mestikajati as Women Representation on Politics

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze Padmasari Mestikajati's work as a representation of women in Indonesian politics, particularly in the context of local politics, which is still characterized by low female representation and strong structural barriers such as patriarchal culture, male elite domination, limited access to political resources, and the placement of female candidates in non-strategic positions. Focusing on Padmasari's campaign strategies and legislative contributions in the Central Java Provincial House of Representatives (DPRD), this study uses descriptive qualitative methods through interviews, observations, and literature studies to examine the dynamics of local politics and gender policies. The results show that Padmasari's success in retaining her legislative seat for two terms was not only influenced by her personal political capital (political kinship and educational background), but also by her ability to optimize adaptive and contextual campaign strategies, as well as the support of the 30% affirmative action quota policy that increased women's representation. Unlike many female politicians who stop at descriptive representation, Padmasari demonstrates substantive representation through the initiation of pro-women policies, particularly the advocacy for the provision of lactation rooms and the strengthening of kindergarten education infrastructure. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of examining female figures who are not only electorally successful but also capable of transforming representation into concrete policies, thereby contributing theoretically and empirically to the development of studies on women's representation in local politics in Indonesia.

Keywords: Women's representation; Affirmative action; Gender representation; Campaign strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

Women's involvement in politics has become an important issue in the dynamics of democracy in Indonesia. In Indonesia itself, women's participation in politics first occurred during the first elections in 1955. The 1955 elections were a turning point in history, as it was the first time Indonesian women participated as voters and as candidates for parliament in a democratic national electoral system (Ramdhani, 2021). In a male-dominated political system, women's participation often faces various challenges, ranging from cultural barriers to policies that do not support their representation in decision-making spaces. In fact, the presence of women in politics not only promotes gender equality but also encourages a more inclusive perspective in the formulation of public policy.

The representation of women in politics is a tangible manifestation of the principle of gender equality, whereby women have the same rights and opportunities to participate in public decision-making processes. With women in the legislature, women's voices, experiences, and specific needs can be more fairly accommodated in policy-making. This is important because, as explained in the perspective of substantive representation, the different social experiences of men and women have the potential to shape different sensitivities and policy orientations, so that the presence of women in legislative bodies opens up greater space for the articulation of social, economic, and political issues that have been underrepresented in the decision-making process. This makes the resulting policies

more responsive and provides more comprehensive protection for women (Agustin, and Asih, 2024). Thus, increasing women's representation in politics is not merely a symbol of emancipation, but also a strategic step towards realizing inclusive and gender-equitable development. According to the concept of gender recognized by a number of experts, men and women differ in personality and behavior. These differences are not universal, but are influenced by the history, culture, and social structure of a particular society.

According to Oakley's definition (in Daulay, 2007), gender is a socially constructed attribute that is culturally imposed on a person. According to the worldview embraced in modern culture, gender is equivalent to sex. Etymologically, gender comes from the English word meaning sex (Echols and Shadily, 2014). According to the evolution of this idea, gender refers to men and women, their respective statuses, and their relative positions.

According to Hikmawan (in Fitriana, 2020), representation is a condition or action that places a person or party as a representative of the attitudes and actions of a particular group in an environment. Representation is also part of a social process related to the customs and culture of society, which can ultimately bring about changes in ideological concepts in a more tangible form. Hanna F. Pitkin, in her work entitled *The Concept of Representation*, explains that political representation is not only related to the physical presence of a representative in a legislative body,

but also concerns the way in which the interests of the community are voiced and fought for in the political process. Pitkin classifies representation into four forms, namely formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive (Tsabita, 2025).

The importance of women's representation in politics cannot be underestimated. Therefore, the government has issued various laws that regulate women's rights, especially in the political sphere. Based on Law Number 8 of 2012, every political party is required to meet a 30% quota for women's representation in legislative candidates. This aims to ensure that women's voices and interests are represented in the

legislative process and decision-making. However, despite the supportive legal framework, reality shows that many women still face significant barriers to active participation in politics.

Although the regulatory framework has set a quota for women's representation, the reality of women's participation in legislative bodies can still be measured more objectively through quantitative data showing the percentage of women's representation at the national and regional levels. The following table presents data on women's representation at both the national and regional levels, specifically in Central Java, which is the location of the research subject.

Table 1. Data on Women's Representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives for Each Term

Period	Number of DPR RI Members	Female Members	Percentage
2014-2019	560	97	17,32%
2019-2024	575	120	20,87%
2024-2029	580	127	21,9%

Source: Ramanda, 2024

Quantitative data shows that women's representation in legislative bodies in Indonesia is still below the ideal quota of 30 percent. At the national level, the percentage of female members in the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) has indeed increased gradually from period to period, from 17.32% in the 2014–2019 period to 20.87% in the 2019–

2024 period, and again increased to 21.9% in the 2024–2029 period. Although this trend reflects progress in the descriptive representation of women, the figures still show a significant gap between the affirmative policy target and the actual representation of women in the national parliament.

Table 2. Data on Women's Representation in the Central Java Provincial DPRD for Each Period

Period	Number of DPRD Members	Female Members	Percentage
2014-2019	100	23	23%
2019-2024	120	23	19,2%
2024-2029	120	24	20%

Source: KPU JATENG, 2024; Mahmudah, 2014; SETYAWAN, 2019

Similar conditions are also seen at the regional level, particularly in the

Central Java Provincial DPRD. In the 2014–2019 period, women's

representation was recorded at 23%, but declined in the 2019–2024 period to 19.2%, before experiencing a slight increase in the 2024–2029 period to 20%. These fluctuations show that the increase in women's representation at the regional level is not linear and is still greatly influenced by local political dynamics, including party recruitment processes, the placement of female candidates on legislative candidate lists, and strong structural and cultural barriers in regional politics.

Overall, this data confirms that the women's quota policy has not been fully able to ensure stable and proportional representation, thus requiring further analysis of the female actors who have managed to break through these limitations and convert their political presence into meaningful representation.

Although quantitative data shows that women's representation is still not optimal, there are female figures who have been able to break through these limitations. In the local context, the existence of female figures who have been able to break through patriarchal domination is clear evidence of the struggle for equality. One figure who attracts attention is Padmasari Mestikajati, a young politician from the Golkar party who has successfully made a significant mark in the Indonesian political arena. Padmasari Mestikajati, or familiarly known as Bu Padma, has successfully served as a member of the Provincial DPRD for two terms, which shows that women can indeed be successful in the world of politics. Quoted from the mass media FISIP UIN Walisongo Semarang, according to her, politics is a long road full of challenges,

but it can be a field of charity if done with a sincere heart. As a member of the Regional Representative Council (DPRD), Padmasari's existence not only reflects an increase in the number of women in legislative positions, but also symbolizes the movement to achieve gender equality in political decision-making. Padmasari's political journey reflects women's struggle to break gender stereotypes while contributing to more inclusive and equitable political development.

The findings of this study show that Padmasari Mestikajati's work represents the success of women's representation in a descriptive and substantive manner in the Central Java DPRD, marked by an increase in the number of female Golkar legislators after the 2024 legislative elections. Unlike the quota limitations in the 2019 elections, this success was driven by the institutional strategy of the Golkar Party's Women's Empowerment and Leadership Development Agency (KPPG) through the placement of strategic candidate numbers and the strengthening of gender-responsive policy advocacy, such as the provision of lactation rooms (Mufrikhah, 2020). This research enriches the study of the KPPG's role in female cadre development by showing Padmasari's innovation in combining internal cadre development, the utilization of external resources such as CSR, and social media as a means of political communication that is adaptive to the dynamics and local issues of Central Java (Fernandez et al., 2018). Padmasari's work as Chair of the Central Java KPPG marks a shift from quota fulfillment to strengthening the substantive role of women in public policy production, while also opening up

opportunities for internal transformation within the Golkar Party amid strong structural obstacles (Ayu et al., 2024). These findings are in line with studies in the Palembang DPRD, but show more contextual adaptation through CSR collaboration based on local public needs, such as the provision of clean water and regional tax socialization (Masyuri et al., 2025).

This journal analyzes Padmasari Mestikajati's work as a form of female representation in Indonesian politics. This study not only discusses her career journey but also highlights her strategies, challenges, and contributions in shaping more inclusive policies. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research seeks to provide new insights into the importance of women's representation in politics and how figures such as Padmasari can inspire future generations. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of studies on women's representation in politics and encourage the strengthening of women's roles in the public sphere.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the method used is descriptive qualitative. This method was chosen because gender and political studies require a deep understanding of the experiences, meanings, and political practices of female actors in a particular social context. According to Sugiyono (2009), the qualitative descriptive method is a research approach used to describe or explain an object based on data or samples obtained as they are, then analyzed and conclusions drawn that can be applied generally. Qualitative research

is understood as an approach that aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena experienced by the research subjects. This approach presents findings through descriptions based on words and language in a natural context, and is carried out using various scientific methods (Moleong, 2017). This study aims to produce a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the phenomena under study. The main objective is to describe in detail the work of a member of the Regional Representative Council, Padmasari Mestikajati, in representing women in the political arena.

The data collection techniques in this study include direct interviews with informants and a literature study sourced from various studies on the representation of women in politics (Yin, 2011). The findings from the literature were then analyzed and adjusted to the research objectives. Analysis of a number of similar cases through literature review was then integrated with the data obtained from the interviews to provide a more comprehensive picture.

RESULTS

Profile of Padmasari Mestikajati

Padmasari Mestikajati is an Indonesian politician who plays an active role in the Central Java Regional Representative Council (DPRD). She holds a doctorate in Social Sciences from Diponegoro University, demonstrating her commitment to developing her knowledge and skills in fields relevant to her duties as a representative of the people. Padmasari herself is the daughter of Bambang Sadono, a senior politician who has a significant track record in Indonesian politics. Bambang served as

Chair of the DPD Group in the MPR RI for the 2014-2019 period, as well as Deputy Chair of the Central Java Provincial DPRD for the 2009-2014 period. This family political background has provided Padmasari with valuable experience and insight in carrying out her duties as a legislator (KPU, 2024).

However, in her political journey, Padmasari has not always found the path easy, as she has experienced several failures. In 2014, even though she won a high number of votes, it was not enough to secure her a seat in the Central Java Provincial legislature (Certificate of Recapitulation of Vote Count Results from Each Regency/City at the Provincial

Level in the 2014 Provincial DPRD Member Elections, 2019).

With the failures she had experienced, the lessons learned were sufficient to determine the strategy for winning the next election, namely the 2019 Central Java Provincial Legislative Council Election. She succeeded in achieving the number 1 position with a high number of votes (Central Java Provincial General Election Commission Decision Number: 48/PL.01.7-Kpt/33/Prov/V/2019, 2019). This success continued in the 2024 Legislative Election period, where she again received the highest number of votes (Central Java Provincial General Election Commission Decision Number 41 of 2024, 2024).

Table 3. Number of Votes for Padmasari Mestikajati in the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Elections

ELECTION YEAR	NUMBER OF VOTES	ELECTORAL DISTRICT
2014	18.581	III (Grobogan, Blora, Rembang, and Pati)
2019	22.343	V (Grobogan and Blora)
2024	28.907	V (Grobogan and Blora)

Source : KPU Jateng, 2014; 2019; 2024.

Of course, in achieving this victory, there was a strategy that had been carefully planned in order to achieve maximum success. In the last two terms, she served on two different commissions. From 2019 to 2024, Padmasari served on Commission C of the Central Java Regional Representative Council, which is responsible for governance and administration, before moving to Commission E for the 2024-2029 term, which focuses on public welfare. The field of public welfare includes employment, education, science, research and technological development, youth and sports, religion, culture, social affairs,

health, transmigration, women's empowerment, child protection, and population control (Central Java Provincial DPRD, 2025). In addition to her role in the DPRD, Padmasari also holds an important position as Chair of the Central Java Golkar Party Women's Association (KPPG) (Nailin, 2021). In this capacity, Padmasari strives to increase women's participation in politics and fight for issues related to women's empowerment at the provincial level. Her presence in KPPG reflects her dedication to creating a more inclusive and responsive political environment for women's needs.

With a combination of strong formal education and solid political experience, Padmasari Mestikajati is committed to contributing significantly to decision-making that impacts the people of Central Java. Through her roles in the DPRD and KPPG, she strives to bring about positive change and improve the quality of life of the community, especially in the context of women's empowerment and social welfare. The dynamics of gender representation in legislative bodies show significant progress in the 2024 Legislative Elections (Pileg), particularly in the Central Java Provincial DPRD. The composition of women's representation in the Golkar party has increased substantially from one council member in the 2019 period to three council members in the 2024 period.

The regulatory context governing women's representation in politics in Indonesia is confirmed by the provision of a minimum quota of 30% female participation, both in the management of political parties at the central level and in legislative candidacy. Affirmative policies regarding women's involvement in politics in Indonesia have a legal basis in Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections. This regulation stipulates that women must be involved in the implementation of elections, both in the KPU and Bawaslu, in the management structure of political parties, and in the process of nominating legislative members, with a minimum requirement of 30% female representation in each of these areas. In the registration process, the Golkar party has demonstrated compliance with this regulation, reflecting progressive efforts to achieve gender equality in the realm of

regional politics. This increase in female representation can be understood as an indicator of progress in democratization and political inclusion at the provincial level, which encourages women's participation in the public policy-making process.

Padmasari Mestikajati's Strategy to Enter the Central Java Regional Representative Council

Entering the 2019 Legislative Election (Pileg), Padmasari Mestikajati implemented an innovative campaign strategy that was relevant to the needs of the community in her electoral district. Considering the issue of drought, which is a significant problem in the region, Padmasari provided clean water assistance as part of her campaign program. This initiative not only demonstrates her concern for the community, but also builds a positive image as a legislative candidate who is responsive to local issues.

As evidenced in an interview with Padmasari Mestikajati:

"Sesaat ketika saya mencalonkan diri, pada saat itu dapil saya terdampak bencana kekeringan, maka prioritas saya saat itu adalah strategi untuk mengirimkan bantuan air bersih kepada masyarakat terdampak, ini juga sebagai bentuk agar masyarakat dapat percaya kepada saya."

This statement shows that strategies must be tailored to the needs of the community, rather than simply applying strategies that are commonly used. In addition, Padmasari utilizes social media as an effective campaign tool. By utilizing digital platforms, Padmasari can reach a wide range of voters, including the

younger generation, who are increasingly active in the digital space. This approach also reflects a gendered campaigning strategy, in which female candidates often face different expectations and limitations, requiring them to adopt different strategies to build credibility and relationships with voters (Franceschet, S., Krook, M. L., & Piscopo, n.d.). On this occasion, Padmasari utilized social media to build emotional closeness and highlight her communicative image, thereby breaking through the traditional boundaries of political campaigns, which tend to be masculine. Through interesting and informative content, she succeeded in building engagement and support from the community.

In terms of funding, Padmasari did not spend any personal funds on her campaign. Instead, she collaborated with the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program of the Rembang cement company, which had a similar interest in supporting social programs. This collaboration not only helped with funding, but also reinforced the campaign's message of focusing on the interests of the community. Thanks to a well-planned campaign strategy and support from various parties, Padmasari Mestikajati won a seat in the Regional Representative Council (DPRD) for the first time after previously failing.

Ahead of the 2024 Legislative Election (Pileg), Padmasari Mestikajati realized that the campaign strategy that was successful in the 2019 Pileg had been adopted by other legislative candidates. Therefore, to create differentiation that would attract voters' attention, she added several new strategies. One of them was

to introduce the importance of taxes as a source of funding for regional development, as well as actively seeking support from women's groups that play a significant role in society. The involvement of these women's groups shows another form of gendered campaigning, namely how female candidates identify and activate a support base related to the social and cultural roles of women in society. This approach strengthens support and builds a broader network among voters.

Padmasari was assigned number 1 on the ballot, which, based on her presentation, shows that ballot position can contribute about 20% of the total victory. The results of the study show that the position on the ballot (ballot position effect) can have a significant impact on the chances of victory for legislative candidates in Indonesia. This factor is often linked to the application of a closed proportional system in the past, where candidates with the highest numbers tended to be more advantaged (Tini, Dwi L.R and Alfiyah, 2023). This shows the importance of awareness of the factors that influence voter preferences. Voters usually pay attention to the number when casting their votes. Therefore, number strategy can be a determining factor in obtaining votes.

As an incumbent, Padmasari also benefited from her proven track record through programs implemented during her previous term. According to the journal, incumbents have structural advantages such as high popularity, established political networks, and access to campaign resources, making it easier for them to mobilize support compared to new candidates. This concept is known as

the incumbency advantage (Agus, 2018). These advantages make it easier for Padmasari to campaign, especially through her previous programs, because the community already knows and has felt the positive impact of her performance. This gives voters more confidence to re-elect her, making a good track record a valuable asset in political contests.

Despite her advantage as an incumbent, consistency in her campaign strategy remains key. A number of incumbents in other regions have failed to be re-elected, showing that the chosen strategy must remain relevant and responsive to existing dynamics. Therefore, Padmasari strives to continue strengthening her relationship with constituents and ensuring that her programs remain in line with the needs of the community.

Priority Issues for Padmasari Mestikajati

Education is one of the main pillars of regional development, as it lays the foundation for the future of the younger generation (Yandip, 2024). In this context, efforts to improve educational infrastructure are very important, especially in underserved areas. Padmasari Mestikajati, as a legislator, has a strategic role in ensuring that every child has access to quality education.

As reported by Blora Web in an article titled Padmasari Mestikajati Post-Pandemic, Focus on Conventional Education Infrastructure, Padmasari Mestikajati has demonstrated her strong commitment to improving educational infrastructure in the province of Central Java. One of the main focuses of her

agenda is the development of educational facilities for kindergarten schools in remote areas.

In this case, Padmasari realizes that basic education is an important foundation for child development, and access to quality education must be expanded, especially in underserved areas. Many kindergarten schools in remote areas still face various challenges, including a lack of adequate facilities, a shortage of qualified teachers, and limited access to sufficient learning resources.

Therefore, Padmasari advocates for an increase in the budget for educational infrastructure, which includes the construction of school buildings, the provision of teaching tools and materials, and training for teachers. This effort aims to create a better learning environment so that children in these areas can obtain a proper and competitive education.

In addition, Padmasari also strives to establish cooperation with various parties, including private institutions and local communities, to support educational programs. By involving the community in the educational development process, it is hoped that a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the education of children in these areas will be created.

In order to raise awareness of the importance of education, Padmasari also initiated a socialization program for parents and the community on the benefits of early education through various activities, such as seminars and workshops. Padmasari strives to encourage active community participation in supporting children's education.

In the field of public welfare, Padmasari Mestikajati has shown great dedication to improving the welfare of women in Central Java. As a member of the Regional Representative Council and Chair of the Central Java Women's Association of the Golkar Party (KPPG), she has taken an active role in advocating for increased budget allocations for programs specifically aimed at improving women's welfare. To achieve this goal, Padmasari coordinates closely with relevant agencies, such as the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection and the Social Services Agency.

As a public figure and legislator, Padmasari is committed to creating a more inclusive environment and supporting women's rights through the provision of lactation rooms. Lactation rooms are facilities designed to provide a safe, comfortable, and decent space for breastfeeding mothers to fulfill their needs in feeding their babies. The existence of these facilities is a tangible manifestation of affirmative policies that promote gender equality and the welfare of mothers and children.

The provision of lactation rooms reflects strategic efforts to support women's rights, especially for working mothers who need access to adequate facilities. This facility not only makes it easier for breastfeeding mothers to carry out their responsibilities, but also provides a safe and private space, thereby reducing the potential for situations that could trigger gender-based violence. This step is an important symbol in fighting for women's rights in the domestic and public spheres, while also supporting the

sustainable development agenda that emphasizes family welfare.

Furthermore, Padmasari integrates an evidence-based approach in the formulation and evaluation of relevant policies. She actively oversees the implementation of the lactation room provision program through coordination with relevant agencies, field data collection, and continuous evaluation to ensure the program's sustainability. Thus, this policy is not only symbolic but also operational, results-oriented, and truly relevant to the needs of women in various sectors.

Through awareness campaigns, Padmasari also encourages the public to be more aware of the importance of supporting breastfeeding mothers' rights. This approach aims to build public understanding of the importance of providing women-friendly facilities, while strengthening social support for working mothers. From a broader perspective, the provision of lactation rooms also plays a role in improving the health of mothers and children, which ultimately contributes to the development of superior human resources.

This commitment reflects Padmasari's vision of realizing inclusive and gender-equitable governance. This effort is a concrete step in creating an environment that is more supportive of women's participation, both in public spaces and in economic activities. Thus, the provision of lactation rooms is not only a technical policy, but also reflects a holistic and sustainable gender-equality-based development paradigm.

Affirmative Action as an Opportunity Opener Padmasari Mestikajati

The affirmative action policy implemented in Indonesia paved the way for women such as Padmasari Mestikajati to advance far in the world of politics. The 30% quota policy for female legislative candidates was first legalized through Law Number 12 of 2003 concerning the general election of legislative members (DPR, DPRD, DPD). This provision has been maintained and strengthened in subsequent election laws, including Law Number 10 of 2008 on the Election of Members of the House of Representatives, Regional Representative Council, and Regional Representative Councils, 2008 and Law Number 8 of 2012 concerning General Elections for Members of the House of Representatives, Regional Representative Councils, and Regional Representative Councils (which became the basis for the 2014 elections). This policy is very strict, namely if a political party participating in the 2014 elections fails to meet the 30% quota for female representation in an electoral district (dapil), then the party's candidacy in that electoral district is canceled entirely. This means that all prospective candidates in that electoral district are considered disqualified, even if the other male candidates have met all the individual requirements.

Affirmative action is one type of "fast-track policy" that can be adopted to strengthen efforts to enhance women's political participation (True, J., Parashar, S., and George, 2012). In this context, Padmasari Mestikajati, as a female figure who is active in politics, is an example of how affirmative action can pave the way for women to contribute more

significantly in decision-making spaces. This policy not only serves to address inequality, but is also a proactive step in promoting more inclusive representation, thereby creating a more equitable and diverse system.

This policy must certainly be implemented by political parties contesting in the upcoming elections. If this affirmative action policy can be implemented effectively, it will have positive consequences, namely an increase in recruitment efforts by political parties to meet the minimum quota requirements for women (. This aligns with what has occurred within the Golkar Party. Padmasari Mestikajati stated that her party, Golkar, has already implemented this policy in the last election in 2024. Furthermore, within the party's organizational structure, Golkar has begun to provide access for women in politics.

The Golkar Party recognizes the importance of diversity and inclusion in its management structure. Although the party's Articles of Association and Bylaws (AD/ART) do not explicitly regulate specific rules regarding quotas or affirmative action policies for women, Golkar strives to create a more inclusive environment by involving women in various leadership positions.

By involving women in management, Golkar hopes to increase the effectiveness and relevance of the policies produced, as well as be more responsive to the needs of the community, especially women. In addition, Golkar is also active in developing programs that support women's empowerment within the party. Through this initiative, Golkar not only

supports the presence of women in the party structure, but also encourages them to take a more active role in the political process and decision-making.

Although there are no formal regulations governing quotas for women in leadership positions, Golkar is committed to continuing to promote women's participation in politics. By fostering a culture that values women's contributions and providing opportunities for them to participate, Golkar seeks to overcome the challenges women face in politics, including stigma and structural barriers.

This affirmative policy is expected to bring about significant changes in the representation of women within the party and in the political arena as a whole. Thus, Golkar not only strengthens the position of women within the party, but also contributes to efforts to create a more just and equal society, where women's voices are heard and taken into account in every aspect of political and social life. As a concrete manifestation of this, the Golkar Party has a women's wing organization called KPPG, which focuses on women's issues.

The Golkar Party Women's Association (KPPG) as a party wing organization plays an important role in encouraging women's participation in politics. KPPG serves as a forum for organizing women within the party, as well as a bridge for them to contribute more to the political structure. One of KPPG's main focuses is to encourage female candidates to be placed at number 1 on the legislative candidate list. This placement is very strategic, considering that the order often has a major influence on election results (Ayu et al., 2024).

By placing women at number 1 on the list, KPPG is striving to ensure that women gain greater visibility in the eyes of voters. This is expected to increase the chances of female candidates being elected, while also highlighting Golkar's commitment to gender equality in politics. KPPG also strives to provide training and support to female candidates so that they are prepared to face the challenges of a political campaign.

One of KPPG's main focuses is to encourage female legislative candidates to be placed at number 1 on the legislative candidate list. This strategic placement is very important, because high numbers often have a significant impact on election results. By placing women in more visible positions, KPPG wants to ensure that female candidates receive greater attention and visibility in the eyes of voters. This is expected to not only increase their chances of being elected, but also send a strong message about the Golkar Party's commitment to gender equality in politics.

KPPG not only focuses on placement, but also on developing women's capacity through various training programs. These programs are designed to equip prospective women with the skills necessary to run effective campaigns. The training covers various aspects, ranging from communication strategies and campaign management to an understanding of public policy and issues relevant to women. By providing this kind of support, KPPG strives to prepare women to face the challenges they may encounter during the campaign process.

DISCUSSION

The Synergy of Political Capital and Campaign Strategy in Breaking Structural Barriers

Padmasari Mestikajati's success in retaining her legislative seat for two terms is the result of a strategic interaction between personal political capital and the ability to adapt to local dynamics. As the daughter of senior politician Bambang Sadono, Padmasari had the advantage of valuable political insight and experience from the start of her career. However, she did not rely solely on her political connections; her educational background, which included a doctorate in social sciences, was proof of her intellectual commitment, strengthening her credibility as a competent legislator. Her campaign strategy was innovative and responsive; in the 2019 legislative elections, she prioritized clean water assistance for communities affected by drought in her constituency. This step demonstrated the effectiveness of strategies tailored to the real needs of constituents in building public trust.

In addition, Padmasari implemented gendered campaigning by utilizing social media to build emotional closeness and highlight her communicative image, in order to break through the traditional boundaries of campaigns that tend to be masculine. Her ability to establish funding cooperation through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program of a cement company in Rembang also proves her financial independence and efficiency in resource mobilization. By combining the support of women's groups and the dissemination of tax policies in the following period, Padmasari succeeded in creating a differentiated strategy that

reached various levels of voters. It was this synergy between social and intellectual capital and adaptive electoral strategies that enabled her to overcome the cultural barriers of patriarchy that often hinder women's political careers at the regional level.

Types of Representation Padmasari Mestikajati

When analyzing women's representation in politics, several theories can be used as a basis. One of them is the theory proposed by Hanna Pitkin. Representation theory is a key element in modern democratic systems. In this theory, there are four different approaches to understanding political representation, namely formalistic representation, descriptive representation, symbolic representation, and symbolic representation (Pitkin, 1972).

First, formal representation is representation seen as the granting of official authority to a representative to act, with a primary focus on the legality and formality of relationships within the organizational structure. Second, descriptive representation refers to a situation in which political representatives reflect the demographic characteristics of the population they represent. This means that these representatives share similarities in identity with their constituents, such as gender, race, or social class. The presence of women in legislative bodies is considered descriptive representation if they can reflect the experiences and needs of women in general.

Third, substantive representation emphasizes the actions and policies taken

by representatives to advance the interests of the groups they represent. In this case, representatives act for their constituents, striving to advocate and fight for the interests of these groups. Pitkin emphasizes that even though a representative may come from a particular group (descriptive representation), this does not automatically guarantee that they will fight for the interests of that group (substantive representation). Fourth, symbolic representation is a type of representation that involves the symbolization of ideas and values, not merely the representation of facts. Although a symbol also means "to stand for" something, it does not have to resemble what it represents, but rather functions as a substitution that has a certain emotional or rational significance.

From the explanation of representation theory put forward by Hannah Pitkin, based on the analysis that has been carried out, Padmasari Mestikajati falls into two categories of representation, namely descriptive representation and substantive representation. Thus, Padmasari Mestikajati's elaboration in representation theory will be explained more comprehensively through the following explanation:

1) Descriptive Representation

Padmasari Mestikajati's presence as a female politician is significant in the context of diversity and female representation in the legislature. This not only reflects a commitment to the principle of inclusivity in politics, but also demonstrates a real effort to ensure that women have a stronger and more significant voice in the

decision-making process. In addition, Padmasari has successfully demonstrated her capacity and competence as a female leader by breaking through male dominance in the legislature, particularly through her position as the only woman from the Golkar Party entrusted to be a member of the Central Java Regional House of Representatives Budget Committee. This achievement has great symbolic and strategic value, given that the Budget Committee is one of the committees that has traditionally been dominated by male politicians. Her success reflects the recognition of women's ability to play a key role in the legislative process and the management of strategic regional budgets.

2) Substantive Representation

Padmasari Mestikajati's substantive representation in politics is reflected in her various efforts to promote policies that favor the interests of women and families. One of the tangible results of her work is her success in initiating and promoting a policy that requires institutions in Central Java to provide lactation rooms and child-friendly facilities. This policy is not only a solution to the urgent needs of working women, especially nursing mothers, but also reflects a commitment to creating a more inclusive and gender-sensitive work environment. With this policy, Padmasari has made a significant contribution to creating social conditions that support women to remain productive in the public sphere without neglecting their roles in the domestic sphere. This policy is

concrete evidence of how women in politics can bring about positive change that has a direct impact on the welfare of society, especially women.

Padmasari Mestikajati's presence is an ideal representation that transcends political symbolism. By bridging her identity as a woman (descriptive) with concrete action through gender-sensitive policies (substantive), she has narrowed the gap between the presence of women in parliament and the effectiveness of the struggle for women's interests. This is crucial evidence that women's leadership in legislative institutions is essential for producing more humanistic and responsive public policies that are able to accommodate the needs of all constituents.

Padmasari's Electability as Descriptive Representation

In the context of descriptive representation, Padmasari Mestikajati's presence in the Central Java Regional Representative Council reflects the identity and demographic characteristics of the female voters she represents. Although data on female representation in Central Java is fluctuating—having declined from 23% in the 2014–2019 period to 19.2% in 2019–2024—Padmasari has been able to maintain her position steadily. Her success in converting her physical presence into political power is evidenced by her position as the only woman from the Golkar faction trusted to join the Central Java DPRD Budget Committee. This achievement has a very strong symbolic value, given that the Budget Committee is a strategic committee traditionally dominated by male politicians.

Furthermore, the increase in the number of female members of the Golkar Party from one to three in the 2024 legislative elections shows significant progress in political inclusion at the provincial level. Padmasari is not merely a quota filler, but a figure who breaks gender stereotypes through her capacity and competence as a female leader in the public sphere. Her presence in parliament ensures that women's specific voices and experiences are accommodated in the national and regional legislative processes. Thus, the descriptive representation carried out by Padmasari has gone beyond the level of legal formalities, becoming clear evidence that women have a key role in managing strategic policies and inclusive regional budgets.

Pro-Women Policy Transformation as a Manifestation of Substantive Representation

Padmasari Mestikajati proves that women's representation can be transformed into concrete policies oriented towards social welfare, known as substantive representation. As a member of Commission E, which is responsible for people's welfare, she actively advocates for issues that are often overlooked in the mainstream masculine agenda, such as fulfilling the rights of breastfeeding mothers through the provision of lactation rooms. This lactation room policy is a concrete manifestation of support for the specific needs of working women, in order to create a safe, comfortable, and supportive work environment for women without neglecting their domestic roles. Through an evidence-based approach, she ensures

that this program is not only symbolic but also operational and sustainable.

In addition to maternal and child health issues, Padmasari's focus on strengthening kindergarten infrastructure in remote areas reflects her concern for the foundation of human resource development in underserved areas. She advocates for increased budgets for school building construction, educational teaching aids, and teacher training in remote areas of Central Java. This initiative shows that female politicians tend to bring a policy orientation that is more sensitive to social and educational issues. By integrating the aspirations of her female constituents into legislation and budgeting, Padmasari has carried out her role of "acting for" the interests of the groups she represents, thereby realizing more inclusive and gender-equitable development.

The Effectiveness of Affirmative Action and the Institutional Role of Political Parties (KPPG)

The affirmative action policy in the form of a 30% quota for women's representation, as stipulated in Law No. 7 of 2017, is a crucial legal instrument in opening up opportunities for Padmasari. However, this regulation requires strong institutional support from political parties so that it does not merely become an administrative requirement. In this case, the Golkar Party, through its wing organization, the Golkar Party Women's Unity (KPPG), plays an active role in regenerating and strengthening women's political capacity. Padmasari, as Chair of the Central Java KPPG, received full support in the form of campaign training and strategic placement at number 1 on

the list of legislative candidates, which proved to be electorally advantageous in terms of visibility in the eyes of voters.

KPPG not only functions as an organizational forum, but also as a bridge for female cadres to contribute more to the party structure and policy-making. The placement of women at the top of the list is a progressive commitment by the Golkar Party to achieve gender equality in regional politics. This internal support is crucial to overcoming structural challenges such as limited access to resources or negative stigma against women in politics. With the synergy between state regulations and supportive internal party policies, female cadres like Padmasari can prepare more effective campaigns and compete competitively in the legislative arena.

The Incumbency Advantage and the Effect of Ballot Position in Local Electoral Dynamics

In the 2024 Legislative Elections, Padmasari's success in winning the highest number of votes was also influenced by the concept of incumbency advantage. Unlike her failure in 2014, her experience during the previous term provided a tangible track record that was felt by the community, thereby building voter loyalty. As an incumbent, she had access to more established campaign resources, higher popularity, and a political network that had been built up to the grassroots level. This gave the community more confidence to re-elect her because of her proven performance in fighting for the aspirations of the region.

In addition to his track record, his position as number 1 on the ballot paper contributed significantly to his vote

count. The ballot position effect often favors candidates with the highest numbers because they tend to be easier for voters to remember and find in the voting booth. The combination of structural advantages as an incumbent and a strategic ballot position creates greater chances of victory compared to newcomers. Nevertheless, Padmasari maintains the relevance of her strategy by continuing to respond to local dynamics, proving that long-term political success requires consistency in public service and sensitivity to the needs of constituents on an ongoing basis.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that Padmasari Mestikajati's success in retaining her seat in the Central Java Regional Representative Council for two terms is the result of comprehensive political capital synergy, including political kinship background, doctoral education, institutional party support, issue-based campaign strategies that are adaptive to local needs, utilization of her status as an incumbent, and the advantage of being number 1 on the ballot in the 2024 legislative elections. From the perspective of Hanna Pitkin's theory of representation, Padmasari has succeeded in realizing descriptive representation through her presence as a female politician in the strategic legislative space and substantive representation through the advocacy of pro-women and social welfare policies, such as the provision of lactation rooms and the strengthening of early childhood education. These findings confirm the effectiveness of the 30% affirmative action quota policy in improving the quality of women's

representation when supported by gendered campaigning and structural support from parties, particularly through the role of KPPG in the regeneration, training, funding, and strategic placement of female candidates. However, as a single, qualitative case study, these findings have limitations in terms of generalization. Therefore, further research is needed using a comparative approach between regions and genders, quantitative testing of the influence of candidate number on the electability of female candidates, and empirical evaluation of the impact of pro-women policies on the quality of life and economic participation of women in Indonesia.

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