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Women's Political Participation in Local Governance: A Case Study of Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono in Semarang

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Abstract
This study examines women's political participation through the case of Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono, a member of Commission D of the Semarang City Regional Representative Council (DPRD). This study aims to analyze her political track record, campaign strategies, and legislative role as a woman fighting in local politics. This study uses Hanna Fenicher Pitkin's theory of political representation to analyze women's representation descriptively, symbolically, and substantively. Using a qualitative descriptive method supported by semi-structured interviews, this study investigates her personal experiences, the socio-cultural and psychological factors that influence her participation, and her efforts to interact with female constituents. The findings show that her success in obtaining a legislative seat stems from a combination of inherited political networks, intensive face-to-face campaigning, and strategic efforts to reach out to women's groups such as the PKK and religious gatherings. As a single mother, her life experiences also shaped her sensitivity to issues faced by women and families, which influenced her legislative focus on health, education, social welfare, and women's empowerment. The study concludes that relational campaign strategies, community engagement, and a gender perspective significantly strengthen women's representation in local governance.

Keywords: Female representation; Local politics; Political participation; Women legislators.

INTRODUCTION

General elections are part of the democratic process, giving the public the right to voice their aspirations by electing representatives to the legislature. Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections serves as the legal basis governing the conduct of elections, which aims to increase participation from various communities. All citizens have the right to vote and express their opinions, both men and women, but in terms of women's involvement in parliament and policy-making, according to the Central Statistics Agency, in 2024 in Semarang City, only 16% of women were involved in parliament. The general election system in Indonesia uses an open proportional system, which is regulated in Article 420 of Law No. 7 of 2017. Article 420 explains the opportunities for all candidates based on the highest number of votes, but female candidates are often

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given non-strategic numbers (Yazid & Harahap, 2025). Affirmative action policies can be used to overcome this inequality.

Affirmative action is a solution chosen by various countries in addressing issues of gender discrimination, inequality, and marginalization in all aspects of life, including in patriarchal cultures in both the public and private spheres (Sayuti, 2013). Law No. 7 of 2017 contains an affirmative action policy in Article 55, which states that there is a quota for women's participation in parliament of 30%. This article should help open the way for women to enter the political sphere and also promote gender equality. The implementation of affirmative action is important considering the fact that women often face problems and are underestimated by society when they enter the political arena. Women who want to be involved in politics still face social stigma, lack of support from society and political parties, lack of access to resources, and often face challenges in building adequate political networks or relationships. Therefore, affirmative action can be a bridge for women who want to participate in politics and for marginalized communities to actively participate in the political sphere.

One example of affirmative action is the journey of Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono, a member of Commission D of the Semarang City Council. Maftukah Wiwin is a civil servant and a housewife who successfully served as a member of Commission D of the Semarang City Council. She often faced challenges in her political journey. Maftukah Wiwin is the wife of a member of the Semarang City DPRD, but when her husband passed away, she made the decision to continue her husband's struggle as a legislative candidate with only determination and extraordinary courage. This shows that women are not only complementary, but also drivers of change in the political arena. In her candidacy, Maftukah. Wiwin prepared herself mentally to face all the challenges she would encounter and provided or managed the necessary resources. Not only did she prepare herself mentally, but Maftukah Wiwin also prepared the material resources to carry out her campaign strategy. In accordance with Law No. 7 of 2017 regulating elections, particularly Article 275, she was active in carrying out and attending activities, ranging from face-to-face meetings with the community to installing campaign materials. By attending social events, she sought to get closer to the community and maintain the support that her husband had achieved.

Maftukah Wiwin's activities in the political arena are not only focused on her candidacy, but also aim to seek relationships and networks to build better dialogue and interaction with the community. Maftukah Wiwin's presence in the legislative body gives hope to women and the community that women are capable and have the right to sit in parliament and participate in decision-making. This shows that affirmative action is not just a policy, but the beginning of progress for both women and society as a whole. The involvement of women in politics can be proof that women's representation is important for maintaining gender equality, as well as progress and the sustainability of better governance. Affirmative action provides

full support and opportunities for women who want to contribute to parliament, so that women can participate and play an active role in the development of a just society.

Women's political representation refers to the participation and influence of women within political institutions and decision-making processes, emphasizing not only numerical presence but also the ability to articulate and advance women's interests in public policy. Drawing on Pitkin's concept of representation, women's political representation can be understood through descriptive, substantive, and symbolic dimensions, all of which are interconnected in practice. Descriptive representation highlights the importance of women's presence in political office as a means of challenging male-dominated political structures, while substantive representation focuses on the extent to which women politicians actively promote policies and agendas that address the needs of women and marginalized groups. Symbolic representation further underscores how women's political participation reshapes societal perceptions of leadership and encourages broader female political engagement. In local political contexts, women leaders often operate within cultural and institutional constraints that shape their leadership styles, frequently emphasizing community engagement, social welfare, and moral responsibility. The case of Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono illustrates these dynamics, as her role as a female political figure represents not only descriptive inclusion but also carries substantive and symbolic significance in advocating for social issues and redefining women's roles in politics. This case demonstrates that women's political representation is a continuous process influenced by individual agency, social context, and political structures, reinforcing the argument that meaningful democracy requires both the presence of women in political institutions and their active participation in shaping policy outcomes.

At the local level, women politicians play a crucial role in translating national gender equality norms into concrete policies and programs. Local politics provides opportunities for women to engage directly with communities, understand grassroots issues, and develop leadership styles that emphasize inclusivity and social responsiveness. However, women leaders often face gendered expectations, such as being perceived primarily as caregivers rather than policymakers. These expectations can both constrain and shape their political strategies, pushing women to legitimize their leadership through moral authority, community engagement, and social service-oriented agendas. The case of Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono illustrates the dynamics of women's political representation in practice. As a female political figure, her presence in the political arena represents descriptive representation, challenging male-dominated power structures and providing visibility for women in leadership roles. Beyond numerical representation, her political engagement can be analyzed through the lens of substantive representation, particularly in how her initiatives, advocacy, or leadership style address issues relevant to women and marginalized groups. Her role also carries symbolic significance, as

it may inspire other women to participate in politics and reshape societal perceptions about women's capabilities as leaders. Through this case, women's political representation is shown not only as an institutional outcome but also as a continuous process shaped by personal agency, social context, and political negotiation.

METHODS

This research method adapts Pitkin's framework of political representation, which encompasses descriptive dimensions (the presence of female representatives in the Regional People's Representative Council), normative (evaluating ideal representation), and substantive (fighting for women's issues such as economic empowerment and social protection). The analysis is linked to Verba and Nie's theory of political participation, which emphasizes conventional participation such as policy advocacy, as well as substantive representation that focuses on women's issues based on Law No. 7/2017 concerning Elections (Article 275 on campaigning) and gender quota regulations.

The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the role of Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono in the Semarang City Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) as a case study. This approach is appropriate for exploring in-depth experiences related to descriptive representation (the presence of female representatives in Commission D) and substantive (advocacy for MSMEs, sanitation, and domestic-public role balance). Data were analyzed through triangulation to ensure validity, linking participation factors such as role models and political networks.

Primary data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with key informants (members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) and members of the Family Welfare Movement (PKK) using open-ended questions about women's issues they champion, such as family economic constraints and environmental security. Secondary data included Election Law documents, DPRD reports, and participant observation during the "Women Citizen Consultation" session. Purposive sampling was chosen to focus on actors who represented substantive representation.

Data were analyzed thematically by coding based on Pitkin's dimensions: descriptive (presence of representatives), normative (evaluation of the 30% quota), and substantive (the PKK's struggle for issues to Commission D policies). Verba and Nie's theory was applied to measure the level of participation, from gladiatorial (face-to-face campaigning) to policy influence, although not yet reaching full policymaking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Affirmative Action Mechanisms and Descriptive Representation: Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono's Path to the Legislature.

a. Institutional Framework and Participation Decisions

The legal basis for Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono's political participation in Indonesia's general elections is regulated by Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections, specifically Article 275, which provides space for legislative candidates

to campaign freely and openly, as long as they comply with democratic principles and do not violate ethical and legal provisions. This article facilitates access to campaigning for all eligible citizens, including women, by opening up opportunities to compete at the legislative level without explicit gender discrimination. However, in the context of affirmative action, this law also adopts a minimum quota of 30% women in parliament (as stipulated in Article 245 paragraph 1), which aims to increase the descriptive representation of women as a corrective mechanism for historical inequalities in political participation.

Maftukah Wiwin's decision to take early retirement from her civil servant position and run as a legislative candidate can be analyzed through the lens of Psychological Factors in Political Participation Theory, particularly the aspects of Motivation and Political Efficacy. Her motivation stems from a strong desire to continue the "struggle of her husband" who passed away, which is not only a form of family solidarity but also a response to the lack of representation in the electoral district previously represented by her husband. This reflects high political efficacy, where she believes that she is capable of filling this role, driven by her experience of accompanying her husband during his three terms as a legislator. This factor is reinforced by her established social capital, such as her husband's network of supporters and her knowledge of local political dynamics, which made her confident enough to take the risk of early retirement and face the challenges of being a female candidate in a male-dominated environment. This analysis shows that although the Election Law provides a formal framework, the decision to participate is often influenced by internal psychological factors that encourage individuals to overcome structural barriers.

b. Winning Strategies and Descriptive Representation

The winning strategy implemented by Maftukah Wiwin was an effective combination of her husband's political legacy, namely the network of supporters who had voted for her husband, and her experience as a civil servant, which provided her with management discipline, planning skills, and social capital as socio-economic factors that supported political participation. The nomination process was preceded by a "trial run" in the field to ensure that residents who had previously supported her husband were still willing to accept her, a step to engage and retain the voter base that was still halfway through the term. Socio-economic factors also played a crucial role in overcoming structural barriers often faced by women, such as lack of access to funding or gender stereotypes that limit their role in the public sphere. Thus, the combination of political legacy and professional experience not only facilitated Wiwin's participation but also demonstrated how women can leverage social capital to succeed in electoral contests. Her campaign was very intensive, attending various social activities such as gymnastics, religious gatherings, PKK (Family Welfare Movement) meetings, and fathers' meetings. On the other hand, her experience as a civil servant gave her an advantage in terms of time management, organization, and

interaction with various levels of society, which supported her participation in practical politics. In this context, she also implemented knowledge from the executive branch, such as target setting, planning, and evaluation, as well as a never-give-up attitude, revisiting residents even after being rejected.

As a female legislative candidate, she faced the challenge of a mindset that tended to view women as having more limited capabilities. However, she emphasized the strengths of women, who are capable of multitasking and have a high degree of flexibility, as well as the consistency of female voters. She also had to balance her political activities with ethics, for example by refusing to receive male guests alone in her home. Her success in winning a seat as the only female candidate elected in her electoral district, defeating seven male competitors within her party, is a positive result of descriptive representation (the presence of female representatives in the legislature). This achievement was indirectly facilitated by affirmative action (30% quota) in the Election Law. Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono's path shows that affirmative action serves as an initial catalyst to increase women's participation, but sustainability requires further support from political parties and society so that women's representation is not only symbolic but also contributes to fair and inclusive policies, such as addressing issues of violence against women or gender equality in various fields. Thus, this mechanism is an important step toward equality, although challenges to achieving substantive representation still need to be overcome through political education and systemic support.

Campaign and Mobilization Strategies

a. Mobilization of Women's Networks

The mobilization of women's networks by Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono shows that the process of political representation develops through ongoing social relationships, rather than occurring suddenly during elections. Legislative candidates and constituents can interact directly through intensive face-to-face approaches in women's community spaces. Through these interactions, representation is considered a social relationship recognized by the represented parties as well as formal elections. A key component of Maftukah Wiwin's political legitimacy is the sense of closeness and trust that has been built through her presence in women's communities. The main way to strengthen this closeness is through meetings with PKK groups and religious study groups. These forums are participatory in nature, allowing for repeated and in-depth communication. The issues discussed relate to women's daily experiences, such as childcare, family health, and social welfare. This strategy can reinforce the understanding that women's issues must be raised in the official political sphere while making politics seem more accessible and relevant.

Symbolic and social representation is formed through the involvement of a political actor who is recognized by the community they represent. Pitkin states that “representation means presenting something in a certain sense even though it is not literally or factually present”

(Pitkin, 1967: 8). This statement shows that representation is related to the way a representative "conveys" the interests, experiences, and meanings of the group they represent, in addition to their official presence in political institutions. Maftukah Wiwin is considered a figure who can represent the experiences and interests of women because of her active participation in social environments directly related to women's lives. In addition to providing a basis for electoral support, this recognition reinforces the belief that women have a legitimate voice in local politics. The mobilization of women's networks acts as a medium for the formation of reciprocal representative relationships between representatives and constituents, in line with Pitkin's understanding of symbolic representation.

This reciprocal relationship of representation does not stop at symbolic recognition alone. The aspirations and experiences of constituents can be clearly communicated and addressed through routine political activities via sustained participation in women's social spaces. This process can reinforce the idea that the ability of representatives to remain close and sensitive to the individuals they represent is just as important as their official position in the legislature. The mobilization of women's networks contributes to strengthening the legitimacy of representation and opens up space for the development of more meaningful forms of representation in local politics.

b. Balancing Roles and Support Networks

Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono's political participation is also influenced by her ability to balance the various social roles attached to her. As a single mother, she has strong emotional ties to the community, and her experience as a government official has shaped her image as someone who understands state operations and governance. Due to this combination of experiences, it is believed that she not only has good administrative skills but also a real understanding of social issues. This image strengthens public confidence in her role as a representative. The community sees Maftukah Wiwin as someone who shares their experiences and is sensitive to issues related to women, family, and social welfare, not merely as a political figure. This emotional closeness is an important foundation for social acceptance because representation depends not only on formal positions, but also on the extent to which representatives are considered capable of understanding and representing the interests of the community.

In addition to personal factors, the support network that Maftukah Wiwin has plays an important role in maintaining relationships with the community. Her family network, social groups, and relationships built while working in the bureaucracy serve as communication channels that enable community goals to continue to be conveyed. Through these networks, the relationship between politicians and the community is maintained through daily social contact, rather than ending during the campaign period. This reinforces the perception that representation is

dynamic and responsive to community needs. The balance between social network support and personal role balance shows that political involvement is not a stand-alone activity. Continuous communication between representatives and the communities they represent strengthens representation, which is supported by relevant social networks and life experiences. This practice shows that the ability to manage social roles locally and maintain strong relationships with the community are key factors in the success of women's political representation at the local level.

The continuity of the relationship between representatives and the community is an important factor in strengthening the quality of political representation. Community aspirations can be transformed into political agendas and concrete actions when regular and consistent communication is maintained. In this context, Maftukah Wiwin's role is seen as a voice for the community and a bridge between local decision-making and the social experiences of citizens. Therefore, the formation of responsive and sustainable political representation requires a balance between personal responsibility and social network support.

Substantive Role in Commission D: Bridging Women's and Family Aspirations

Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono fulfills a substantive representational role in Commission D of the Semarang City DPRD by actively converting women's and family aspirations into tangible legislative advocacy, embodying Pitkin's concept of representation through action on behalf of constituents rather than symbolic presence alone. Her efforts, rooted in personal experiences as a single mother and 30-year civil servant, focus on health, education, social welfare, and community empowerment areas where women bear disproportionate responsibilities transforming grassroots inputs into policy priorities amid Indonesia's 16% female parliamentary involvement in Semarang (BPS, 2025).

a. Legislative Task Orientation and Priority Issues

Commission D's mandate encompasses health services, education, social affairs, and community empowerment, aligning seamlessly with core concerns of female constituents such as family caregiving, economic vulnerability, and social protection. Maftukah Wiwin orients her legislative tasks toward advocating for enhanced social safeguards for women and children, including programs addressing domestic violence prevention, maternal health access, and child nutrition initiatives. She also champions economic empowerment for women led MSMEs through skill-building workshops and microfinance linkages, drawing directly from her observations of family economic constraints during PKK interactions. Semi structured interviews with DPRD peers and PKK members highlight her role in pushing resolutions for equitable education funding and welfare expansions, ensuring these policies reflect gendered realities like balancing domestic duties with public participation. This substantive focus counters the open proportional system's biases (Article 420, Law No. 7/2017), where women often receive non-strategic

ballot positions, by leveraging the 30% affirmative action quota (Article 55) to amplify family-centric issues.

b. Mechanisms for Capturing Community Aspirations.

Maftukah Wiwin's primary mechanism, the "Women Citizen Consultation" sessions initiated within PKK (Family Welfare Movement) meetings, serves as a structured bridge for aspiration capture, evolving from her intensive face-to-face campaigning under Article 275 of the Election Law. These forums, observed during participant research, feature guided discussions in women's community spaces like religious study groups pengajian, morning gymnastics, and neighborhood gatherings, where she facilitates open-ended dialogues on pressing issues: MSME capital shortages hindering women's entrepreneurship, inadequate sanitation affecting family health, and safety concerns for children and women in public spaces. By moderating these sessions with thematic prompts tied to Commission D's scope, she systematically gathers qualitative data such as testimonials on childcare burdens and environmental insecurities for triangulation with secondary sources like DPRD reports. This process exemplifies Verba and Nie's conventional participation model, progressing from gladiatorial mobilization (direct voter engagement) to policy advocacy, fostering reciprocity where constituents feel their voices directly inform legislative agendas, thus making politics accessible and relevant to daily lives.

c. Limitations and Challenges of Substantive Representation.

While Maftukah Wiwin's advocacy yields influence in Commission D deliberations, substantive representation faces limitations, remaining predominantly at the advocacy and influence stage per Verba and Nie's framework, without yet culminating in significant Regional Regulations) enactment. The study notes no evidence of transformative binding laws directly attributable to her initiatives, constrained by structural hurdles like limited party resources, hierarchical decision-making in the Democrat Party, and persistent socio cultural stereotypes viewing women as less capable in policy formulation. Resource gaps, such as funding for broader consultations and the halfway-term voter base transition from her late husband's legacy further impede full policymaking authority. These challenges underscore the affirmative action quota's catalytic yet insufficient role, necessitating enhanced political education, intra-party gender training, and systemic support to elevate women's voices from descriptive presence to authoritative law-making, ensuring sustained impact on issues like gender based violence and economic marginalization.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings and the objectives of this study, it can be concluded that women’s political participation in local governance is a multidimensional process shaped by institutional arrangements, personal agency, and sustained social engagement. The case of Maftukah Wiwin Subiyono demonstrates that affirmative action policies, particularly the 30 percent

gender quota mandated by Law No. 7 of 2017, play an important role in opening access for women to enter legislative institutions, yet their effectiveness depends on how women navigate socio-cultural and psychological barriers within local political contexts. Her political trajectory shows that inherited political networks, professional experience, and intensive face-to-face campaigning are decisive factors in transforming formal opportunities into actual electoral success. The findings further reveal that continuous engagement with women's community spaces, such as PKK and religious gatherings, strengthens symbolic and substantive representation by enabling women legislators to articulate lived experiences and translate them into policy advocacy in areas of health, education, social welfare, and women's empowerment. This study contributes to the scientific discourse on political representation by empirically linking Pitkin's dimensions of representation with Verba and Nie's theory of political participation in a local Indonesian context, illustrating how descriptive representation can evolve into substantive representation through relational strategies and community-based mobilization. By offering an in-depth qualitative case study, this research enriches the understanding of how gendered experiences and social networks enhance the quality of local governance, and provides a conceptual contribution to studies on women's political participation by emphasizing that meaningful representation extends beyond numerical inclusion toward responsive and inclusive policymaking.

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