

| Submission | Review Process    | Revised    | Accepted   | Published  |
|------------|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 19-03-2022 | 20 s/d 30-03-2023 | 29-04-2024 | 30-04-2024 | 30-04-2024 |

*Ampera: A Research Journal on Politics and  
Islamic Civilization, Vol. 5 No.2, April 2024 (112-117)*

## **Equality at the Polls: Female Representation Challenges in Musi Banyuasin Regency in 2019-2024**

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### **ABSTRAK**

In Musi Banyuasin Regency, the quest for gender equality in political representation faces multifaceted challenges. This study explores the barriers hindering female participation and representation in local electoral processes. Through qualitative analysis, interviews with key stakeholders including female candidates, local officials, and community leaders were conducted to uncover underlying issues. The findings reveal several critical challenges. Firstly, structural barriers such as entrenched patriarchal norms and limited access to financial resources significantly impede women from contesting elections on an equal footing with their male counterparts. Secondly, despite legal frameworks promoting gender equality, cultural perceptions and societal expectations often undermine women's political ambitions. Thirdly, the role of political parties emerges as pivotal, with varying levels of support and nomination opportunities affecting women's candidacy viability. Moreover, the study highlights community attitudes towards female leadership, where biases and stereotypes persist, shaping voter preferences and electoral outcomes. These dynamics perpetuate a cycle of underrepresentation and marginalization of women in decision-making bodies like the local legislative council. Ultimately, achieving gender equality at the polls in Musi Banyuasin Regency necessitates concerted efforts from various stakeholders to dismantle barriers, reshape cultural narratives, and advance inclusive governance practices.

**Keywords: Female Representation, Legislative Elections, Musi Banyuasin**

## **ABSTRACT**

Di Kabupaten Musi Banyuasin, upaya untuk mencapai kesetaraan gender dalam representasi politik menghadapi berbagai tantangan. Studi ini mengeksplorasi hambatan yang menghalangi partisipasi dan keterwakilan perempuan dalam proses pemilu di tingkat lokal. Melalui analisis kualitatif, wawancara dengan para pemangku kepentingan utama termasuk kandidat perempuan, pejabat daerah, dan tokoh masyarakat dilakukan untuk mengungkap isu-isu yang mendasarinya. Pertama, hambatan struktural seperti norma patriarki yang sudah mengakar dan terbatasnya akses terhadap sumber daya keuangan secara signifikan menghalangi perempuan untuk ikut serta dalam pemilu secara setara dengan laki-laki. Kedua, meskipun ada kerangka hukum yang mendorong kesetaraan gender, persepsi budaya dan ekspektasi masyarakat sering kali melemahkan ambisi politik perempuan. Ketiga, peran partai politik menjadi sangat penting, dengan berbagai tingkat dukungan dan peluang pencalonan yang mempengaruhi kelayakan pencalonan perempuan. Selain itu, penelitian ini menyoroti sikap masyarakat terhadap kepemimpinan perempuan, di mana bias dan stereotip masih ada, yang membentuk preferensi pemilih dan hasil pemilu. Dinamika ini melanggengkan siklus kurang terwakili dan marginalisasi perempuan dalam badan-badan pengambilan keputusan seperti dewan legislatif daerah. Pada akhirnya, untuk mencapai kesetaraan gender di tempat pemungutan suara di Kabupaten Musi Banyuasin, diperlukan upaya bersama dari berbagai pemangku kepentingan untuk menghilangkan hambatan, membentuk kembali narasi budaya, dan memajukan pemerintahan yang inklusif.

**Keywords: Keterwakilan Perempuan, Pemilu Legislatif, Musi Banyuasin**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The women's political stage has always been underestimated for a long time (Sissa, 2024). In Ancient Greece, women were only functional, that is, to provide for the necessities of life (Albayrak, 2023). Conditions in classical Greece are not much different from those in Indonesia, especially from the beginning of independence to the early New Order period. Women are only allowed to vote, not participate or even represent women in government, both in the executive and legislature. During the Old Order and New Order periods, the women's movement was only limited to fighting for emancipation, especially in formal matters such as education and health. In the early 1990s, the women's movement underwent significant changes (Puspita, 2023). They began to highlight gender equality issues, including women's representation in public and political spaces (Paxton, Hughes & Barnes, 2020). At that time, the women's movement in Indonesia was more influenced by the ideology of international feminism which focused on various problems and injustices (Alfiani & Anggraini, 2023). In the context of democracy, every citizen has the right to vote and the right to vote. The right to vote refers to active participation in elections, while the right to vote means that women can also occupy legislative and executive seats, and play a direct role in designing, drafting, and implementing policies

that have an impact on all citizens. Therefore, the issue of women's representation became one of the important issues after the New Order collapsed in Indonesia (Robinson, 2018; Saputra, Setiawan & Febriani, 2021)

Political understanding among women is also still low because the world of politics is considered to belong to men (Lips, 2016), so people feel that there is no need to provide political education to women. However, women elected to the legislature in Indonesia are close to the 30% quota, with a percentage of 27.64%. In response to the low representation of women in parliament, the Indonesian government introduced an affirmative action policy. This policy is applied both in the party management structure and in the list of legislative candidates.

In Musi Banyuasin Regency, as in many regions globally, traditional gender roles and societal expectations often conspire to limit women's political aspirations. Despite legal frameworks aimed at promoting equal opportunities, cultural norms that prioritize male leadership persist, influencing voter perceptions and candidate viability. Moreover, access to financial resources and party support frequently tilt the electoral landscape against female candidates, exacerbating disparities in representation. In this context, the number of women elected as members of the DPRD is very minimal. Only 4 of the 45 seats of DPRD members are occupied by women (InfoPublik.id, 2019). Understanding these challenges requires a nuanced analysis of how political systems intersect with social dynamics. This introduction sets the stage for exploring the multifaceted obstacles faced by women in Musi Banyuasin Regency, aiming to uncover insights that can inform policy interventions and grassroots initiatives aimed at fostering greater gender parity in local governance. By examining the specific hurdles faced by female candidates and the broader implications for democratic inclusivity, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing dialogues on advancing women's political empowerment and dismantling barriers to their full participation in electoral processes.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive research method with a case study approach. Case study research is an intensive study of a single case to draw generalizations to general phenomena (Gerring 2006). This approach allows us to dig deeper and in detail about a specific phenomenon, in this case, women's representation in the legislative candidacy process.

The case study method provides a framework that allows us to elaborate in more detail and in depth on the challenges and obstacles faced by women when running for legislative positions. In this study, we interviewed two elected female DPRD members, to gain first-hand insight into the experiences and challenges they faced during the nomination process. Our secondary data is obtained from a variety of sources that have been published in academic journals, as well as print and online media news. These sources provide broader context and support our in-depth analysis of the primary data we collected through interviews. We apply several stages in analyzing the data, namely data

reduction, explaining the findings, verifying the data, and drawing conclusions that involve synthesizing from all findings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.**

### **Women's Representation in the 2019-2024 Musi Banyuasin**

The law on 30% representation of women in the legislature has been very comprehensive in accommodating the existence and role of women (Blackburn, 2004; Ariany, Umar & Hanafiah, 2024). At the same time, the law also helps women to contest politics widely (Sukiada, 2016). With the existence of the Constitution, it seeks to eliminate gender differences in the world of practical politics, and the policies that are born also fight for many women (Vasandani, Nugraha, & Susantijo, 2022). However, the law returns to women, whether they want to contest politics or not. In fact, there is already a law that regulates and requires women to participate in the legislature. In other words, the existence of a 30% women's representation law is very helpful so that women can participate in politics, and for many people who do not like women to be leaders.

In the 2019-2024 legislative election contest in Musi Banyuasin Regency, it showed less than encouraging results for the existence of women. There were 13 political parties that did not meet the quota of 30% female representation in the list of legislative candidates. This shows that political parties still do not fully support women's participation in politics. In fact, women's involvement in politics is very important to create policies that are more inclusive and representative of all levels of society. Similarly, the General Election Commission (KPU) announced that only 4 women were elected members of the DPRD. Of the total 45 elected DPRD members, only 4 are women. Thus, the percentage of female representation in the Musi Banyuasin Regency Legislative Election contest only reached 13%, while men dominated with 87%. This fact shows that women's representation in political seats has not reached half of the target of 30%.

### **Problems and Challenges**

In principle, women have outstanding skills in leadership. Not only are they able to lead effectively, but they also bring a unique perspective that is often lost in male-dominated leadership. Women have a deep knowledge of politics and public policy, which is the result of formal education, work experience, and active involvement in a variety of social and community activities. Additionally, women often exhibit a strong leadership mentality, including resilience, empathy, good communication skills, and the ability to adapt to changing situations. These skills are especially important in political contexts, where the ability to negotiate, build consensus, and manage conflicts is indispensable.

Women also tend to be more inclusive in their leadership styles, often prioritizing collaboration and participation from various parties. This can bring great benefits in decision-making, as more perspectives and ideas are considered. In many countries, research has shown that women's involvement in politics and government can improve the quality of public policy, especially in areas such as education, health, and social

welfare. Furthermore, having more women in political leadership positions can inspire the next generation and create a more supportive environment for other women to participate in politics. This can help break the cycle of gender inequality and drive society towards greater equality. Therefore, there is no reason to doubt women's ability to be leaders. Support for women's involvement in politics is not only a matter of justice and equality, but also a strategic step towards achieving a more effective and responsive government to the needs of all members of society.

The low representation of women in the 2019-2024 Musi Banyuasin Regency Legislative Election contest which did not reach the 30% quota gave birth to various reactions and responses. Of the 45 available DPRD seats, only 4 seats are occupied by women, one of which is Eni Erliza and Nuti Romyana. Their representation in the DPRD contest is certainly inseparable from a myriad of experience and knowledge about the world of politics, authority, and responsibility. The election of the two women gives hope that they can give birth to policies that fight for and listen to the aspirations of the community, especially women.

The low representation of women in the Musi Banyuasin Regency DPRD in 2019-2024 is not so surprising, considering various factors that hinder women's participation in politics. These factors include. First, the issue of gender. In this case, the problem of gender differences that continue to be a problem in all circles is always an obstacle. The view that women are weak and only suitable for taking care of the household is still firmly embedded in society. This stereotype makes many women hesitant to enter politics and prove that they can be tough and competent leaders. Second, lack of political knowledge. In this case, the lack of political knowledge among women is often caused by a lack of willingness and interest to be directly involved in the world of politics. Without adequate knowledge about politics, women become less confident to run for office or actively participate in political activities. In addition, society often underestimates women's ability as leaders, considering them weak and only suitable to be housewives. Third, lack of family support. In this case, family support is an important factor in encouraging women's participation in politics. Many women face obstacles from families that do not support their involvement in politics, often due to concerns that politics is a harsh and intriguing world. In addition, the lack of political education for women makes them unprepared to be involved in politics. Women need to convince their families that getting into politics is not as bad as imagined and that they can balance political work and household duties.

## **CONCLUSION**

Women's representation in the Musi Banyuasin Regency DPRD for the 2019-2024 period did not reach the 30% quota, caused by structural and cultural barriers such as lack of family support, gender stereotypes, and lack of political education. In the 2024 Legislative Election contest, it is hoped that women's representation in politics can increase significantly, bring more diverse perspectives, and create inclusive policies that are responsive to the needs of all members of society, strengthen democracy, and encourage sustainable and equitable development.

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