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BEYOND THE BALLOT: ANALYZING THE FAILURE OF FEMALE LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES IN LOCAL INDONESIAN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the factors contributing to the electoral failure of female legislative candidates from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) in the 2019 local legislative election in Ambon. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on in-depth interviews, party documents, and official election results. The findings reveal four interrelated factors. First, the party's recruitment and cadre development processes were suboptimal, leading to inadequate political preparation for female candidates. Second, weak female political leadership within the party structure limited access to strategic resources and support. Third, the lack of prominent female figures diminished electoral appeal among voters. Fourth, the weak social base of the candidates contributed to low electability. The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on internal party dynamics as a critical factor in enabling—or constraining—women's success in local electoral politics. This research recommends systemic reforms in gender-responsive recruitment and capacity-building within political parties, as well as the strengthening of female leadership at the local level. These findings offer valuable insights for the development of social sciences and humanities, particularly in understanding power relations, political representation, and structural challenges facing women in Indonesian local politics.

Keywords: *Gender and Representation, Local Elections, Party Recruitment, Political Participation, Women in Politics*

INTRODUCTION

The involvement of women in politics is not merely a matter of representational justice, but also an indicator of the quality of inclusive and participatory democracy (Lupien, 2022; Mockler, 2022). Although Indonesia has adopted various affirmative policies, including a minimum 30% quota for women's representation on legislative candidate lists, the realization of these policies in terms of electoral success remains far from expectations. In Ambon City during the 2019 Legislative Election, most female legislative candidates from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) failed to secure seats, even though they had passed administrative selection and were nominated by a major party with strong national political capital. This reflects a significant gap between formal policy and political practice at the local level.

The core issue underlying this problem is that, although opportunities are available at the regulatory level, structural and cultural barriers continue to obstruct women's ability to compete equally in political spaces. These obstacles include non-merit-based recruitment processes, gender-insensitive political cadre development, the dominance of male figures in party leadership, and weak social support for female candidates (Maboudi, 2020; Prodip, 2022; Smith & Sinkford, 2022). In addition, local politics is often shaped by patronage, informal networks, and voter pragmatism—factors more easily accessed by male candidates (Saifuddin et al., 2019). Therefore, studying the internal dynamics of political parties and the structural challenges faced by female legislative candidates in local contexts such as Ambon City is of great importance.

Several previous studies have attempted to explain the dynamics of women's political participation in various local contexts in Indonesia. For instance, research by Aspinall et al. (2021) and Firdaus & Wulandari (2023) highlights how gender quotas tend to be viewed as administrative obligations rather than as substantive strategies for women's political empowerment. Studies by Asmorojati & Muhammadi (2021) and Wardani & Subekti (2021) demonstrate that political parties often fail to empower female cadres through training or access to campaign resources. In regional contexts, research by Lestari (2020), Mahsun et al. (2021), and Prihatini (2019) emphasizes the importance of social support bases and prominent public figures as key to electoral success—elements often lacking in female candidates. This is supported by findings from Bayo (2021), Choi (2019), and Dewi et al. (2023), who underscore the weakness of women's political networks at the local level as a major factor in their electoral failures.

On the other hand, studies by Adongo et al. (2023), Chuang (2019), and Schneider & Bos (2019) stress the importance of leadership training and gender-based political education as crucial steps in strengthening women's positions in a male-dominated political system. Research by Aldrich (2020) and Meserve et al. (2020) shows that the success of female candidates heavily depends on how parties position and manage them as political assets. Meanwhile, studies by Fadillah (2022), Herdiansah et al. (2019), and Solihin et al. (2019) reveal that in local electoral contexts, gender issues are often overshadowed by political pragmatism and the appeal of popular figures—advantages typically held by men.

Although these studies have made important contributions to understanding the structural and cultural constraints in women's politics, there remains a lack of research specifically examining the failures of female legislative candidates in local contexts—particularly those that analyze the interaction between party recruitment, internal leadership, and social base dynamics. Moreover, approaches that connect the weakness of personal charisma, the absence of structural party support, and the unpreparedness of female candidates as an interrelated set of problems have yet to be deeply explored in previous research.

In addressing this gap, the present study seeks to further investigate the dynamics behind the failure of PDIP's female legislative candidates in Ambon City's 2019 Legislative Election. This is done not solely from an electoral standpoint, but also through examining party structures, the candidates' personal characteristics, and the local social constructions. Such an approach allows

for a more holistic analysis by integrating various aspects often treated separately in earlier studies. Through a qualitative case study approach, this research attempts to reveal how internal party mechanisms, lack of support for female leadership, and the weak public appeal of female candidates form a chain of contributing factors. The study not only aims to answer the question of "why women fail in local elections," but also offers new insights into how political party systems and actors shape the trajectory and prospects of women's political participation. This research is expected to enrich the social sciences and humanities, particularly in understanding power relations, gender, and democracy in the context of Indonesian local politics.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, as its primary goal is to gain an in-depth understanding of the social and political realities behind the failure of PDIP's female legislative candidates in the 2019 Legislative Election in Ambon City. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to explore phenomena holistically within their natural contexts, especially when the issues involve power dynamics, representation, and social structures that are not always visible on the surface (Ahmad et al., 2019; Patton, 2020). This study does not aim to produce statistical generalizations, but rather to highlight the complexity and uniqueness of local contexts that are often overlooked in macro-political analyses.

Ambon City was selected as the research location because it reflects unique local political dynamics, with social, cultural, and political characteristics that differ from other regions in Indonesia. Moreover, Ambon is one of the cities in Eastern Indonesia with a low level of women's political representation in the local parliament, despite the implementation of gender quota regulations. The failure of female candidates from PDIP in the 2019 legislative election presents an interesting and relevant case for study, especially since PDIP, as a major national party, has not yet succeeded in optimally managing women's representation at the local level. Choosing this location also strengthens the position of this research as part of efforts to decolonize political studies, which have historically been centered on Western Indonesia.

The study involved 12 purposively selected informants based on their relevance and direct involvement in the 2019 legislative election process. The main informants consisted of five female legislative candidates from PDIP Ambon City who ran in the 2019 election, including both those who failed and those who came close to winning a seat. These informants were selected because their firsthand political experiences provided authentic insights into the obstacles and challenges they faced. Additional informants included three administrators from the PDIP Branch Leadership Council (DPC) in Ambon City, two local political observers, and two regional General Election Commission (KPU) members, each of whom offered important perspectives on political recruitment, affirmative policies, and electoral dynamics. This diverse set of informants enabled data triangulation and enriched the understanding of the phenomena under study.

Data were collected using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, limited participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews served as the primary method, as they allowed for a reflective and contextual exploration of informants' personal experiences, perceptions, and strategies (Mulisa, 2022). Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was recorded with the informants' consent, then transcribed verbatim for analysis. Observations were conducted during campaign activities and internal party meetings, offering insights into patterns of interaction, leadership dynamics, and female representation in political forums. Meanwhile, document analysis included election data from the KPU, the party's statutes and bylaws (AD/ART), local PDIP organizational structures, and local media coverage related to campaign events and election outcomes. These three methods were used simultaneously to capture complementary dimensions across personal narratives, institutional structures, and public representations.

To ensure data validity, triangulation techniques were applied using three main strategies: source triangulation, method triangulation, and time triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from female candidates, party officials, and election organizers. Method triangulation was achieved by combining interviews, observations, and document reviews. Time triangulation involved repeating key interviews in two or three phases to test the consistency of the information provided. This process strengthened data reliability and minimized interpretive bias.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Party Recruitment and Party Cadre Development

Recruitment conducted by political parties is one of the crucial stages in preparing cadres with the potential to become national leaders. To achieve this goal, political parties must have effective recruitment and cadre development processes, with well-structured stages (Zahra et al., 2023). In this context, an interview with Mr. WT, who serves as the Secretary of the Ambon City Branch Executive Council (DPC) of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) on February 24, 2023, offers valuable insights. He explained, "For the 2019 recruitment, PDIP referred to Party Regulation (PP) No. 25A of 2018 on the recruitment and selection of candidates for the DPR, DPD, and DPRD. This regulation provided ample opportunities for the public, especially women, who wished to join PDI Perjuangan." The emphasis on offering broad opportunities to the public, particularly women, in the recruitment process reflects the party's commitment to inclusivity in politics and to ensuring that individuals with potential are given equal opportunities to participate in the party's political journey. An open and inclusive recruitment process like this is expected to enhance diversity and gender representation in politics, thereby strengthening democracy and improving governance.

A fair and inclusive recruitment process is a critical first step in building a healthy and diverse political foundation. The Party Regulation No. 25A of 2018, referred to by PDIP Ambon

City, demonstrates the party's seriousness in creating a structured process and providing broad opportunities for citizens, especially women, to engage in politics. This is a positive step in addressing gender inequality in the political sphere (Cohen & Karim, 2022; Willie & Kershaw, 2019).

However, the success of recruitment also depends on the implementation and enforcement of such regulations. Political parties must actively encourage women's participation and identify leadership potential to ensure women play a more significant role in politics. Moreover, political education and the active support of the party can help women feel more confident and prepared to engage in political processes. It is also important to monitor and evaluate the recruitment process periodically to ensure that the principles of gender equality are realized in practice. These measures will help ensure that women have a stronger presence in local and national politics and that the public can benefit more from balanced gender representation in political decision-making.

The perspective of Mr. DL, who serves as Head of the National Election Witness Board (BSPN) of the PDIP DPC Ambon City, given in an interview on April 10, 2023, provides a clearer view of the importance of adhering to party rules and the provisions of the Election Law in the recruitment process. He emphasized, "We still refer to the party rules. The most fundamental aspect of recruitment is in accordance with the provisions of the Election Law, namely the 30% women's quota, as that is the most important." This statement highlights the importance of complying with regulations and laws that mandate women's quotas in politics. By allocating at least 30% of seats for women, the legislation aims to promote women's political participation and address gender imbalance. However, adhering to this rule should not remain a formality, but involve real efforts to ensure that women are encouraged and supported to register and participate in the political process.

In this regard, Mr. DL emphasized the importance of disseminating candidate registration announcements to all districts and ensuring that the potential of female candidates is recognized and encouraged. In doing so, the recruitment process can foster an inclusive and fair environment, allowing women to actively engage in politics while also fulfilling legal requirements and supporting the broader goal of gender equality in political decision-making.

Through Mr. DL's perspective as Head of BSPN DPC PDIP Ambon City, expressed on April 10, 2023, it becomes evident that adhering to party regulations and the provisions of the Election Law—especially regarding the 30% women's quota—is critical. Understanding that this quota is a key principle in recruitment reflects a commitment to achieving more balanced gender representation in politics. The implementation of the 30% quota for women is a strategic step toward addressing gender inequality in politics. It encourages political parties to actively seek out, support, and recognize the potential of female legislative candidates. However, it is important not to reduce this effort to a mere numbers game, but to also create an enabling environment for active female participation.

Announcing legislative candidate registration in all subdistricts is a key step in ensuring that women have equal opportunities to register and engage in the political process. This enables women from various backgrounds and regions to take part in politics, ultimately enhancing the diversity of perspectives and experiences they bring to political decision-making. Mr. DL's viewpoint underscores how essential it is to follow party regulations and election laws regarding women's quotas in candidate recruitment. It is not merely about fulfilling legal requirements, but also about creating a fair and inclusive foundation for women seeking to participate in politics—allowing them to effectively contribute to societal and national development.

The results of this interview reveal that the recruitment process for female legislative candidates (caleg) from PDIP in the four Electoral Districts (Dapil) of Ambon City was conducted in accordance with the provisions outlined in the Election Law and party regulations. This indicates PDIP's commitment to upholding the law and democratic principles in conducting the recruitment process. Nevertheless, there is a candid acknowledgment that, although the recruitment process followed the guidelines, the 30% target for female representation among candidates has not been fully achieved. This remains a challenge faced by many political parties in realizing gender equality in politics. Despite efforts to find qualified female candidates, further work is needed to increase both the number and role of women in political life.

In this context, it is crucial for political parties and society at large to continue striving to enhance women's participation in politics. This may include more proactive efforts to identify and support qualified female candidates, provide necessary training and support, and foster an inclusive environment that encourages women to engage in political processes. These steps are expected to increase women's political representation, enrich the diversity of viewpoints, and promote more inclusive and just decision-making.

Women's Political Leadership

Leadership and office-holding are reflections of a person's authority, responsibility, and hard work during their tenure. When such positions are attained through effort and struggle starting from lower ranks, they become even more meaningful. This idea is supported by an interview with Mrs. IN, who serves as Treasurer of the Ambon City DPC PDIP and was also a female legislative candidate from PDIP in the 2019 Ambon City Legislative Elections, conducted on February 24, 2023.

Mrs. IN exemplifies a leader with active engagement in social organizations, particularly Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Her role in these organizations extends beyond membership, as she also holds leadership responsibilities. This demonstrates her strong commitment and dedication to her social roles and professional duties. In addition, her hard-earned managerial experience as the manager of an NGO owned by her in-laws highlights her success in building credibility and authority in the social sector.

From this interview, we can conclude that leadership is not merely about attaining a position, but about how one manages responsibility and plays a crucial role in their field. Mrs. IN

is an inspiring example that success in leadership can be achieved through hard work, dedication, and active engagement in various social initiatives. Her success proves that leadership attained through grassroots struggle has great value and positive influence across multiple sectors of society. Leadership and office-holding are two important elements that often reflect the character, capability, and dedication of individuals throughout their service. Beyond mere positions, leadership is about one's ability to influence and inspire others while bearing the responsibilities tied to their authority.

The interview with Mrs. IN revealed how a leader can have a significant impact on the social sector. Her role in NGOs is tangible proof of how leadership can be applied in social activities that benefit the community. It is important to remember that leadership is not just about holding a specific office, but about how one uses their position to serve and contribute positively to society. Mrs. IN's success in fulfilling her social role shows that responsibility and hard work during one's term of service are key to leadership success.

Although some female legislative candidates from PDIP were unsuccessful in securing seats, a different perspective was offered by Mr. DL, who served as Head of BSPN DPC PDIP Ambon City in 2019, during an interview on April 10, 2023. Mr. DL emphasized that labeling female PDIP candidates as failures may not be entirely accurate, especially when considering the Sainte-Laguë vote conversion system used in the election.

He explained that although several female candidates from PDIP were not elected, they still managed to garner a significant number of votes. For instance, in Electoral District 3, one female candidate obtained over 900 votes. The key point emphasized here is that the active involvement of PDIP's female candidates in the election process resulted in considerable voter support, showing that they had strong community backing.

Mr. DL also highlighted that in some cases, male candidates—often incumbents—had an advantage due to their larger vote counts. This is a common occurrence in politics, where candidates with prior office experience tend to have name recognition and electoral advantages. This perspective offers a more optimistic view of the performance of PDIP's female candidates. Even if they were not elected, their contribution in gathering votes and actively participating in the political process remains valuable. It also highlights the importance of encouraging more women to enter politics to achieve a more balanced gender representation in political decision-making.

The interview results provide deeper insight into the failure of PDIP's female candidates to win seats in the Ambon City Regional Legislative Council (DPRD) in the 2019 elections. Their ability to collect a respectable number of votes essentially shows that they had significant public support and the qualifications needed to represent their constituencies. However, their failure to secure seats was due to the Sainte-Laguë vote conversion system used in the election.

The Sainte-Laguë method is a system used to calculate seat allocation in proportional representation systems. It divides the number of votes obtained by each candidate using specific divisors to determine who earns a seat. In many cases, male candidates often gain more votes

than female candidates, due to various factors, including social and cultural influences on voter preferences. Since male candidates generally have higher vote counts, they tend to dominate seat allocations under the Sainte-Laguë system. This issue is not specific to PDIP or its female candidates, but is a broader challenge within proportional representation systems that use such methods.

The Withering Prominence of Female Political Figures

In the journey toward leadership, the interaction and cooperation between leaders and the community play a vital role. It is not only the leader who contributes to community development, but also the involvement and support of society that determine the extent to which leaders—particularly women—can achieve their goals in politics. In the context of the 2019 municipal elections in Ambon, the openness and acceptance of the public toward female leadership became a key element in determining the success of female legislative candidates from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP).

An interview with Ms. JS, a community member from RT 04 Kudamati, conducted on February 27, 2023, provided valuable insight into public perspectives on women in politics. Ms. Julia referred to the historical struggle of Kartini in advocating for women's emancipation and gender equality as a foundational justification for women's right to participate in leadership. For her, women possess equal rights to lead and contribute to public affairs, and their role should not be confined to the domestic sphere.

Ms. Julia's view reflects a societal shift toward a more inclusive and progressive understanding of women's roles in politics. When society embraces the idea that women have equal capacity and entitlement to leadership, the electoral prospects of female candidates become significantly stronger. Therefore, active public support, as expressed by Ms. Julia, serves as a cornerstone in advancing women's roles in politics and ensuring that their voices are taken into account in crucial decision-making processes. By upholding values of gender equality and continuing to raise awareness on the importance of women's political participation, we can ensure that all members of society feel engaged and empowered to enact positive change within political and social structures.

In the pursuit of more inclusive leadership and political representation, community support is indispensable. Public involvement and backing play a crucial role in determining the success of female candidates, particularly those from PDIP, in the 2019 Ambon municipal elections. The community's openness to women as leaders and decision-makers significantly influenced whether or not female candidates were elected.

Through the interview with Ms. JS, a resident of RT 04 Kudamati, conducted on February 27, 2023, we gain a clear understanding of the strong belief in women's rights to participate in politics and leadership. She referenced the legacy of Kartini as a symbol of women's emancipation and gender equality. For her, women have the same right to lead and actively engage in society, and their roles are not limited to household responsibilities. Ms. JS's opinion

demonstrates a cultural and societal shift toward greater acceptance of women's political roles. When the public acknowledges that women are equally capable of leading and making decisions, the chances of female candidates being elected increase significantly. Active support from the public, such as that expressed by Ms. Julia, is a critical element in empowering women in politics and ensuring that their perspectives and aspirations are respected within a more inclusive political system.

It is essential to continuously promote public education and awareness regarding the importance of gender equality in politics and leadership. By enhancing understanding of the role women play in national and community development, we can ensure that women are given equal opportunities to participate in shaping a more just and diverse future through political decision-making.

The significance of a legislative candidate's public profile and popularity cannot be overlooked in the context of elections. How society perceives and recognizes a candidate can significantly impact electoral outcomes. To assess the prominence of female PDIP candidates in Ambon City, we refer to an interview with Mr. BHU, the head of RT 04 Kudamati, conducted on February 27, 2023.

Mr. BHU's comments underscore the importance of popularity in politics. He emphasized that candidates must attain a considerable level of public recognition to succeed in elections. Popularity is one of the key factors shaping public perception and support for a candidate. However, he also acknowledged that in the 2019 municipal elections in Ambon, female PDIP candidates may not have been as well-known as their counterparts from other parties. This reveals the challenges faced by PDIP's female candidates in building their public image and recognition, especially in a competitive political environment.

The interview findings suggest that popularity is a vital element in determining a candidate's success. Nevertheless, to enhance women's political representation, attention must go beyond popularity. Efforts should also focus on building strong public images and ensuring candidates have the necessary qualifications. Hence, improving the prominence and popularity of women in politics must be part of broader initiatives to boost female participation in democratic processes.

Interviews with various stakeholders provide deeper insights into the factors contributing to the failure of female PDIP candidates to secure seats in the Ambon City DPRD during the 2019 elections. A significant factor is the low level of public recognition or visibility of these candidates.

In political contexts, prominence—or public recognition—is a key factor influencing a candidate's chances of garnering voter support. Candidates known by the public generally have an advantage in elections. However, interview results revealed that most female PDIP candidates were not well-known among Ambon City residents. This lack of recognition poses a serious challenge in the electoral process, as voters are more inclined to support familiar or popular candidates. Thus, limited public recognition can be a major reason behind PDIP female candidates' electoral failure.

To address this challenge, steps must be taken to build public prominence and increase the visibility of female candidates. This can involve more intensive campaigning, active participation in community events, engagement in social activities, and other efforts to introduce themselves to potential voters. Political parties also have a significant role in helping female candidates gain prominence and supporting their electoral success.

The Weak Social Base of Women Candidates

The social base is an important factor considered by the PDIP's Ambon City Branch Leadership Council (DPC) during the recruitment of legislative candidates. This is based on the understanding that a candidate's social foundation significantly influences voter preference in elections. An interview with Ms. JS, a resident of RT 04 Kudamati conducted on February 27, 2023, highlighted the importance of this factor.

Ms. JS provided a clear perspective on how social entities—such as a candidate's place of origin—can affect voter preferences. Her personal experience in past elections showed that people often tend to support candidates with affiliations or connections to specific social entities, such as a shared hometown or community. This could be due to the familiarity and trust established within those social structures.

This indicates that beyond qualifications and vision, the candidate's social base also plays a key role in the electoral process. Candidates with strong ties and relationships within specific social groups may have an advantage in securing support from those communities. In politics, understanding the importance of social bases is crucial for both candidates and political parties. Candidates can leverage their networks to build public support, while political parties may consider diversifying their candidates to include various social entities, thereby fostering more inclusive political representation. Thus, the social base is a factor that cannot be ignored in politics. Understanding its role helps clarify the dynamics of elections and can lead to more effective political representation (Krupnik et al., 2022; Yani et al., 2022).

As explained by Ms. JS in her February 27, 2023, interview, the social base has a strong impact on the election process. This understanding illustrates how factors such as a candidate's origin or personal connections to voters can shape voter preferences. The importance of the social base is part of a broader electoral dynamic. People often support candidates with whom they share social ties or familiarity, as they tend to feel more comfortable and trusting of individuals they know or who are socially close to them. However, it is important to note that while the social base can influence voters' choices, it should not be the sole criterion in selecting candidates. A candidate's qualifications, vision, commitment, and work plan must also be seriously considered. In practice, a strong social base combined with solid qualifications can be a determining factor in a candidate's electoral success.

For candidates and political parties, understanding the role of the social base can serve as a strategic tool for building public support. This involves fostering good relationships with diverse social groups and understanding the varied needs and aspirations of the community.

Additionally, voter education can help overcome biases rooted in social bases. Educating voters can guide them to evaluate candidates based on their qualifications and vision rather than solely on social factors.

Statements made by Mr. BHU, head of RT 04 Kudamati, during his interview on February 27, 2023, highlight the importance of social connections and relationships in politics. He pointed out that having relatives or acquaintances serving as DPRD members can influence voter preferences. This illustrates how social relationships and regional affiliations play a significant role in local politics.

In local political contexts, personal relationships—such as having family members or acquaintances involved in politics—can foster a sense of ownership and hope within the community. Voters often expect that electing candidates from their own area will result in greater benefits and attention to their local needs. This is a key aspect of local politics, where constituents want to see their representatives genuinely committed to advancing the interests of their region.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that while social connections may affect elections, they must be accompanied by careful assessments of candidates' qualifications and commitments. Voters must ensure that their chosen candidates can truly represent the public interest and are dedicated to the progress of their region. In broader political practice, understanding how social relationships and regional affiliations affect electoral outcomes can assist candidates and political parties in developing effective campaign strategies. This includes strengthening community engagement and presenting relevant visions and work plans tailored to local needs. Thus, Mr. BHU's statement shows that social connections and regional ties play a vital role in local politics, and understanding this factor helps enhance our comprehension of grassroots electoral dynamics.

Findings from interviews with various stakeholders reveal the factors contributing to the failure of female PDIP candidates to secure seats in the Ambon City DPRD in the 2019 general elections. In addition to the previously discussed issues of public prominence and community support, a weak social base and limited political track record also contributed to their failure.

The social base—referring to a candidate's network and social connections—has a significant impact on politics. In electoral contexts, strong ties with various societal groups, organizations, or communities can help candidates build broader support. However, if PDIP's female candidates had relatively weak or limited social bases, this would have hindered their efforts to gain sufficient support for election. Besides the limited social base, a minimal political track record also posed challenges. A candidate's political track record reflects their past experience and involvement in politics. Those with extensive political backgrounds and active engagement in political activities may have an advantage in understanding local dynamics, building relationships, and effectively communicating their visions to voters.

Yet, if female PDIP candidates had little or no political experience, they may have lacked these advantages. This can influence voter perceptions of their qualifications and abilities to

perform effectively as members of the DPRD. To address these challenges, actions should include strengthening candidates' social bases through active community participation and involvement in local organizations, as well as increasing political engagement. Political education and training can also help female candidates better understand political processes and develop the qualifications needed for effective leadership.

Ultimately, the failure of female PDIP candidates in Ambon's 2019 general election can be attributed to several factors, including weak social foundations and minimal political experience. To enhance women's roles in politics, strengthening these aspects must become a central focus in future recruitment and preparation of female candidates.

Internal Party Dynamics and the Absence of Strong Female Leadership

One of the most critical yet often overlooked factors contributing to the failure of female legislative candidates in local politics is the internal dynamics of political parties themselves. In the case of PDIP in Ambon, the party's internal structure and operational practices reflect a broader gender imbalance that significantly disadvantages female candidates. The lack of strategic support, limited access to campaign resources, and absence of mentoring mechanisms have collectively weakened the political standing of women within the party.

Interviews with party insiders and community members reveal that the nomination process within PDIP was often influenced by informal networks dominated by male elites. As a result, female candidates were less likely to be positioned in winnable districts or receive sufficient backing for their campaigns. Moreover, the party's cadre development programs were found to be inadequate in preparing female members for the rigors of electoral politics. Without systematic political training and capacity-building initiatives that are responsive to gender disparities, female candidates were left to navigate the political landscape with minimal institutional support.

The absence of strong female figures in leadership positions within PDIP at the local level further exacerbated the problem. Leadership roles that could have provided visibility, influence, and the authority to advocate for female representation were predominantly held by men. This not only limited the space for women to advance their political careers but also sent a message to the electorate that female leadership was less valued within the party.

Addressing these internal party barriers is essential to improving women's electability in local politics. Gender-sensitive reforms in party recruitment, leadership development, and campaign support structures are necessary to create a more equitable political environment. Without such changes, female candidates will continue to be marginalized, regardless of their individual capabilities or the evolving attitudes of voters toward women in leadership.

Furthermore, the internal party culture often reflects and perpetuates societal gender norms, which restrict women's political participation. In many cases, female candidates face skepticism not only from voters but also from within their own parties. This skepticism can manifest as limited encouragement to pursue leadership roles or as implicit biases that favor

male candidates during candidate selection processes. Such cultural barriers inside the party structure undermine female politicians' confidence and hinder the development of a robust pipeline of qualified women leaders.

In addition, the lack of visible female role models in political leadership within PDIP contributes to a cycle of underrepresentation. When aspiring female politicians do not see women successfully occupying influential positions, they may feel discouraged or perceive politics as an inaccessible arena. This absence of role models diminishes motivation and reduces the likelihood that women will invest the time and resources needed to build a political career. Conversely, strong female leadership could inspire greater participation and foster solidarity among women within the party.

Lastly, internal party reforms need to be coupled with broader societal efforts to challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equality in politics. While parties like PDIP play a pivotal role in shaping electoral outcomes, the sociocultural context also shapes voter attitudes and expectations regarding female leadership. Political parties must therefore work in tandem with civil society organizations, media, and educational institutions to cultivate a political environment that values and supports women candidates. Such a holistic approach is essential to breaking down both institutional and cultural barriers to women's political success in Indonesia's local elections.

CONCLUSION

The failure of female legislative candidates from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) in the 2019 Ambon City Legislative Election cannot be attributed solely to individual limitations or a lack of voter support. Rather, it reflects deeper, entrenched structural issues within political parties and the broader local socio-political dynamics. The findings of this study reveal that the party's unpreparedness in developing gender-equitable recruitment and political cadre systems has directly contributed to the limited political capacity of female candidates. In this context, the absence of institutional support for women's leadership within the party has not only restricted their political mobility but also significantly weakened their bargaining position in electoral competition. The lack of established political stature and the absence of a robust social support base further diminished the electoral prospects of women at the local level. This overall process underscores that women's political success in local electoral contexts is profoundly shaped by the interaction between party structures, community social configurations, and the implementation of systematic empowerment strategies. In addressing the core objective of this research, it can be concluded that improving women's success in local political contests requires a paradigmatic shift within political parties. Women must no longer be regarded as mere administrative complements but recognized as strategic political actors who need to be nurtured, prepared, and supported through sustained institutional mechanisms. Emphasizing the internal dimensions of party organization as a primary determinant of either the

success or failure of female candidates highlights the urgent need for political parties to adopt more inclusive and transformative policy orientations. Accordingly, this study offers a meaningful contribution to academic discourses on power relations and gender representation, while also advocating for the renewal of political practices towards greater justice within Indonesia's local democratic system.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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