Women in the Political Landscape: A Study on the Roles of Female Legislators in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia

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Abstract

Amidst the prevailing patriarchal culture that dominates various life dimensions, particularly in politics, women's political representation emerges as a beacon of change. Women often face multifaceted socio-political challenges, necessitating them to invest more resources and effort than their male counterparts to make their mark in politics. This research examines the roles and contributions of female legislators in the NTT Provincial DPRD for the 2019-2024 tenure, particularly in aligning with the interests of political parties and the broader categorization of women in legislative bodies. The strategies employed to allocate positions to women are diverse, reflecting their aspirations to enhance their influence and access in politics. These aspirations are anchored in the desire to bolster the capacities of women and youth in political spheres. Emphasizing the significance of economic, social, and political capacities, this study underscores the need for women to possess financial resources, robust social networks, and political acumen to navigate and thrive in the political landscape.

Keywords

patriarchal culture; political landscape; east nusa tenggara, female legislators

Introduction

The domination of patriarchal culture in people's lives in NTT is almost visible in every aspect of people's lives (Asmarani & Hidayat, 2022; Kebingin, 2021; Lon & Widyawati, 2018). Men have the power to determine what women should do. Men appear as the people who know best whether a decision is good or not (Cho & Jang, 2021; Murtiningsih, Advenita, & Ikom, 2017). While women only listen and follow directions from men. In this dimension, of course, mainstreaming gender in social life will be difficult to frame, the existence of women will always be seen as an object of patriarchal culture (Ngundju Awang, Maria Kristin, & A A Woda, 2023; Rodliyah, Purwasito, Sudardi, & Abdullah, 2018).

In gender relations between men and women, women are always placed in the domestic area (kitchen and childcare), this is a stigma for most of the socio-political life of the people in NTT (Dale, 2016). This of course makes it difficult for women to build and develop their own capacity. The implication is that most women do not want to be included in the legislative candidate market in NTT (Dalupe, 2020; Suyanto, Arwiyah, & Machfiroh, 2016). So, what happens is that the existence of female legislative candidates is only to fulfill the quota of representation in political parties, namely 30% of the Final Candidate List. However, in fact, there are NTT women who have qualified skills so that they can qualify to become members of the NTT DPRD, although in limited numbers. In the 2019 legislative election, it was recorded that of the 65 seats up for grabs, only 12 seats were won by female legislators, the remaining 53 seats were occupied by male legislators (Ngundju Awang et al., 2023).

The composition of legislative members in the NTT Provincial DPRD for the 2019-2024 period is still dominated by male DPRD members with a percentage of 82% male legislators and 18% female legislators.

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The composition is still lame where the target for representation of women legislators in DPRD ideally reaches 30%. This explains that the influence of patriarchal culture is still quite strong in influencing people's political preferences during the election of members of the NTT provincial legislature (Aspinall, White, & Savirani, 2021; Bayo, 2021; Johannes, Liliweri, Gana, & Nursalam, 2022). Although the composition of the NTT DPRD members is like this, the performance produced by the NTT provincial DPRD so far has been the performance of an institution in which 18% of women legislators also contribute (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage Based on Gender of East Nusa Tenggara Legislative Members
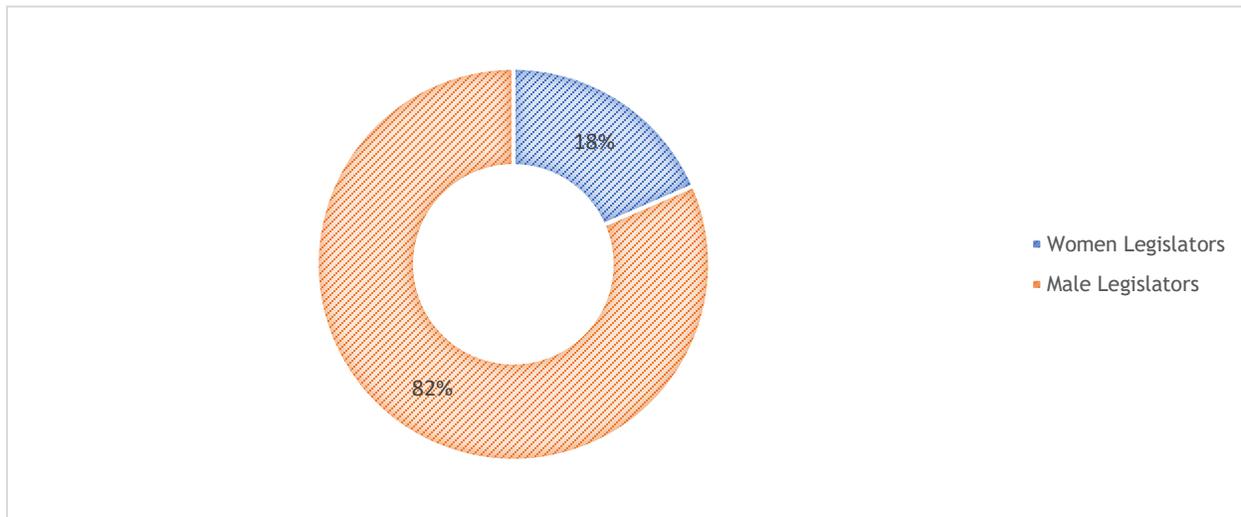
Discourses related to women's political representation emerged amid the domination and hegemony of patriarchal culture in various dimensions of life, especially in the political space (Hamid, Basid, & Aulia, 2021). Women in a patriarchal culture are generally constructed socially and politically to assume roles, carry character, and behave in the private (domestic) sphere (Giroux, 1991). Levels vary from extreme. exclusion to more moderate and more fluid fusing. Nevertheless, everything is still inhibiting and does not accustom women to being able to take part in the public sphere. There is a kind of socio-political obstacle that forces women to double their capital and power, which must be spent more heavily and complicated than men when they enter politics (Eto, 2010; Shojaei, Samsu, & Asayesh, 2010).

Discourses on women's political representation are emerging, challenging the prevailing patriarchal norms. Historically, women have been socially and politically constructed to assume roles within the private or domestic sphere. This confinement varies in intensity but consistently hinders women from actively participating in the public domain. Women face multifaceted socio-political barriers, requiring them to exert more effort and resources than their male counterparts to break into politics. Previous research, such as the one conducted by Jovani, Subono, & Suyanto (2020), has shed light on these challenges. Their study highlighted the strides made by women in the 2014 Provincial Legislative Election and the subsequent decline in 2029. Such research underscores the importance of understanding the dynamics at play and the need for more inclusive policies. Similarly, studies by Nurdin (2022) and Ferdous & Islam (2021) emphasize the challenges faced in implementing gender mainstreaming in local governments, both in Indonesia and abroad.

Given this backdrop, it becomes imperative to delve deeper into the factors influencing women's political representation in NTT. Understanding the challenges and barriers they face, shaped by the overarching patriarchal culture, is crucial. This research aims to bridge the knowledge gap, offering insights that could pave the way for more inclusive and gender-responsive policies in the future.

Methods

In this research, we aim to explore the experiences and roles of female legislators in the NTT Province using a qualitative approach. The methodology has been meticulously designed to ensure clarity,

reproducibility, and robustness in the findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018). We have chosen a qualitative approach because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of women legislators, capturing nuances that might be missed in a purely quantitative study. Our primary data collection techniques include in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The rationale behind this combination is to capture both individual narratives and collective perspectives, providing a holistic understanding of the subject. These interviews will offer detailed insights into the personal experiences, challenges, and perspectives of each legislator, while the FGDs will facilitate a collective dialogue, allowing for the emergence of shared experiences and common themes.

The participants have been selected based on their representation in the NTT legislature, encompassing legislators from various parties such as The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Indonesian: Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan, PDI-P), The Indonesian Unity Party (Indonesian: Partai Perindo), The National Democratic Party (Indonesian: Partai NasDem), The National Mandate Party (Indonesian: Partai Amanat Nasional, PAN), The National Awakening Party (Indonesian: Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, PKB), The Functional Groups Party (Indonesian: Partai Golongan Karya, Golkar), The Democratic Party (Indonesian: Partai Demokrat), and The Great Indonesia Movement Party (Indonesian: Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya, Gerindra).

This selection ensures a diverse and comprehensive representation of female legislators in the province. While the primary focus is qualitative, any emergent quantitative data will be statistically analyzed. To ensure the validity of our findings, we will seek expert opinions in the relevant field to verify our results using the same dataset. The decision to employ this approach, combined with interviews and FGDs, stems from the need to deeply understand the intricacies of female representation in a patriarchal setting. The research will be conducted in the NTT Province over a period of six months, ensuring sufficient time for thorough data collection, analysis, and validation. Each methodological choice is backed by a clear rationale, ensuring the study's integrity and relevance to the subject matter.

Result and Discussion

Despite the emerging discourses on women's political representation, patriarchal norms remain deeply entrenched in NTT, often overshadowing women's roles and contributions in the public domain. Historically, societal constructs have predominantly placed women within the confines of the domestic sphere. This confinement, although varying in intensity across different regions and communities, consistently acts as a barrier, preventing women from actively participating in public and political arenas. The challenges are manifold, with women having to navigate a complex web of socio-political barriers. These barriers often demand from them a greater exertion of effort and resources compared to their male counterparts to make a mark in politics.

Drawing from previous research, such as the study by Jovani et al. (2020), it's evident that while there were significant strides made by women in the 2014 Provincial Legislative Election, there was a concerning decline by 2029. This fluctuation in women's political representation underscores the volatile nature of their political journey, influenced by both societal perceptions and institutional barriers. Furthermore, studies by Nurdin (2022) and Ferdous & Islam (2021) highlight the challenges in implementing gender mainstreaming policies at the local government level, not just in Indonesia but globally. These challenges, often rooted in deep-seated patriarchal beliefs, hinder the effective translation of these policies into actionable steps.

The cultural landscape of NTT is deeply intertwined with patriarchal norms that have, for centuries, dictated the roles and responsibilities of its inhabitants. Women have been at the receiving end of these norms, often being relegated to the confines of the domestic sphere. Historically, these societal constructs have been so deeply embedded that they have overshadowed the potential and capabilities of women, limiting their roles to mere caregivers or homemakers. This confinement, while varying in intensity across different regions and communities within NTT, has consistently acted as a barrier, hindering women from stepping out and actively participating in the public domain, especially in politics.

The journey of a woman in NTT aspiring to enter politics is riddled with challenges that are multifaceted and complex. Beyond the societal challenges that stem from deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs, there are

also institutional barriers that women have to navigate. These institutional challenges manifest in various forms, such as limited access to resources essential for political campaigns, lack of networking opportunities with key stakeholders, and a glaring absence of mentorship or guidance from seasoned politicians. The political landscape, while showing signs of evolution, remains largely male-dominated. This is evident from the fluctuations in women's political representation over the years. For instance, while there was a significant increase in women's representation in the 2014 Provincial Legislative Election, a subsequent decline was observed in 2029. Such fluctuations not only highlight the volatile nature of women's political representation but also underscore the intricate dynamics at play, influenced by both societal perceptions and institutional barriers.

Figure 2. Characteristics of Respondents Based on the Bearer Party
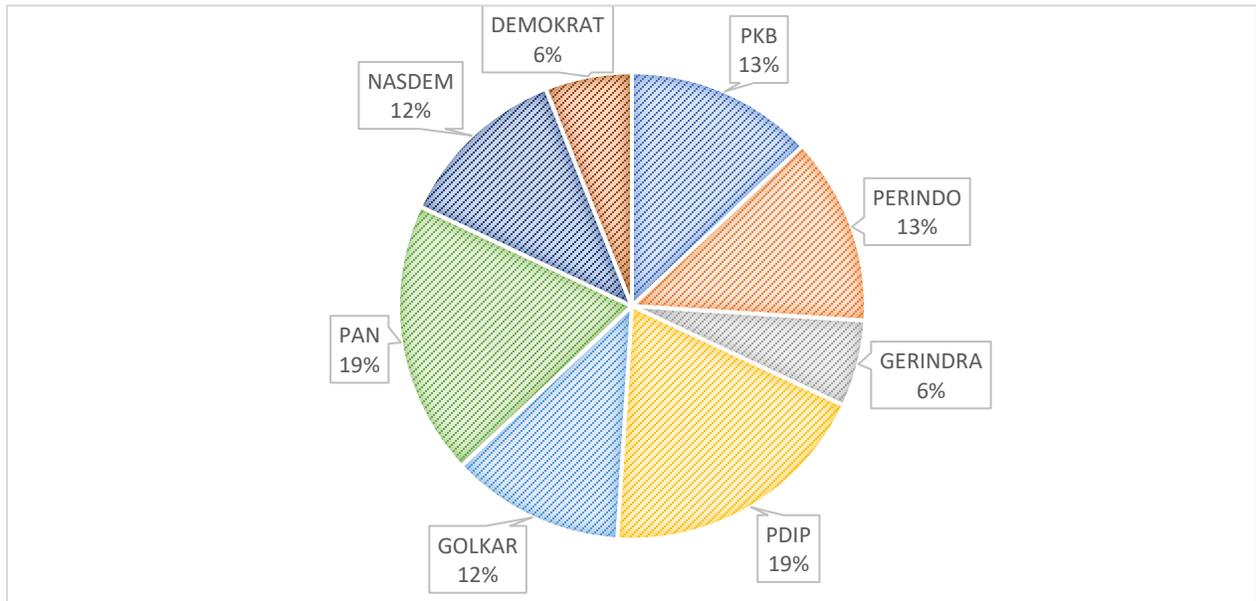

Furthermore, while there have been policies and regulations introduced with the aim of gender mainstreaming, their implementation at the grassroots level, especially in local governments, remains a challenge. The patriarchal beliefs, deeply entrenched in the societal fabric of NTT, often act as roadblocks, hindering the effective translation of these policies into actionable steps that can bring about tangible change. However, it's not all bleaks. The silver lining in this complex scenario is the increasing discourse on women's political representation. With the efforts of various women-centric NGOs, advocacy groups, and community leaders, there's a growing awareness and push towards creating a more inclusive political environment.

The research delved into this socio-cultural milieu, thick with patriarchal undertones. It identified patriarchal culture as a key determinant of women's political representation in the NTT Provincial DPRD. Interestingly, the election of women to the NTT Provincial DPRD suggests a silver lining. It indicates that while patriarchal norms are strong, they don't always stifle women's political ambitions, especially during nominations and elections. Regulatory frameworks also play a role in bolstering women's representation. However, a lingering question remains: does the inclusion of female legislators in the NTT Provincial DPRD truly enhance the status of women in NTT?

The study's informants comprised 12 female and 4 male legislators from the NTT Provincial DPRD (see Figure 2). The selection was not based on party or electoral district affiliations but on the representation of women in the DPRD. As a result, all female legislators were included. Male informants were chosen based on their representation in various commissions, integral to legislative operations. When categorized by party affiliations, the majority hailed from the PDIP and PAN parties. Notably, the PAN party had the highest number of female legislators, indicating its potential in fostering female cadres in NTT's electoral landscape. Furthermore, when viewed by electoral districts, the majority came from electoral district 3, encompassing East Sumba, Central Sumba, West Sumba, and Southwest Sumba Regencies (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Characteristics of Respondents by Electoral Area
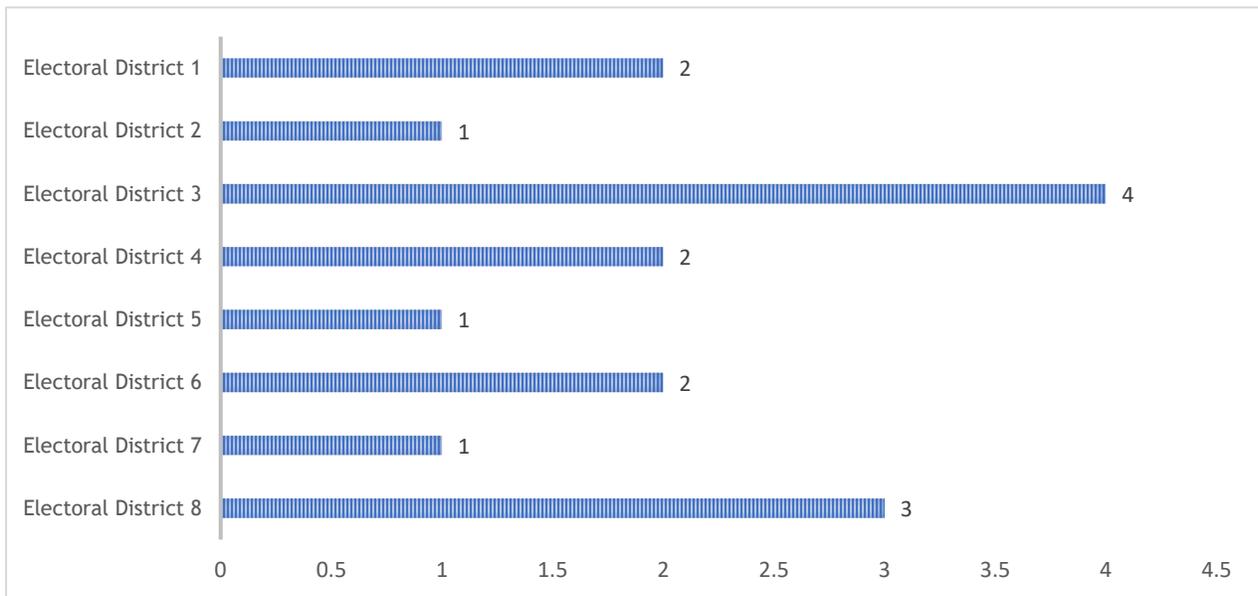
The educational backgrounds of the informants were also noteworthy. Most possessed bachelor's or master's degrees, with some even holding doctoral qualifications. This highlights the representative nature of the NTT DPRD, especially concerning women's representation, from an educational standpoint. The political representation of women in the NTT DPRD has evolved over time. Before the implementation of Law no. 22 of 2007, which mandates at least 30% women's representation in election organizers, the NTT DPRD had no female representatives. However, post this law's enactment, the 2009 legislative elections saw four women elected. This number grew to five in the 2014 elections and surged to twelve in the 2019-2024 elections. This uptick underscores the growing public trust in female legislators, further evidenced by regulatory outputs initiated by them, such as regulations on maternal and child health, environment, migrant workers, gender mainstreaming, and child protection.

Factors Influencing Women's Participation

Several factors have been identified that encourage women to venture into the political arena in Indonesia. One of the primary drivers is the existence of policies that mandate the inclusion of women in national politics. A notable example is Law no. 5 of 2012 concerning the Election of Members of the DPR, DPD, and DPRD. Article 55 of this law mandates a minimum quota of 30% women representation for political parties. This provision has significantly spurred the participation of women in the democratic process held every five years. Other factors bolstering women's political participation include support from political parties, intrinsic motivation among female cadres, family encouragement, a proven track record, a vast mass base, and the presence of a multi-party system.

Despite these supportive factors, several challenges hinder women's successful election to political positions. Incumbents seeking re-election and the prevalent practice of money politics are among the primary obstacles. The underrepresentation of women in decision-making institutions in Indonesia becomes glaringly evident, especially when the democratic transition calls for gender equality and justice. The nation's socio-cultural fabric, deeply rooted in patriarchal values, acts as a significant barrier to women's realization as policymakers. This patriarchal culture, which emphasizes male dominance, often sidelines women, relegating them to domestic roles and viewing them as weak. Consequently, women's financial capabilities are often restricted, especially in regions like NTT where women are primarily confined to household chores.

Men, on the other hand, are perceived as the primary actors in public spheres, handling political, social, and economic affairs. Such cultural norms deter women from entering politics, as any deviation is seen as a violation of societal expectations. Furthermore, the political landscape, dominated by men, and an ineffective electoral system further impede women's political aspirations. While political parties should

ideally serve as gateways for women into politics, they often become barriers, especially during candidate recruitment. The nomination procedures are predominantly determined by the male elites of the political parties. Even when women are active members, they are seldom positioned in strategic roles that influence policymaking. Emphasizing the importance of political parties in enhancing female representation, Mrs. Emilia Nomleni, Chair of the NTT DPRD, stated that leadership is a human right, not determined by gender. In the current era, women's leadership opportunities are limited due to various obstacles. However, every individual, including women, possesses equal rights. Often, women are unable to harness their potential due to unequal educational and opportunity access compared to men.

In light of these challenges and opportunities, it's essential to recognize the broader global context. Democracy champions the principle of equality, ensuring equal access and full participation for both genders, especially in decision-making roles. International frameworks like the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) advocate for global governments to implement quotas. These quotas serve as temporary measures to bolster the representation of women in appointive positions at the national level, based on election outcomes.

Despite these international conventions and commitments, the gender disparity in public and political spheres remains a pressing global issue. The global average of women in parliaments stands at a mere 18.4 percent. Out of this, only one in 190 women ascend to roles of presidents or prime ministers. Furthermore, women's representation in global cabinets or mayoral positions doesn't exceed 7 to 8 percent. Indonesia, aligning with its national and international commitments, upholds the 1945 Constitution that guarantees gender equality. Moreover, the nation has adopted gender prioritization as a policy, integrating a gender perspective into policy formulation, planning, and budgeting.

Gender equality, a fundamental human right, ensures that everyone, regardless of gender, can lead dignified lives, free from fear and with the autonomy to make life choices. Historically, women have been perceived as the weaker gender, often relegated to secondary roles. Accomplished women who can adeptly juggle family and career responsibilities remain a rarity. Societal expectations, which often confine women to their roles as homemakers, deter many from pursuing careers.

Tierney (1991), defines gender as a cultural concept distinguishing roles, behaviors, mentalities, and emotional attributes between men and women. This distinction, deeply embedded in societal norms, varies across time, places, and even social classes. Mansour Faqih elaborates that gender attributes are socially and culturally constructed. For instance, women are often labeled as gentle, emotional, and beautiful, while men are deemed strong, rational, and stoic. However, these traits are fluid and can evolve over time. Faqih further emphasizes that the history of gender differentiation has been a prolonged process, shaped by societal teachings and cultural reinforcements. Over time, these constructed differences have been internalized as natural, forming the bedrock of gender identities.

Understanding Patriarchy and Its Implications

Patriarchy, as defined by Sechiyama (2013), is a social system that positions men as the primary power holders, dominating roles in political leadership, moral authority, social rights, and property control. Within families, the father figure holds authority over women, children, and assets. Some patriarchal societies also follow a patrilineal system, where property and titles are inherited by male descendants. This system inherently institutionalizes male governance and privileges, subordinating women. Walby discusses the evolution of patriarchy, noting its shift from private to public domains. While women have gradually gained access to public spheres, especially in employment, the capitalist system continues to exploit them, evident in the persistence of the glass ceiling. Women are no longer solely exploited by individual male figures but collectively in public spaces, especially in their professions. Walby also highlights that in contemporary society, various groups of women can be exploited by a combination of gender-blind public policies and the interests of affluent families.

The patriarchal system grants men special rights over women, dominating not just the private but also the broader public spheres, including politics, education, economics, law, and more. This culture is the root cause of various forms of violence directed by men against women. Historically, patriarchy has been evident in the social, legal, political, religious, and economic structures of many cultures. Even if it's

implicitly recognized in constitutions and laws, much of today's society remains biased in practice.

In the context of the NTT Provincial DPRD for the 2019-2024 period, the role of women legislators has been in line with statutory rules, such as Law No. 2 of 2011 concerning Political Parties. Women have political aspirations for increased access to power and more open political opportunities, including occupying strategic positions or being involved in decision-making processes within political parties. These aspirations are linked to individual capacity-building and the broader political environment. However, the character and idealism of women, especially the youth, often clash with the pragmatic interests of political parties, leading to their marginalization.

To address this, political parties must empower women and youth with quality political and economic training. They should design programs that directly address the issues and needs of these groups, such as political knowledge, financial resources, and social networks. This research highlights the importance of increasing women's and youth's access to strategic positions in political parties, both structurally and in decision-making processes. To achieve this, political parties need to enhance the capacities of women and youth progressively, ensuring they possess the necessary economic, social, and political capital for political roles. Collaboration with civil society and academic networks is crucial to empower and build the capacities of women within political parties.

Conclusion

Firstly, women legislators in the NTT Prov DPRD have been executing their roles in strict adherence to the statutory regulations, specifically as outlined in Law No. 2 of 2011 concerning Political Parties. Their roles and contributions are in alignment with the categorization and expectations set for women legislators. The strategic positioning of women in the NTT Prov DPRD is commendably diverse. Emilia Nomleni, for instance, holds the dual roles of chairman of the NTT Prov DPRD and Chair of the NTT PDI-P. Similarly, Lili Adoe and Ince Sayuna have been entrusted with deputy chair positions, with the latter also serving as the secretary of the NTT Golkar Party. Furthermore, the PKB Party and the NTT Democrats have recognized and leveraged the expertise of women by placing them in pivotal roles. Figures like Ann. W. Kolin and Kristien S.Patty, both of whom are seasoned in the political arena, exemplify the trust and recognition women have garnered in the political domain.

Secondly, there exists a tangible aspiration among women to augment their access to power and to secure broader political opportunities. This includes occupying strategic roles and having a more pronounced involvement in the decision-making processes within political parties. The aspiration to enhance access to power is intrinsically linked to the capacity-building of individual women and the youth in political parties. The anticipation of more open political opportunities for women and the youth is influenced by both the internal dynamics of political parties and the broader societal context. The collective realization of these aspirations can potentially foster a political environment that is more inclusive and receptive to both women and the youth.

Lastly, there is a pronounced emphasis on the aspiration to bolster women's access to strategic positions within political parties. This aspiration underscores the necessity for women and the youth to be equipped with three core capacities: economic, social, and political. The economic capacity pertains to financial resources, the social capacity encompasses social relations and networking, and the political capacity involves political acumen and skills. These capacities are deemed indispensable for women and the youth, serving as foundational capital that can facilitate their ascent to strategic roles within political parties. The study underscores the importance of these capacities in shaping a more inclusive political landscape.

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