WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL POLITICS IN BOJONEGORO: CHALLENGES AND STRENGTHENING STRATEGIES THROUGH THE 30% QUOTA POLICY

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The problem addressed in this study is the stagnation of women's representation in the Bojonegoro District House of Representatives (DPRD), which remains at approximately 10–15% and has not reached the mandated 30% quota. This study aims to analyze the obstacles and formulate strengthening strategies for women's political representation in local politics through the implementation of the 30% quota policy. This research is grounded in theories of gender representation, descriptive representation, and affirmative action policies in politics. The study employs a descriptive qualitative research method, with data collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the implementation of the 30% quota policy in legislative elections tends to be merely administrative and has not substantially increased women's electoral success. The main obstacles include entrenched patriarchal culture, limited political party support, and electoral constraints such as insufficient campaign funding and weak political networks. Based on these findings, the study recommends strengthening political party commitment to cadre development, enhancing electoral oversight mechanisms, and implementing continuous women's political empowerment programs at the local level to transform women's representation from symbolic participation into substantive political influence.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of the gender gap remains a global concern, including in the political sphere. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022, the political empowerment subindex measures the representation gap between men and women in high-level political positions. Indonesia scored 0.169 and ranked 90th out of 146 countries, 4th in ASEAN, and 13th in the G20, indicating that the gender gap in political participation is still significant. (Goryunova & Madsen, 2024). Then, according to the latest data from Schwab et al (2025) Global Gender Gap Report 2025, women's representation in parliament remains low, with only 61 out of 187 parliamentary speakers worldwide being women. Indonesia ranks 97th with a score of 69.2%, indicating a slowdown in women's

access to political leadership positions. Many women in politics are also still concentrated in non-strategic ministries, not in fields like economics or defense. This confirms the need for accelerated real representation and influence of women in policymaking.
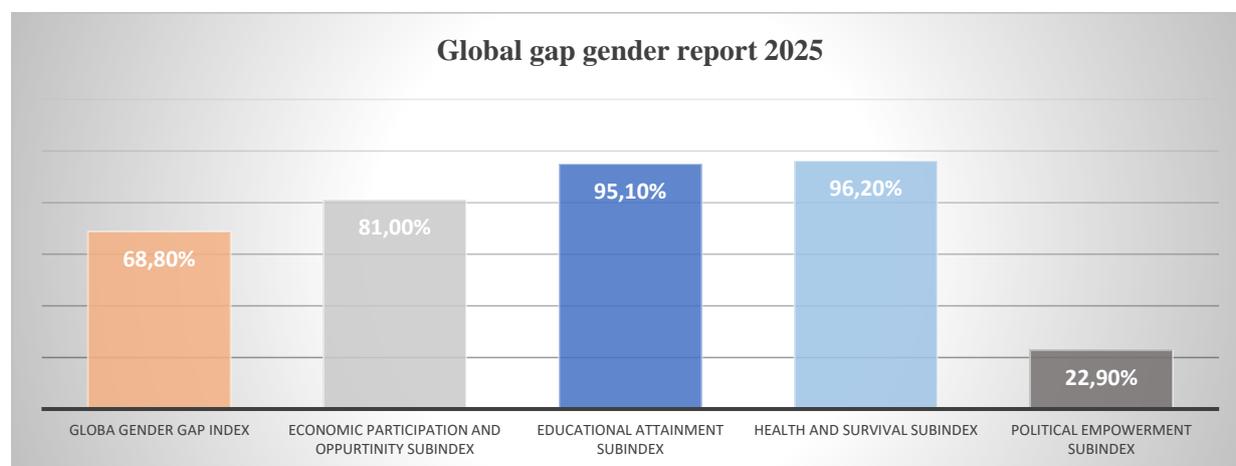

Figure 1. Global Gender Gap Report 2025
Source: World Economic Forum, 2025

The Global Gender Gap Index 2025 shows that globally, the gap in political empowerment, which includes women's representation in parliament, is still very wide, with only 22.9% of the gap closed. Although there was an increase of 0.7 points compared to the previous year, this figure is still far below other sectors such as education (95.1%) and healthcare (96.2%). This confirms that structural barriers to women's access to political power are still very strong, making it an important basis for promoting more effective policies and interventions to accelerate the achievement of balanced gender representation in legislative bodies. (Saadia Zahidi, 2025).

Since the Dutch colonial era in Indonesia, when women were reduced to supporting roles for men and had no real place in socio-cultural life, such inequalities have persisted (Dragojlovic & McGregor, 2022). According to Meisenberg & Woodley (2015), recent global trends indicate that systemic inequality in women's rights and opportunities has a detrimental impact on psychological health, and male-dominated political and economic structures are increasingly hindering women's progress. Studies from Mandasari (2023) show that since the reform era, women's political participation in Indonesia, especially representation in decision-making, has become an important agenda for the government and legislature.

A key component of democracy and equal access to the decision-making process is women's political representation (Bintari, 2021). The percentage of women entering the political sphere remains low, despite a clear trend toward gender equality in politics. This is because women are still globally underrepresented at all levels of decision-making (Women, 2023). As of January 2023, only 31 countries have female heads of state, while women only account for 26.5% of legislators and 22.8% of cabinet ministers worldwide in 2023 (Women, 2021).

Gender inequality in political representation remains a structural challenge in Indonesia (Firdaus & Wulandari, 2023). Although the 30% quota policy for female representation in legislative candidacy has been in place since 2008 (Sidik, 2022), and the reality on the ground shows results that are not yet fully balanced. Studies from Jumanah et al. (2023) While the public role of women is increasing, their political participation

remains low due to patriarchal culture and doubts about women's capabilities. This happened because of several factors, one of which is that Election Law No. 7 of 2017 guarantees women's political rights through a zipper mechanism, but its implementation is hampered by patriarchal culture, weak political communication, and low public awareness of the importance of women's political rights (Kesumadewi & Iskandar, 2022).

Nationally, the achievement of women's political representation does show progress. The 2019 election was considered a significant breakthrough in Indonesian democracy because women's representation in the House of Representatives reached 118 people, or 20.5%, exceeding 20 percent for the first time since the post-reform election of 1999 (Perdana et al., 2021). In addition, according to BPS (2025), women's participation in the Indonesian parliament is only 22.46%, far below half the population. Regions like North Sulawesi reached 45.24%, but Aceh only had 8.97%, and some districts even had zero women in the DPRD. However, this condition is not yet reflected in Bojonegoro Regency, an area known for its strong patriarchal culture (Huda, 2020).

The phenomenon of low female participation in local politics in this region is not new. From the 2004 Legislative General Election to 2019, the proportion of women who successfully secured seats in the Bojonegoro District DPRD tended to stagnate at around 10–15%, a figure still far below the 30% quota target mandated by Law Number 10 of 2008 concerning General Elections (Aspinall et al., 2012).

Amidst the dominance of masculine local political structures, women often become merely "symbolic" in the political process, serving no more than the formal fulfillment of quota requirements. Studies from Yuliana & Hermawati (2025) emphasizing the need for affirmative action policies and the strengthening of women's political capacity to achieve gender equality in Indonesian local politics. Meanwhile, the decentralized government system in Indonesia, which aims to grant regional autonomy, indirectly strengthens the traditional customary system that often excludes women from the political decision-making process (Heryanto, 2014).

Bojonegoro, as a region with an agrarian social structure and strong patriarchal values, reflects how local cultural norms and political practices can constrain women's participation (Huda & Renggani, 2021). Many female candidates with the capacity and experience are sidelined due to a lack of support from political parties, social stigma, and structural barriers such as money politics and masculine patron-client networks. According to a study by Aula (2023), increasing women's representation in politics is an important step toward a more inclusive, just, and sustainable society (Górecki & Kukołowicz, 2014). In this context, quota policies do not automatically guarantee gender justice without accompanying transformations in local political values and practices (Erick & Masyitah, 2020).

The phenomena occurring at the international, national, and local levels related to women's representation can be understood through the framework of Critical Mass Theory, which emphasizes the importance of a sufficiently significant number of women in political institutions to influence policy direction and change the masculine institutional culture. According to Kanter (1977), critical mass becomes the proportion in the occurrence of a major change. However, as explained by Mackay et al. (2010) in Feminist Institutionalism, true change depends not only on quantity but also on how existing institutional norms, rules, and practices, both formal and informal, can be transformed to be more responsive to gender equality. Whereas Bogaards (2022) feminist institutionalism is not merely an application of gender to institutional theory but rather an approach that combines institutional analysis with a feminist perspective. The focus is on how political

institutions produce and reproduce gender inequality. Thus, in the context of Bojonegoro, it serves as a mirror reflecting how women's representation in politics still faces structural challenges that require in-depth analysis through a critical approach.

Despite extensive research on women's representation in politics, most of it still focuses on the national or provincial level. Systematic review study of (Saputri et al., 2023) Most research on women's political representation focuses on the aspect of descriptive representation, namely the factors, barriers, and strategies of female candidates in electoral politics. However, studies on substantive representation, especially in the Asian and Indonesian contexts, are still limited. Literature study of Ono & Endo (2024). Various studies show that women face gender bias at three stages of political recruitment, from self-selection and party nomination to voter selection. This bias explains the gender gap in political representation and encourages research on how to reduce it. Few studies delve deeply into local dynamics like in Bojonegoro, where a 30% quota is practiced within a highly specific political culture.

This research fills that gap by offering a qualitative analysis based on a case study, which emphasizes the experiences of female actors in facing structural and cultural barriers. The researcher conducted an analysis to find the novelty of the research using VOSviewer software.
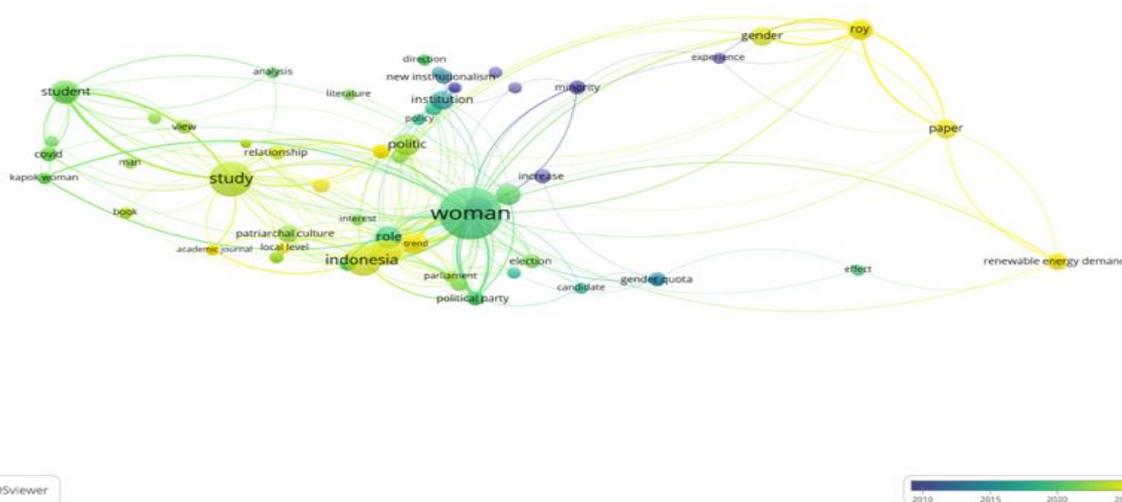

Figure 2. Overlay Visualization Network by VOSViewer
Source: Viosviewer, 2025

Based on the analysis results, Figure 2 shows the overall network of keywords related to the theme of women's representation in politics, such as woman, politic, institution, gender, and Indonesia. The figure illustrates that the keyword "woman" occupies the central and most dominant position, indicating that the issue of women in politics is the main focus of various previous studies. The strong connection between the keywords woman, politic, role, parliament, and gender quota indicates that significant scientific attention is directed toward the role and representation of women in political institutions and the implementation of gender quota policies (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Additionally, keywords such as Indonesia patriarchal culture, and local level indicate that the socio-cultural and political context at the local level, including Indonesia, is an important space for analyzing women's representation. This is relevant to the research focus on local politics in Bojonegoro, where the dynamics of patriarchal culture and the 30% affirmative action quota for women still face various challenges in practice.

Some small clusters like new institutionalism and minority show that there are theoretical foundations used in understanding how institutional structures can influence women's representation. Meanwhile, the emergence of new keywords such as "patriarchal culture" and "renewable energy demand" in recent years (2023–2025) signifies an expansion of topics toward gender issues and sustainable development, enriching the discourse on women's politics in a broader context (Soetjipto, 2024).

The lack of a direct link between these new themes and the main cluster of women and politics indicates a research gap. This can be an opportunity for novelty in this research, namely by examining the structural challenges and strategies for strengthening women's representation in local politics, specifically in the implementation of the 30% quota policy in Bojonegoro. Thus, this research is expected to make a new contribution to linking gender equality issues with local political dynamics in Indonesia.

Although the 30% quota policy has been implemented, women's representation in the Bojonegoro DPRD is still considered low (Maghfiroh et al., 2024). This condition indicates a gap between affirmative action policies and local political realities. This research is important for understanding the factors that hinder women's political participation and for outlining strategies to strengthen women's political roles so that the implementation of the quota policy can be more effective and substantive. Various previous studies on women's representation in politics have generally focused on the national or provincial level and have highlighted the quota policy itself without exploring appropriate strategies to substantively increase women's participation (Bintari, 2021), (Kesumadewi & Iskandar, 2022) and (Murni, 2025).

Some studies still view this issue solely from a formal political perspective without integrating gender theory-based analysis. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by offering a qualitative case study analysis in Bojonegoro Regency, which focuses on the experiences of female political actors in facing structural and cultural barriers at the local level. This research also aims to formulate strategies to strengthen the political role of women so that the 30% quota policy can be implemented more effectively, with gender justice, and in accordance with the local socio-cultural context.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative research method with a case study design to deeply describe women's representation in local politics in Bojonegoro. Qualitative research places more emphasis on the interpretive process of data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis (Creswell et al., 2017). Qualitative research aims to generate descriptive data presented in the form of words, both written and spoken, from individuals and observable behaviors (Waruwu, 2024). The research was conducted from October to December 2025 Bojonegoro Regency.

The data to be obtained in this study will come from primary and secondary sources. Primary data will be sourced from DPRD members, political party officials, women activists, and civil society organizations in Bojonegoro Regency. Secondary data will be sourced from documentation.

Data collection techniques are carried out through three methods: observation, interviews, and documentation (Zahroh et al., 2025). Observations were conducted to

observe the actual representation of women in local politics in Bojonegoro. Interviews were used to explore the informants' experiences and perspectives on the issue. Documentation was carried out by tracing and reviewing Law No. 2017 on elections, legislative election results data, and the Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU).

The technique for determining informants in this study used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique for selecting data source samples based on specific considerations or criteria (Creswell, 2018). The criteria for selecting interview informants in this study are: 1) The informants are part of the government's political actors and election organizers; 2) The informants possess resources, knowledge, or social capital that can explain women's representation and challenges in local politics in Bojonegoro.

Based on the desired goal, which is women's involvement in political positions in Bojonegoro Regency, the researcher selected the following informants:

Table 1. Research Informants

Group	Definition	Stakeholder
Government Political Actors	Part of the political power to make and influence government policy.	1. Members of the Bojonegoro District DPRD (1 male and 2 female)
Election Organizers	The institution that organizes elections, consisting of the General Election Commission, the Election Supervisory Body, and the Election Organizer Ethics Council, as a single functional unit for organizing elections to elect members of the House of Representatives, members of the Regional Representative Council, the President and Vice President, and to directly elect members of the Regional People's Representative Council by the people.	1. Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum (Bawaslu) (1 person) 2. Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) (1 person)

Source: (Syauket, 2022) (Auza et al., 2024) (Indonesia, 2017)

Based on Table 1, the number of informants in this study is 5 people. The object of this research is DPRD Bojonegoro Regency, Bawaslu, and KPU. Data analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 Plus software. NVivo 12 Plus analysis in this study utilized the concept map analysis feature, followed by the hierarchy map and word cloud (Saputra et al., 2020).

The validity of the research data is strengthened by using data credibility tests through triangulation techniques, namely method and source triangulation (Sugiyono, 2017). Method triangulation compares results from observation, interviews, and documentation. Source triangulation verifies information between different informants, while theory triangulation places findings within a conceptual perspective of policy implementation (Susanto et al., 2023).

To operate the data collection techniques that run concurrently with data analysis, this study uses the "interactive analysis" model from Miles and Huberman. This Miles and Huberman model proposes three important components in data collection and analysis

that are interconnected and simultaneous: data collection, data reduction, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women's involvement in the political world is a crucial aspect of implementing democracy in Indonesia because it has a strong legal basis and is a concern where female politicians can change deeply rooted biases and demonstrate their competence. According to Beaman et al. (2012) found that in India, after two elections with female leaders, the gap in parental aspirations for sons and daughters significantly decreased. Additionally, Bhavnani (2009) showed that the presence of female leaders improves voter perception and women's chances of winning in village council elections. Then the study of Hessami & da Fonseca (2020) stating that more women in parliament can influence policy decisions, such as an increase in childcare services, although this is not always reflected in government budgets. Additionally, higher female representation also contributes to reducing corruption and abuse of power.

These findings indicate that the presence of female leaders can erode gender stereotypes and broaden public acceptance of women in politics. Given the evidence of successful quota policy implementation in India, it is important to examine how similar conditions exist in Indonesia, which also implements a 30% quota rule for women's representation in politics. However, its implementation often faces various obstacles in the regions. Therefore, this study will focus on the strategies and challenges of women's representation in local politics in Bojonegoro to understand the extent to which policies and on-the-ground realities are able to support women's role as influential political actors.

The 30% quota policy for women's representation at the local level, especially in Bojonegoro, is supported by official regulations from the Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU). In Bojonegoro Regency, this is reinforced by the KPU Decree on the Determination of Elected Candidates Number 1445 of 2024 and KPU Decision Number 927/PL.01.9-Kpt/3522/KPU-Kab/VII/2019. These two decrees serve as evidence of the real implementation of affirmative action policies through a legitimate and structured election process. Through this decree, the representation of women in local parliaments is not just a discussion but has become a formal and binding decision. However, the existence of this regulation still faces a number of challenges, both in the nomination process, political party support, and public acceptance. Therefore, it is important to further examine how this decree contributes to increasing the number of elected women and how local strategies in Bojonegoro are implemented to ensure the sustainability of women's representation in the political sphere. Here are the results of the data analysis obtained by the researcher in the NVivo12 map hierarchy.

Figure 3. TreeMap

Source: nvivo12 processed by researchers, 2025

Figure 3 shows that the results of the NVivo treemap analysis indicate that the implementation of the 30% quota policy is the most dominant issue in women's representation in Bojonegoro. Although this policy has been implemented as a form of administrative compliance for political parties in registering legislative candidates, it has not yet significantly increased the number of elected women. This is in line with studies from Damayanti et al (2024), which state that the challenges faced in the representation process are internal factors, where the party's commitment only meets the 30% quota administratively. Simply implementing a quota policy is not enough without political education support from the party to ensure women are truly able to play a role and be elected to public office (Widiyaningrum, 2020). In fact, women who have successfully been elected to the DPRD have demonstrated a substantive contribution to issues of health, MSMEs, and gender mainstreaming. Studies from Yunika et al. (2019) Women's representation in the Bungo DPRD is still formal because of low understanding of women's political roles and motivation dominated by money politics.

The main obstacles faced by women are electoral, such as limited funds and political networks, as well as structural barriers within parties that still only view women as a quota 85cepticism. This aligns with previous studies such as those by Bukhari et al. (2023), rural women in Sindh, one of Pakistan's regions, are still socially, economically, psychologically, and politically disempowered due to weak socio-economic conditions. In addition, the study results also show that cultural challenges remain strong, as evidenced by the public's 85cepticism about women's leadership abilities in Bojonegoro (Huda, 2020). Nevertheless, empowerment strategies began to develop through improved political communication skills, community engagement, and support for economic empowerment. By optimizing

political party support, these strategies have the potential to increase more meaningful representation of women in the future.

Researchers also conducted an analysis using a word cloud with Nvivo software, with the following results.

Figure 4. Output Wordcloud
Source: nvivo12 processed by researchers, 2025

Based on Figure 4, the word cloud shows the word "women" as the most dominant term, confirming the main focus of the research on women's involvement in local politics. Other prominent words such as "politics," "Regional People's Representative Council," "representation," and "quota" describe the context of women's representation through affirmative action policies. This is indeed proven, as the field of women's representation in Bojonegoro has become a representation, a study of (Famelasari & Prastiwi, 2021) The representation of women in leadership has not automatically translated into equal protection and empowerment for women through public policy. Then there is the emergence of the terms "challenges," "structure," "culture," and "campaign" indicates the continued presence of strong electoral and social barriers. Cultural barriers arise in the form of societal views that still doubt women's leadership and place them in domestic roles. According to (Purnamasari, 2025) The representation of women in leadership has not automatically translated into equal protection and empowerment for women through public policy. Then there is the emergence of the terms "challenges," "structure," "culture," and "campaign" indicates the continued presence of strong electoral and social barriers. Cultural barriers arise in the form of societal views that still doubt women's leadership and place them in domestic roles. According to (Hia, 2025) The success of the women's representation quota is not sufficient with just regulations; it requires structural transformation within the party. Although the 30% quota has been mandated, parties still treat it as a formality, and women's political opportunities remain hindered by patriarchal culture and a lack of strategic support, even thoough public awareness and legal instruments continue to open up opportunities for strengthening their representation (Harahap, 2025). Meanwhile, electoral obstacles are evident in the intense campaign competition, ranging from limited funds and a narrow political network to less strategic ballot placement. Therefore, although women in Bojonegoro have participated in political

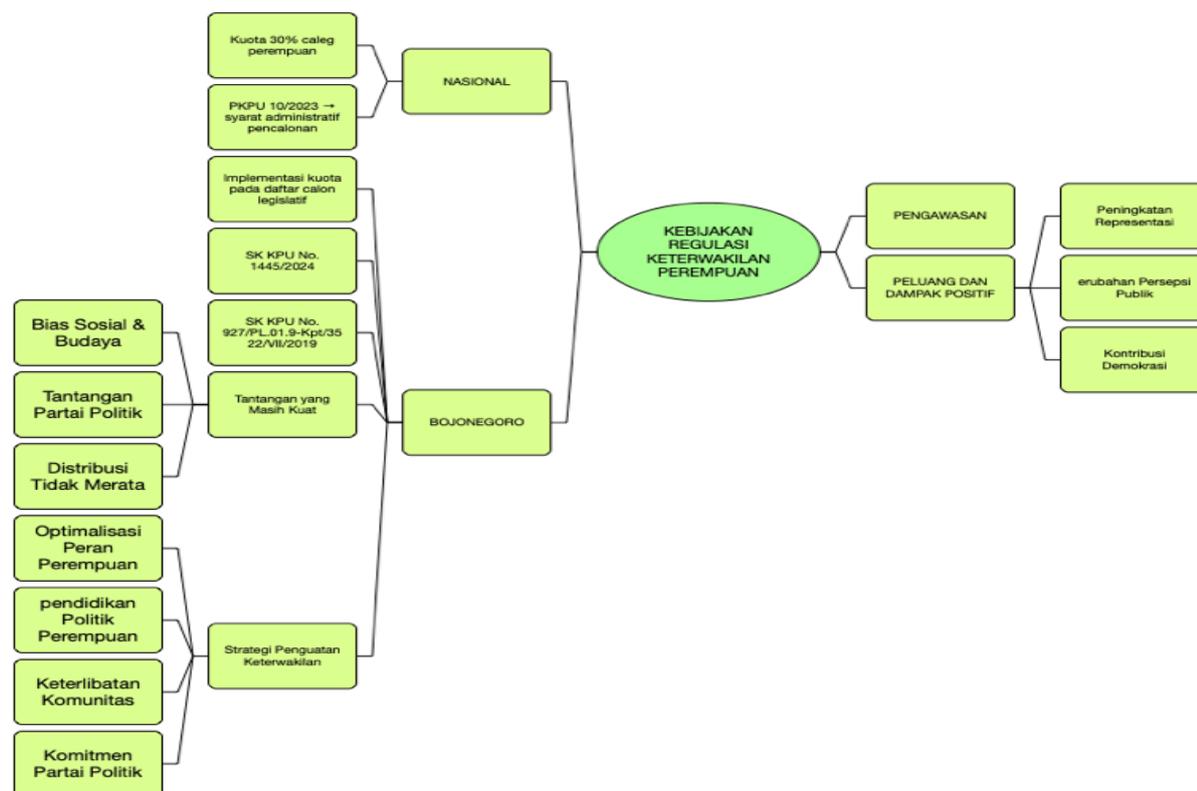contests, they still face an uneven playing field, making it difficult to achieve optimal electoral success.

Figure 5. Mind Map Analysis
Source: nvivo12 processed by researchers, 2025

Analysis was also conducted using a mind map on the following data results. The results of the mind map analysis show that under the theme of National Regulations, the affirmative policy of a 30% quota for women on the list of legislative candidates has a strong legal basis through PKPU 10/2023 and regional regulation no. 9 of 2025, followed by Law (UU) Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections (Rahim & SH, 2025). This policy normatively becomes an important instrument in opening up women's access to participate in the electoral political process. Opportunities and strengthening strategies: The mind map identifies that women's representation still has the potential to be strengthened through optimizing women's roles in the bureaucracy. Utilizing community networks, and empowering communities as a support base (Rahim & SH, 2025). Additionally, oversight from Bawaslu and KPU contributes to ensuring the quota policy's implementation is more transparent and accountable. With regulatory pressure and increasing public awareness, women in Bojonegoro have the space to transform administrative representations into substantive ones (Rahim & SH, 2025). Based on this analysis, the researcher conducted a study using SWAT analysis, with the following matrix results.

Table 2. SWOT Analysis

	Strength (s) - Strong legal basis (mandatory 30% quota). - Elected women are active in public issues (MSMEs, health, gender mainstreaming). - Women are starting to occupy strategic positions in the bureaucracy. - Election monitoring supports the implementation of quotas. - Strong network of women's organizations (Fatayat, MSMEs, communities). - Public awareness of women's issues is increasing.	**Weakness (W)** - Quotas are often just an administrative formality. - Number placement is not strategic. - Party support is inadequate and cadre development is minimal. - Political capacity is not evenly distributed. - Political and financial capital is low. - Domestic dual roles hinder campaigning. - Political networks are narrow and less competitive.
Opportunities (O) - Opportunity to strengthen gender issues in local policies. - Monitoring of quota implementation is becoming stricter. - Support from international instruments (CEDAW). - Community support → potential electoral base. - The narrative of gender equality is becoming more accepted by the public.	**Strategi (SO)** - Maximizing community networks and bureaucratic positions to increase women's electability. - Encouraging women to engage in strategic public issues as political capital.	**Strategi WO** - Strengthening women's cadre development and political education. - Affirmative party support for campaign funds and ballot order.
Threats (T) - Hidden resistance from within the party. - Difficult to prove quota manipulation. - Money politics erodes women's opportunities. - Strong patriarchal culture → doubts about women's leadership. - Social norms are still domesticating.	**Strategi ST** - Strict oversight of quota practices to prevent tokenism. - Empowering women as critical actors (not just "30%").	**Strategi WT** - Overcoming cultural barriers through public campaigns and civil society collaboration. - Internal party reforms to ensure more equal access for women.

The analysis results confirm that the success of women's representation policies is not solely determined by the existence of gender affirmation rules but is also heavily influenced by changes in political culture, institutional support from parties, and strategies to enhance women's capacity as political actors. It is this simultaneous effort on all three aspects that can more meaningfully strengthen women's representation at the local political level. Electoral obstacles such as limited campaign funds and political networks, as well as structural barriers within the party that still place women merely as quota fillers, show that women in the Bojonegoro DPRD have not yet reached a critical mass, as stated by Kanter (1977). The fact that women hold only 7 out of 50 seats in the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPRD) places them as a minority group, making them vulnerable to political marginalization. Kanter explains that when women have not reached a critical minimum proportion of 30%, they are more likely to serve as "tokens," meaning their presence is merely symbolic representation, not political actors influencing decisions (Kanter, 1977). This aligns with field findings, where women are often positioned merely as administrative quota fillers and receive inadequate strategic support, financial backing, and winning networks from political parties.

This finding also strengthens the perspective of Feminist Institutionalism (Mackay et al., 2010), which emphasizes that formal regulations such as quota policies will not produce substantive change if political institutions still contain gender-biased norms, values, and practices. Hidden resistance from the internal structures of parties, such as manipulation of quota fulfillment and unequal resource allocation, indicates that formal electoral institutions still operate within a framework of masculine political culture that limits women's opportunities to win electoral contests (Haris, 2014). Thus, the strategy to strengthen women's representation through a 30% quota policy requires not only changes in formal regulations but also a transformation of political practices at the internal party and community levels, including strengthening women's political capacity through community networks, leadership training, and increased access to political and economic resources.

Overall, the combination of Kanter and Mackay's theories provides a comprehensive explanation that the low number of elected women is not solely due to a lack of affirmative action policies, but also to the absence of full institutional empowerment that fully supports women as equal political actors. Therefore, the success of women's representation in Bojonegoro will be greatly determined by the ability to encourage a shift in women's representation from mere political symbols to strategic actors with bargaining power in the public decision-making process.

CONCLUSION

The involvement of women in Bojonegoro politics shows that the 30% quota policy has opened up space for women to participate in legislative elections. However, its implementation is still largely administrative and has not fully and significantly promoted women's electability. The main obstacles stem from patriarchal culture, minimal party support, and electoral challenges such as limited funds and political networks. In fact, the women who were successfully elected have demonstrated substantial contributions to public issues such as health, MSMEs, and gender mainstreaming. Therefore, the role of political parties, election monitoring, and women's empowerment strategies at the local level is crucial for shifting women's representation from merely symbolic to a position with stronger political bargaining power. With adequate structural support and increased

capacity for women as political actors, women's representation in Bojonegoro has the potential to develop more substantively in the future.

Acknowledgment

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