Increasing Women’s Parliamentary Representation in Asia and the Pacific: The Indonesian Experience

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Abstract

In recent years, governments across Asia and the Pacific have adopted gender quotas to increase women’s representation in parliament. In 2003, Indonesia introduced a 30% gender quota that, over two election cycles, contributed to an increase in women’s share of seats in the national parliament from 9 per cent to 18 per cent. In the most recent (2014) elections, despite stronger enforcement of the quota provisions, expansive civil society-led efforts to support women candidates and favourable press coverage, the percentage of women elected to the national parliament declined. This article examines the evolving political context in which the gender quota operates to argue that common support programs designed to maximize the gender quota’s impact on women’s representation are insufficiently targeted at major obstacles. Findings will be of interest to lawmakers and public sector professionals working to advance gender equity and to students of democratization, representation and gender politics.

Key words: women, democracy, parliament, Asia Pacific, gender quota, Indonesia

1. Introduction

The under-representation of women in elected office is a challenge for democratization around the globe. Parliaments, in particular, are designed to represent all sectors of society, but nearly all of the world’s parliaments are dominated by men. During the past 20 years, many of the world’s democracies have adopted policies and mechanisms for increasing women’s political representation. In 1995, only four countries used gender quotas. Twenty years later, 120 countries had adopted some form of gender quota to increase women’s representation (IPU 2015). There are three main types of gender quotas: reserved seats, voluntary party quotas and legal candidate quotas. Under a reserved seats system, a minimum number of parliamentary seats are reserved for women representatives. Voluntary party quotas are political party commitments to increase the number of their women candidates. Legal candidate quotas or ‘legislative quotas’ as they are sometimes known, require political parties to field a minimum number of candidates (typically between 20 and 40 per cent) in order to be eligible to contest elections.

1. Across Asia Pacific, reserved seats have been introduced for women in the representative assemblies of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, China, Timor-Leste, the Philippines, Vanuatu and Samoa. Reserved seats for women have been widely adopted across Africa as a means of addressing historically very low levels of female representation in parliament.

2. In the Asia Pacific, voluntary party quotas have been adopted in Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, Canada, Chile and Guatemala. The policy of the Australian Labor Party, for example, is that, by 2025, 50 per cent of its parliamentary representatives will be women.
The legal candidate quota is the most common form of quota to have been adopted in recent decades. The legal candidate quota requires women candidates to win their seats and does not guarantee that they will be elected. The system thus avoids the charge sometimes levelled at reserved seats that quotas are undemocratic or that candidates have been elected only because of their gender and not because of their qualifications or abilities.

The impact of legal candidate quotas on women’s representation has been the subject of much scholarly analysis and debate. At the global level, scholars argue that quotas are contributing to a steady increase in women’s representation (IPU 2015). However, significant variation can be observed across regions and countries. Analysts are increasingly interested to understand the different contexts in which quotas are introduced and the factors that constrain a quota’s impact on women’s descriptive (numerical) representation. Observers have noted, for example, that quotas tend to translate into more seats for women in countries where public attitudes are more supportive of women in public leadership positions, where there is a higher degree of secularization and where there has been early extension of the franchise to women (Beauregard 2015; Dahlerup 2005; Hillman 2017; Paxton and Hughes 2015). The Indonesian case makes an important contribution to the comparative literature. Indonesia is a majority-Muslim country that returned to democracy in 1999 following three decades of authoritarian rule. Historically, Indonesian women have had low levels of representation. During the early years of reform, the introduction of a legal candidate quota provided a jump-start for women’s representation, which reached 17.86 per cent of national parliamentary seats in the 2009 elections. However, despite subsequent improvements in compliance with quota provisions and an expansion of support programs for women candidates, in the 2014 elections, women’s share of parliamentary seats declined. This article examines the changing institutional context in which the gender quota operates in Indonesia and argues that government and international donor-led programs designed to maximize the quota’s impact are failing to address critical obstacles to women’s representation in Indonesia.

2. The Legislative Quota in Indonesia

Indonesia returned to democracy in 1999, holding the country’s first free and fair elections since 1955. The elections were hailed as a success, but they delivered only a small number of seats to women candidates. At 9.6 per cent, the proportion of women elected to parliament for the 1999–2004 term was lower than that during the previous decade of authoritarian rule. In the early reform years, the Indonesian women’s movement lobbied effectively for a gender quota that would jumpstart women’s historically low level of representation. Introduced via legislation (Law No. 12/2003), the legal candidate quota stipulated that:

Each participating political party may nominate candidates for the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (National House of Representatives), Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (Regional House of Representatives), and Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah I and II (People’s Representative Council Provincial and District/City level), for each electoral district, giving consideration to representation of women of at least 30 per cent.

The 2004 general elections were the first to be held under the new quota system. The results were disappointing for those hoping for a quick bounce in the number of women elected to parliament. The newly introduced legislative quota contributed to only a marginal increase in women’s representation in the national parliament—from 9.6 per cent to 11.1 per cent. A key reason for the limited impact of the legislative quota was that the legal provisions were weak, and there were no sanctions for non-compliance. The law required, somewhat ambiguously, that parties merely ‘consider’ the 30 per cent target for women...

3. In the 1987–1992 parliament, women held 13 per cent of seats; in the 1992–1997 parliament, women occupied 12.5 per cent of seats; and in the final parliament ‘elected’ under Suharto (1997–1999), women occupied 10.8 per cent of seats (Wardani 2009).
candidates and did not specify what should happen if political parties failed to meet the target. Not surprisingly, many political parties failed to meet the quota requirement. Even in cases where parties put forward a higher number of women candidates, other practices undermined the potential impact of the quota. For example, in many places, political parties placed women candidates in unwinnable seats or far down the party list where their chances of being elected were very low (Bessel 2009). In 2004, it appeared that political parties had failed to take the gender quota seriously.

Following the result of the 2004 election, activists lobbied for the gender quota to be strengthened in law. Despite opposition from some lawmakers, the parliament passed a revised electoral law (No. 10 2008) that strengthened the requirements. In the revised law, it became compulsory for political parties to include a minimum of 30 per cent women candidates. The revised law also required parties to place women candidates in one of every three places on the list—i.e. among the top three ranked candidates, one must be a woman. Employing this variation of the ‘zipper’ system meant that political parties could no longer ‘bury’ women candidates at the bottom of lists where they would attract the least attention from voters. Furthermore, each local branch of the Elections Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU)) was required to verify that submitted party lists complied with the quota requirement. Lists that did not comply were to be sent back to political party offices for revision. The law also required the local and national elections commissions to publish in the media the gender-disaggregated party lists, creating additional pressure on parties and the elections commissions to comply with the quota requirement.

Despite the absence of sanctions for non-compliance, the strengthened law contributed to a much better result for women candidates in the 2009 general elections. Women accounted for 34.7 per cent of candidates contesting seats in the national and regional assemblies. In the National Representative Assembly, the proportion of women jumped from 11.1 per cent to 17.86 per cent, bringing Indonesia closer to the world average, which was 19 per cent at the time. Across the 33 provincial assemblies, women won an average of 16 per cent of seats, which also represented a significant improvement on the 2004 results. In district and municipality-level assemblies, women won an average of 9 per cent of seats (Wardani 2009).

In the lead up to the 2014 polls, it was widely expected that women’s representation would further increase (Satriyo 2014). There were several reasons for such optimism. At the regulatory level, the KPU acknowledged ongoing compliance challenges in the implementation of the gender quota in 2009 and vowed that it would strictly enforce the gender quota in 2014 by returning non-compliant lists to central party boards. Government leaders repeated their commitment to achieving 30 per cent representation for women. Several government ministries launched programs and initiatives to promote women candidates. The Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection sponsored a television campaign featuring former President B. J. Habibie in which the public was encouraged to consider voting for women candidates. In it, the former president opined, ‘[n]ot all problems can be solved by men … the representation of women in national and subnational parliaments is important for solving the nation’s problems’. In general, the media climate was favourable to women candidates. Even though there was a tendency in some sections of the media to sexualize women candidates, journalists gave

4. Only three out of the seven parties reaching the parliamentary threshold of three percent met the 30 per cent quota requirement for women candidates, and these were among the smaller parties. The dominant parties were the worst performers (Siregar 2006).

5. The world average has since increased to 22.7 per cent (2016). For the latest data, see Inter-Parliamentary Union: www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm. Indonesia ranks 76th out of 143 countries for women’s political representation (Noor 2015).

6. On improvements in election management in Indonesia, see (Hillman 2011).
women candidates more serious attention than they had in the past. In previous election cycles, media coverage of women candidates tended to focus on women’s traditional roles as wives and mothers. In the lead up to 2014, journalists on radio and television conducted serious interviews with women candidates about their ideas and proposed policies. Given the supportive environment, the results of the 2014 elections were a major disappointment for advocates of women’s increased representation. Despite higher levels of investments and regulatory improvements, the proportion of women elected to the national parliament in 2014 declined from 17.86 per cent to 17.36 per cent (Table 1). At the provincial level, women won only 14.6 per cent of 2114 seats across 33 provinces. At the district/municipality level, women won only 14.2 per cent of 12 360 seats.

The results of the 2014 elections raise questions about the impact of positive action policies and programs designed to maximize the impact of the gender quota. It is argued here that policies and programs have not been based on a robust identification of the changing nature of the obstacles facing Indonesian women’s access to the political arena. Scholars examining the barriers to women’s entry to elected office generally organize their analysis around cultural, structural and institutional factors. Studies of variation in quota impacts have tended to emphasize cultural factors, notably public attitudes toward women in politics and public leadership positions (Caul Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer 2012). In the most recent World Values Survey conducted in Indonesia, 59 per cent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that men made better political leaders. A 2012 survey conducted by the

| Election | Total seats | (%) Men | (%) Women |
|----------|-------------|---------|-----------|
| 2014     | 560         | 82.68   | 17.32     |
| 2009     | 550         | 82.14   | 17.86     |
| 2004     | 550         | 88.9    | 11.1      |
| 1999     | 500         | 90.4    | 9.6       |

1 Source: Indonesian Election Commission: www.kpu.go.id.

Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) made similar findings: 64 per cent of respondents agreed that men made better leaders. Another poll conducted in the lead up to the 2014 elections found that 44 per cent of voters preferred male candidates, 3 per cent preferred female candidates and 48 per cent preferred neither male nor female candidates (The Asia Foundation 2013).

Although a growing number of Indonesians indicate support for women’s engagement in politics, other cultural attitudes constrain women’s engagement. In the 2012 CSIS survey, 86.3 per cent of respondents agreed that women could work outside the home but also that ‘women’s primary responsibility is to take care of the household’. And whereas only 39.6 per cent of respondents agreed that ‘politics is dirty and inappropriate for women’ (with 48.9 per cent disagreeing); an overwhelming number of respondents (83.6 per cent) agreed with the statement that women should not work at night. The widely held view that women should not work after dark is a significant barrier to women candidates because the work of running for office (rallies, constituent visits, political party meetings, travel etc.) often requires candidates to work long into the night. In the same CSIS survey, 92 per cent of respondents agreed that women should obey their husbands. Such expected ‘obedience’ often extends to voting. Women voters are accustomed to following male leads in choosing political candidates (supporting the choices of male household heads, for example), which makes it more difficult for women candidates to attract women’s votes.

Patriarchal attitudes about gender roles and the suitability of women for public office are often reinforced by the public statements of

7. In 2014, the ‘caleg cantik’ or ‘pretty candidates’ phenomenon attracted wide attention. See (Power 2014).
8. Source: Indonesian Elections Commission. For analyses of 2014 election data, see Ana Margaret et al. 2014 and various online resources provided by Perkumpulan untuk Pemilu dan Demokrasi (Perludem): www.perludem.org.
9. Source: World Values Survey Online www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp. The most recent survey data for Indonesia is from 2006. Indonesia was not included in the fifth wave of the survey (2010–2015).

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religious and traditional (adat) leaders who are influential in local communities and in local politics. During election campaigns in Indonesia, it is commonplace for community and religious leaders and for male legislative candidates to publicly question the morality of women running for office. Indeed, despite the successful introduction of a legislative quota, Indonesia’s much lauded process of democratization since 1999 has not resulted in significant expansion in the role of women in the political sphere. Democratization has opened channels for progressive voices, but it has also opened channels for conservative and patriarchal forces to advocate less emancipatory positions. The rising influence of conservative and patriarchal attitudes in Indonesian politics is particularly evident at the local level where an increasing body of laws seeks to regulate women’s appearance and conduct. According to the National Commission against Violence toward Women (Komnas Perempuan), as of June 2016, there were 422 bylaws that directly or indirectly discriminated against women, compared with 154 such laws in 2009. Laws discriminating against women, typically promoted in the name of religious and moral decency, include dress codes, the public segregation of men and women, and rules curtailing women’s mode of travel and movements at night, all of which limit women’s mobility and ability to run for office.

Because many of the prevailing attitudes toward women are influenced by religion, many successful women candidates have sought endorsements from local religious leaders (kiyai). One candidate reported that she based her strategy on wooing kiyai in marginal villages that had received little attention from political competitors. The candidate believed that her strategy was successful, despite her gender, because she had been endorsed by the male head of the local branch of her party and had strong ties to religious networks through her previous work in Fatayat, the women’s wing of Nahdlatul Ulama, which is Indonesia’s largest Muslim organization and the most influential organization in the rural parts of Java in which the candidate was campaigning.

Although cultural attitudes continue to constrain some women’s entry to political office, cultural attitudes alone do not adequately explain the stalled progress for women candidates in the 2014 elections. I argue that the deterioration of women’s electoral prospects is attributable to institutional factors (Hillman 2017). In the 2009 elections, Indonesia replaced the closed list voting system with an open list system. The open list allows voters to choose how they preference candidates, including candidates from the same party, regardless of the candidates’ order on party lists. Under the previous closed list system, party officials would decide the order in which candidates would receive votes for the party. Under the open list system, candidates compete against all other candidates—i.e. those from their own party as well as candidates from other parties. This places much more significance on individual ‘ground war’ campaigns and has led to skyrocketing campaign spending. Much of the increase in spending is covered by individual candidates—a fact highlighted by political parties’ shrinking share of campaign funds. In 2014, reports filed with the central election commission showed that total campaign funds for some political parties in 2014 were as little as 50 per cent of 2009 expenditures (Timur and Priamarizki 2014). It is difficult to find reliable information about the expenditure levels of individual candidates; however, several candidates who have contested both 2009 and 2014 elections report that their campaign costs have more than doubled. KPU documents indicate that candidates spent between one and eight billion

10. www.komnasperempuan.or.id
11. Source: SWARGA Project: Focus group discussions with women parliamentarians. Bandung. August 2015.

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Rupiah (US$ 75 000–600 000) on individual campaigns over and above what political parties spent on campaigns, although official reports filed by candidates are likely to under-report actual expenditure.¹⁵

In a political system long characterized by patronage and ‘money politics’, Indonesia’s parliamentary candidates are expected to provide goods in return for votes. Popular handouts include donations to communities and local organizations such as uniforms and equipment for local sports teams, agricultural supplies such as seeds and fertilizer, and donations for the construction of village facilities such as houses of worship and infrastructure. Other goods include personal gifts such as prayer mats and headscarves. Cash gifts are becoming increasingly common. Patronage is often facilitated by vote brokers who offer their services to candidates in the pre-election period. Teams of vote brokers, known as ‘tim sukses’ are now an institutionalized feature of Indonesia’s elections. Tim sukses are responsible for building alliances and constituencies to maximize support for their candidate. Members of each tim sukses, who number in the hundreds (and even in the thousands for the teams of the wealthiest Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat candidates) need to be paid—a major and growing campaign expense (Aspinall 2014).

The high cost of running for office is a major barrier to women’s entry into political office in Indonesia and in many other countries with limited public funding for political parties and campaigns (Meutia 2015). The absence of public campaign funding means that candidates need support from the business community to which men are generally better connected. Further, activities associated with ‘money politics’, including vote buying, backroom dealing and the politics of patronage tend to discourage capable women from entering the race.¹⁶ Such practices raise the bar for women activists from non-elite backgrounds. And it is noticeable that in recent elections, several women activists and capable parliamentarians have lost their seats and been replaced by women from political dynasties. According to research by Centre for Political Studies at the University of Indonesia, in the 2009–2014 parliament, 41.7 per cent of women members of parliament (MPs) were members of political family dynasties. In the 2014–2019 parliament that figure increased to 46.75 per cent (Ana Margareta et al. 2014). According to one analysis, the increase in women parliamentarians from dynastic backgrounds risks perpetuating ‘politics as usual’ as such women tend to act ‘as agents of masculine interests’ (Perdana et al. 2015). Scholars have made similar observations about the profiles of women elected to parliament in other low and middle-income democracies such as Bangladesh (Chowdhury 2003).

The increasing cost of running for office in Indonesia has prompted debates about the need for further electoral reform. One strand of the debate focuses on the party list system, with some activists advocating for a return to the closed list as a means of abolishing the need for individual ‘ground war’ campaigns. A second strand of debate focuses on the need for campaign finance reform in order to reduce the influence of patronage and dark money in election campaigns. Indonesia has made progress in regulating campaign finance in recent years,¹⁷ but caps on donations apply only to political parties and not to individual candidates. Because there are no tax incentives for donating transparently to political parties, those interested to influence politics are more inclined to give money directly to candidates. Such transactions are unregulated. Public finance for campaigns remains extremely limited, driving candidates into the hands of wealthy benefactors who expect returns on their investments. Indonesia’s media is full of

¹⁵. Source: Indonesia National Elections Commission.
¹⁶. Interview with Heni Pancaningtyas, Parliamentary Stream Manager, Empowering Women for Poverty (Mampu) Project. Jakarta. August 2015.
¹⁷. For example, campaign finance laws now restrict the amounts corporations and individuals can donate to political parties in a given year. The maximum amount for individual donations is one billion Rupiah; the maximum amount for corporations is 7.5 billion Rupiah. Candidates are also required to declare the amount of their campaign funding to the elections commission.
reports of politicians caught up in scandals by allocating projects and favours to political backers. Public funding is now estimated to account for less than 1 per cent of political party finances in Indonesia and is probably a much smaller component of legislative candidates’ campaign funds, given that most candidates receive little or no funding support from their political party (Mietzner 2013).

In the early years of Indonesia’s return to democracy, a presidential decree (2001) allocated political parties 1000 Rupiah (US$0.08) per vote won, providing political parties with a substantial amount of their revenue. In 2005, however, a new decree issued by then President Yudhoyono reduced payments by 90 per cent to approximately 100 Rupiah (US $0.008) per vote. As Marcus Mietzner observes, Indonesia’s public funding for political parties is among the lowest in the world; it is precisely 158 times lower than funding made available to political parties in Turkey—another middle-income predominantly Islamic country, which has recently returned to multiparty elections following an extended period of authoritarian rule (Mietzner 2013).

Regardless of the legislative quota provision, the lack of public funding for political parties in Indonesia disadvantages women candidates because running for office increasingly depends on an individual candidate’s access to vast resources, either through personal wealth or through deals with supporters in the business community. While male candidates also need access to significant financial resources to run for office, men are advantaged relative to women not only by their higher economic status relative to women but also by their dominance of business and political-official networks at local and national levels. It is thus perhaps not surprising that an increasing number of successful women candidates are members of political dynasties (Margaret et al. 2014). This trend is limiting the scope for activists and women from more humble backgrounds to enter politics and reducing the likelihood that women parliamentarians will fight for ordinary women’s interests. The failure of the national parliament to pass the Gender Justice and Equity Bill (Rancangan Undang-Undang Keadilan dan Kesetaraan Gender) after 2 years of deliberation and the lack of support for the bill among many elite women parliamentarians highlight the ongoing challenge for women’s representation in Indonesia.

3. Policies and Programs Supporting Increased Representation for Women

Indonesian government agencies and non-government organizations were active in supporting women candidates in the 2014 elections. In 2012, Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Indonesia, established the Strengthening Women’s Participation and Representation in Governance in Indonesia (SWARGA) project to increase women’s representation in parliament in the 2014 elections and to strengthen the capacity of women parliamentarians. Using materials developed by The Asia Foundation and the Partnership for Governance Reform (Kemitraan), the training program for candidates covered the following: (i) the importance of women’s involvement in politics; (ii) election systems and election stages; (iii) electoral districts, quotas and how to set and secure vote targets; (iv) personal branding and effective campaign strategies; and (v) individual action plans. The training program for MPs was designed to strengthen women’s performance in parliament and consisted of modules on the following: (i) the legislative function of parliament; (ii) the budgetary function of parliament; (iii) the oversight function of parliament; (iv) gender mainstreaming; (v) decentralization; and (vi) communication skills.

The SWARGA initiative also funded activities designed to strengthen the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus (Kaucus Perempuan Parlemen (KPP)), which has a mandate to empower women MPs. The SWARGA project supported improvements in the administrative capacity of the KPP secretariat by developing administrative procedures, strategies and action plans. SWARGA also facilitated exchange
and coordination between KPP and women members of provincial and district parliaments through the creation of a national Women’s Parliamentary Network. The Women’s Parliamentary Network was designed to serve as a forum for outreach, information sharing, networking and capacity development support and to provide more services to women MPs in the future.

A number of international and national civil society organizations also supported Indonesian government efforts to promote women in parliament. Search for Common Ground Indonesia, in partnership with Solidaritas Perempuan, conducted a two-year program aimed at strengthening women’s participation in several district and municipal elections where women’s representation was particularly low. In the target areas (Bogor, Bali and Lombok), the team’s research revealed that political parties were selecting unqualified women with little political background and knowledge in order to meet quotas. The program provided training to women candidates in campaigning, communications, leadership, public speaking and confidence. The project also held ‘engagement forums’, providing opportunities for constituents to meet with women candidates to learn about their political platforms. Part of the program was designed to build the capacity of political parties to seek out qualified female candidates. A number of other organizations including The Asia Foundation, the National Democracy Institute, the International Republican Institute and Kemitraan developed programs for training women candidates and for building networks among women candidates and parliamentarians in Indonesia.

Recognizing the importance of promoting women’s broader participation (and visibility) in electoral processes, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, in partnership with the Center for Political Studies (PUSKAPOL) at the University of Indonesia, worked with KPU and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) to promote women’s appointment to electoral management bodies. The team conducted a series of four-day training workshops for women on electoral management and participation in the lead up to the 2014 legislative elections. The training was designed to build women’s capacity and skills for employment in electoral management and to encourage more women to seek employment in electoral management bodies. Most donor-funded training programs, however, focused on potential candidates and actual candidates for election.

Although the intent of training programs for women candidates is admirable, and there may be longer term impacts that are difficult to measure, the results of Indonesia’s 2014 parliamentary elections suggest that programs have not been particularly effective. For example, of 1100 women attending training programs in the Province of Bali in the lead up to the 2014 elections, only four were successful in winning seats in the provincial and district/municipal legislatures. None were successful at the national level. Although the SWARGA project finds that women did better in regions where the project conducted training, it is difficult to attribute electoral results to the training programs, especially considering that the vast majority of training program participants do not get elected.

The majority of government and donor-funded training programs are based on the assumption that a central challenge for women’s representation in Indonesia is individual capacity—i.e. the availability of qualified women candidates. Indeed, this is the argument advanced by Indonesia’s political parties as the main explanation for their failure to meet the 30 per cent legislative quota with capable female candidates. With the problem thus identified, a number of support programs funded and coordinated by the government of Indonesia and international donors provided training to promising women candidates. Many support programs also sought to identify potential candidates and to provide this

18. Interviews with Ida Budhiarti, the only female commissioner in Indonesia’s National Election Commission. Jakarta. August 2015; Jan Pieter Pangaribuan, Director, Domestic Politics Division, Ministry of Home Affairs. Jakarta. August 2015; and Pheni Chalid, Project Manager, Strengthening Women’s Participation and Representation in Governance (SWARGA), Jakarta. October. 2015.
information to political parties for consideration. Training for potential candidates and serving MPs was often based on civic and political education curricula, including training on parliament’s functions and electoral system rules.

However, it is far from clear that individual capacity is the main obstacle to women’s advancement in politics. Civil society in Indonesia is home to multitudes of talented women activists with an interest in politics and public policy. According to the director of the Political Studies Centre at the University of Indonesia, ‘talent is not the problem’. In the lead up to the 2014 elections, several research and advocacy groups provided Indonesia’s political parties with names and biographical information about potential women candidates. Political parties, however, do not seem to be interested in such lists. According to former Bali provincial elections commissioner and director of an NGO that promotes women in leadership, ‘I have attended many trainings for potential candidates and met many talented women who would make excellent MPs. However, most of these candidates do not get recruited. Political parties do not want talented women; they want women with money.’ In facing this challenge, Indonesian women candidates are not alone. The training and preparation of tens of thousands of women candidates throughout the world has frequently been thwarted by political party intransigence, prompting some international groups such as the National Democratic Institute to focus attention on how best to support political parties to advance women candidates (Ballington 2012).

Nevertheless, international programs supporting women in politics continue to focus on individual capacity building for women candidates. But too often, programs are designed on the basis of what funding agencies think candidates should know in order to be effective MPs, rather than on what candidates need to know in order to win an election. In the lead up to Indonesia’s 2014 elections, few training programs addressed critical skills such as how to fund and manage campaigns and build political networks, even though aspiring candidates routinely identify building and financing a successful campaign as a paramount challenge. In facing this challenge, Indonesian women candidates are not alone. A recent global survey of legislators revealed that ‘[w]hile both men and women express concern about the many pitfalls of political campaigning, females are more worried overall, particularly about gender discrimination, the difficulty of fundraising, negative advertising, the loss of privacy, and not being taken seriously’ (Rosenbluth et al. 2015). Developing the skills needed to run an effective campaign and overcome the multitude of political social and cultural obstacles requires many years of mentoring and on-the-job training, which can only be effectively led and coordinated by political parties. Government and international donor-funded support programs that are typically rolled out only in election year will not be able to address the more significant capacity and attitudinal challenges.

4. Future Directions for Positive Action

Future positive action programs designed to complement the legal candidate quota need to be based on a more robust analysis of the obstacles to women’s representation. Individual talent needs to be cultivated, but international experience increasingly suggests that only political parties can successfully cultivate and promote female talent (Caul 1999). Political parties are the primary vehicles of representation in Indonesia’s multiparty democracy and, as such, must also be the primary vehicles of change in attitudes toward women in politics. There is ample evidence globally to suggest that changes made by dominant political parties can have a

19. Interview with Sri Budi Eko Wardani, director, Political Studies Centre, University of Indonesia. Jakarta. August 2015.
20. Interview with former Bali Provincial Elections Commissioner Luh Riniti Rahayu, Denpasar, August 2016.
21. Interview with SWARGA project team. Jakarta. September 2015; and Hana A. Satriyo, Gender Advisor, The Asia Foundation. Jakarta. September 2015.
significant impact on other parties’ behaviour and on women’s representation (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu 2013; Caul 1999). Government and donor programs need to work more closely with Indonesia’s political parties, targeting the more progressive, secular parties with a better track record of promoting women. Internal party governance and policy changes that would benefit women include (i) strengthening women’s wings by resourcing them appropriately and by linking the wings to the leadership of the party so that women’s wings do not contribute to the marginalization of women in the party; (ii) ensuring that women are represented in party leadership and policy committees; and (iii) the articulation of gender equity and women’s advancement goals in party platforms. To date, only a small number of political parties have incorporated the gender quota into party statutes. Parties can make organizational changes to ensure that women have more voice in internal policymaking and not just over perceived traditional ‘women’s issues’ such as health and education. Political parties can also be supported to develop systems of meritocratic recruitment and programs for cultivating future candidates, perhaps in partnership with Indonesia’s various women’s organizations, which remain an untapped resource for political mobilization. Women’s religious organizations such as Fatayat, the women’s wing of Nahdlatul Ulama and Aisyiyah, the women’s wing of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia’s second-largest Muslim organization, have been successful in promoting women’s interests and welfare but have thus far made limited contributions to the promotion of women’s entry to elected office, even though such organizations have often served as training grounds for women parliamentarians (Mar’iyyah 2015). Although Fatayat and Aisyiyah are officially non-partisan, in keeping with the policies of their parent organizations, their missions would not be compromised by working with women candidates from across party lines to build a critical mass of women MPs who could advocate for gender equity and women’s issues in parliament.

Advocates of increased women’s representation must also remain at the forefront of public debates and campaigns on political party and campaign finance reform because the cost of running elections and the murkiness of politico-business relations is becoming an ever-larger barrier to women’s entry to political office. Women’s advocates could make a case for increased public funding of political parties in return for political parties’ commitment to recruit and train talented candidates (men and women) via transparent and meritocratic recruitment processes. Efforts to advance women’s representation should not be separated from efforts to improve the quality of democracy more broadly. Parliament is designed to represent all members of society. Political finance reform will help to level the playing field for men and women and ensure that Indonesia’s young and promising democracy does not become captive to elite interests. This is a challenge for democracy not only in Indonesia but also in many other parts of the world, including in older, more consolidated democracies, where there is a growing perception that democracy is for sale to the highest bidders.

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