BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY: ENHANCING WOMEN'S AND YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Building an inclusive democracy remains a critical challenge within Indonesia's current political landscape, particularly in enhancing the political participation of women and youth. Inclusive democracy requires the active engagement of all segments of society without discrimination, ensuring that the voices and interests of historically underrepresented groups are duly considered in the decision-making process. The political participation of women and youth continue to face numerous structural and cultural barriers, including persistent gender stereotypes, limited access to political education, and a lack of opportunities and platforms to contribute effectively in both formal and informal political spheres. Increasing the involvement of these groups is crucial, as women and youth bring diverse perspectives and aspirations that can enrich public policy and strengthen the legitimacy of democratic governance. Strategies to promote their participation include enhancing inclusive political education, reforming policies that support equitable representation, and leveraging digital technologies as accessible platforms for broader engagement. Moreover, the active engagement of government institutions, political parties, and civil society organizations is essential to foster an enabling environment for the meaningful participation of women and youth. By advancing the political involvement of women and youth, Indonesia can achieve a more representative, just, and sustainable democracy. Inclusive democracy not only safeguards political rights but also enriches the democratic process by incorporating diverse voices that truly reflect the entirety of Indonesian society.

Keywords: Inclusive Democracy, Political Participation, Women, Youth, Indonesia

1. Introduction

According to UN Women (2023), women's participation in politics, leadership, and the public sphere is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. However, global data shows that women remain underrepresented in political representation. For example, data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) indicates that the proportion of women in parliaments worldwide increased from 11.3 percent in 1995 to 26.5 percent in 2023, still far from the ideal threshold of 30 percent. Only six countries have reached the 50 percent mark for female parliamentary representation: Rwanda, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates. In Asia, only one country reached 40 percent female representation, while Indonesia, based on the 2024 General Election results, recorded a female legislative representation of 22.1 percent, ranking it 120th out of 187 countries (UN Women 2023; IPU 2023). On the other hand, youth political participation was very prominent, with more than half of the registered voters being young voters, consisting of about 33.6 percent from Gen Y and 22.85 percent from Gen Z. The high level of youth voter participation represents

a significant potential that could shape the direction of democracy development in Indonesia.

Since the Reformasi era, Indonesia's democracy has seen significant progress that has expanded space for public participation in politics. However, political participation of women and youth still faces various structural and cultural barriers. Women often encounter patriarchal culture, gender stereotypes, and limited access to education and political resources. Meanwhile, youth experience marginalization within formal political structures, plagued by limited participation opportunities, low political awareness, and inadequate institutional support.

The involvement of women and youth in politics is not only about their presence but also about how their voices and aspirations contribute to more inclusive and responsive policymaking. In Indonesia's democratic context, promoting their representation is a vital prerequisite for realizing a just and quality democracy. Technological advances have also supported this role, as information and communication technology creates new opportunities through social media and digital platforms to voice aspirations and organize political movements. Nonetheless, the effective and meaningful use of technology requires sufficient political education (Sari 2023; Loader 2014; IPU 2023).

As the third largest democracy worldwide, Indonesia faces complex challenges in ensuring genuine democratic inclusivity. This includes guaranteeing meaningful engagement from all societal segments—across ethnic, social, economic, and geographic divides—without discrimination, particularly for underrepresented groups like women and youth. Therefore, this article will explore in depth how the principles of inclusive democracy can be applied effectively in Indonesia, focusing on strategies to enhance political participation of women and youth. The discussion covers barrier analysis, the role of stakeholders, and policy recommendations to strengthen their involvement in national political life.

The article aims to identify and analyze the challenges faced by women and youth in political participation, explore inclusive democracy as a framework, and provide practical recommendations to encourage their engagement. Ultimately, it aspires to promote a more just, representative, and inclusive democracy in Indonesia by removing social barriers and discrimination.

2. Literature Review

Political participation is one of the main pillars of a healthy and sustainable democratic system. Generally, political participation is defined as the involvement of individuals or groups in the political decision-making process, whether through elections, political party activities, social movements, or other forms of participation. Theories of political participation emphasize the importance of inclusivity and fair representation so that democracy can function effectively and reflect the aspirations of all layers of society (Suryakusuma 2018; UN Women Indonesia 2023; Heryanto 2020).

In the context of gender, women's political participation has been a major focus of study. Numerous researches show that although women constitute half of the population, their involvement in politics remains far from proportional. Structural barriers such as patriarchal culture, gender stereotypes, and institutional discrimination often limit women's access to political spaces. Studies highlight that political education, affirmative policy support, and economic empowerment are

important factors that can enhance women's political participation. In Indonesia, despite progress in women's representation in parliament and government institutions, cultural and social challenges remain significant obstacles to broader political participation by women (Liddle 2019; BPS 2023; KPPPA 2023; Jovani 2024).

Meanwhile, youth is also a strategic group in modern democracy. Research on youth political participation indicates that they tend to engage differently compared to previous generations, especially by utilizing information technology and social media as means of political expression and mobilization. However, low political awareness, lack of formal participation spaces, and marginalization within traditional political structures are common challenges faced by youth. Several studies emphasize the importance of political education and active involvement in community organizations as ways to increase youth political participation (Putra 2021; Suryadi 2022; KPU 2024).

The development of information and communication technology is also an important aspect in recent literature on political participation. Social media and digital platforms open new opportunities for women and youth to voice their aspirations, build networks, and organize social movements more effectively. However, the literature also cautions that the use of these technologies must be accompanied by digital literacy and political education to ensure that participation is not merely symbolic but has a real impact on the democratic process. Although many studies have discussed women's and youth political participation separately, there is a lack of comprehensive research integrating these two groups within the context of Indonesian democracy. Furthermore, the dynamics of utilizing digital technology as a tool for political empowerment require deeper exploration, especially regarding how technology can overcome existing structural and cultural barriers.

Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by holistically examining the political participation of women and youth in Indonesian democracy, identifying the challenges they face, and exploring the role of technology and empowerment strategies that can enhance their engagement more effectively.

3. Research Methods

This article employs a qualitative approach, and the type of research used is a literature review. The data sources utilize secondary data from published research and online media reports that were purposively selected. The data collected are related to inclusive democracy in connection with the political participation of women and youth in Indonesia. The obtained data are then analyzed using descriptive analysis methods (Creswell 2014).

4. Results and Discussions
4.1. The Challenges to Inclusive Democracy in Indonesia

Inclusive democracy is a democratic system that guarantees equal access for all societal groups, without exception, to participate in political processes, decision-making, and development. In Indonesia, inclusive democracy holds deep relevance, aligned with the nation's social, cultural, religious, and geographical diversity and complexity that characterize this country. This system plays a crucial role in creating social justice, strengthening national stability, and promoting sustainable development by involving all elements of

society fairly and equally.

However, there are several challenges in implementing inclusive democracy in Indonesia:

First, maintaining the integrity of the Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia (NKRI). Indonesia is a highly diverse country with more than 1,300 ethnic groups, around 700 regional languages, six recognized religions—Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—as well as other local beliefs. Inclusive democracy ensures that all groups are heard and involved in decision-making, thereby preventing horizontal conflicts and preserving national unity.

Second, strengthening the principle of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity). Inclusive democracy aligns with the spirit of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, which emphasizes unity within diversity. By providing space for all societal elements to participate, inclusive democracy ensures that Indonesia's diversity becomes a strength for nation-building.

Third, promoting fairer representation. In Indonesia, women, minorities, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples often face structural barriers in accessing political spaces and decision-making. Although women constitute more than half of the population, they are frequently marginalized from strategic positions in legislative, executive institutions, and public policy formulation. Inclusive democracy requires equal representation that not only involves women symbolically but ensures their active role and real influence in decision-making. Through inclusive democracy, gender gaps can be minimized by creating affirmative policies such as quotas for women's representation in parliament, empowering women in local leadership, and expanding women's access to planning and implementing development. This not only delivers justice but also brings important gender perspectives in formulating public policies responsive to the needs of all society.

Similarly, youth often face challenges in accessing political spaces, decision-making, and strategic roles across sectors. Although they represent the majority of Indonesia's population and have great potential to be agents of change, youth participation is often hindered by political structures dominated by older generations, stereotypes about lack of experience, and limited access to political education and resources. Inclusive democracy demands fairer youth representation in legislative, executive bodies, and public policy-making. This includes providing greater space for youth to express their ideas, active involvement in decision-making processes, and developing affirmative programs supporting youth leadership. Ensuring youth representation not only refreshes political dynamics with fresh and innovative ideas but also creates policies more relevant to future needs. Active youth participation is a vital step to guarantee sustainable national development, strengthen political stability, and create an inclusive and just society.

Fourth, addressing social and economic inequalities. Indonesia still faces significant social and economic disparities. Inclusive democracy can serve as a tool to listen to marginalized groups and ensure fairer policies, such as access to education, healthcare, and employment.

Fifth, guaranteeing human rights. Inclusive democracy emphasizes respect for human rights. This is crucial in Indonesia to prevent discrimination

and ensure every citizen has equal rights in national and civic life.

Sixth, increasing political participation. By opening wider participation spaces for all societal elements, inclusive democracy can raise political awareness and active citizen participation. This is important to create a more responsive and accountable government in Indonesia.

Seventh, facing global challenges. As the world's third-largest democracy, Indonesia has the responsibility to be an example of how democracy can be implemented inclusively in a developing country. This is relevant globally to demonstrate that democracy can function harmoniously amid diversity.

Therefore, inclusive democracy is highly relevant in addressing the challenges of pluralism, inequality, and development in Indonesia. By applying the principles of inclusivity, Indonesia can strengthen unity, create social justice, maintain political stability, and realize the values of Pancasila and the spirit of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika.

4.2. Enhancing Women's and Youth Political Participation

Enhancing Women's Political Participation. Women's political participation in Indonesia is a crucial indicator in the effort to realize an inclusive and just democracy. Although progress has been made, such as the 30 percent quota policy for women's representation in parliament, women still face various obstacles that reduce their involvement in political processes and decision-making (Jovani 2024). To enhance women's political participation, several strategic steps can be taken, including:

First, improving political education for women. Political education is essential to raise women's awareness of their political rights. Leadership training programs, advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives can help women understand the political system, campaign strategies, and their roles in decision-making.

Second, reducing structural and cultural barriers. Strong patriarchal cultural norms remain a significant obstacle to women's political involvement. Raising public awareness about the importance of gender equality and providing support to women who want to participate in politics are important steps to overcome these barriers.

Third, strengthening affirmative policies. Affirmative policies, such as the 30% quota for women's representation in legislative bodies, need to be reinforced and consistently implemented. Moreover, political parties must be more proactive in recruiting, supporting, and nominating women in elections— not merely to fulfill quotas but to provide fair opportunities.

Fourth, increasing women's representation within political parties. Political parties play a central role in the political process. Increasing the number of women in party leadership structures can create greater space for women to participate in politics from the planning to the implementation stages.

Fifth, enhancing access to resources. Women's lack of access to resources such as campaign funds, political networks, and media often hinders their participation. Financial support, mentoring programs, and fair media access can help women become more confident and competitive in politics.

Sixth, reducing violence and discrimination against women in politics.

Women often become targets of gender-based violence—physical, verbal, or digital—when they enter the political arena. Strict law enforcement against perpetrators and the provision of a safe political environment can help women engage without fear.

Seventh, inspiring through female role models in politics. Successful women figure in politics, such as ministers, governors, or members of parliament, can inspire other women to get involved. Campaigns highlighting their achievements can help build confidence among other women.

Eighth, promoting sustainable social change. Increasing women's political participation requires ongoing social change, including gender equality campaigns, integrating gender perspectives in education, and the media's role in advocating the importance of women's representation.

4.3. Enhancing Youth Political Participation

Similarly, the youth represent the largest demographic group in Indonesia, with great potential to become the driving force behind social, political, and economic change. However, youth political participation is often limited due to lack of access, knowledge, and opportunities to engage in decision-making processes. To enhance youth political participation in Indonesia, a strategic approach focused on empowerment and inclusivity is needed, namely: engaging political education (Litusik = Politics is Fun), which aims to change youth's perceptions of politics, which is often seen as boring, conflict-ridden, or even negative. Through this approach, politics is understood as something relevant, interesting, and a tool to create positive change in society. Here are several reasons why politics can actually be "fun" and engaging:

First, politics is an inseparable part of everyday life. Every aspect of our lives, from the price of basic necessities to the quality of education and healthcare services, is influenced by political policies. By understanding and engaging in politics, we can have control over decisions that directly impact our lives. Therefore, politics provides space for everyone to contribute, whether through voting, advocacy, or concrete actions, to create better change.

Second, politics as a tool for change. Politics is a means to voice opinions, fight for others' rights, and promote important issues such as social justice, environmental preservation, and gender equality. Through politics, individuals have the opportunity to contribute to policy-making. Moreover, politics opens up collaborative spaces, allowing us to work together with various parties to create significant change at local and national levels.

Third, politics connects many people. Politics is a space that unites individuals from diverse backgrounds to pursue common goals. In politics, differences are not obstacles but strengths that enrich ideas and solutions. By engaging in politics, we have the chance to meet people who share similar passion, vision, and mission, while broadening our perspectives and building valuable networks.

Fourth, education and self-development. Politics provides deep insights into how society works, from government structures to social dynamics that affect daily life. Through political involvement, we can hone important skills such as public speaking, purposeful writing, strategic thinking, and effective

negotiation. Thus, politics not only broadens our understanding of the world but also helps develop our potential to become more critical individuals.

Fifth, politics is hope. Politics offers hope to create a better future through collective action. Through politics, we can fight for changes that bring justice, welfare, and equality. Active youth involvement is key, as it brings energy, fresh ideas, and new perspectives. The youth engage, the greater the chance to bring positive change and strengthen the future of democracy.

4.4. The Contribution of Higher Education Institutions to Inclusive Democracy in Indonesia

Political science plays an important role in strengthening and developing democracy in various ways. As a discipline that studies power, governance, and the interaction between political institutions and society, political science provides significant contributions to building a more inclusive, participatory, and sustainable democracy. Likewise, the contribution of higher education institutions to inclusive democracy in Indonesia is very significant. Through classroom teaching, research, and community service, universities have provided students with deep insights into the importance of active participation, social justice, and inclusive representation within the political system.

Moreover, higher education institutions also encourage the development of critical thinking, strengthen the capacity of youth as agents of change, and produce scholarly works relevant to improving public policy and advancing a just democracy. By involving communities in various service programs, universities play a direct role in promoting values of inclusivity, equality, and unity amid Indonesia's diversity.

For example, in 2024, Indonesia held two major moments in its "Democracy Festival": First, the Legislative and Presidential Elections on February 14, coinciding with Valentine's Day, and second, the Regional Head Elections on November 27. Universities actively contributed by providing political education to the public. This effort aimed to create informed and critical voters to support peaceful and integrity-driven elections. The political education programs targeted various groups, ranging from school students and church communities to the general public.

Similarly, published research includes studies on women's political participation in local parliaments. Various studies found that the increase in women's representation in politics is influenced mainly by two factors: social capital and moral capital. Social capital includes networks, relationships, and community support that enable women to gain access to political spaces and strengthen their positions in decision-making processes. This includes support from women's organizations, political parties, and local communities that act as connectors to enhance women's political involvement. Moral capital, on the other hand, relates to integrity, public trust, and women's ability to present issues that are relevant and important to society. This capital plays a crucial role in building the legitimacy of women as competent and trusted leaders representing public interests. The research also highlights that the collaboration between social and moral capital is key to encouraging women's involvement in parliament, both through affirmative policies and individual capacity building. These findings provide important insights for developing strategies to increase

women's political representation, especially at the local level (Jovani, Mendrofa, et al. 2023) (Dewi 2017) (Derichs, Fleschenberg & Hustebeck 2006).

Furthermore, research and publications emphasize the importance of the youth as agents of change in the democratic process. Findings show that youth political participation is influenced by several main factors, such as political education, access to information, the influence of social media, and trust in political institutions. The research also reveals that youth tend to be more active in non-traditional forms of participation, such as digital campaigns, social movements, and advocacy on specific issues, compared to formal participation like elections or involvement in political parties. Additionally, barriers such as political apathy, lack of comprehensive political education, and limited participation spaces often hinder youth from engaging optimally. Understanding these dynamics, the research offers strategic recommendations, including strengthening political education in educational institutions, enhancing digital literacy to avoid misinformation, and creating more inclusive participation spaces for youth. These research outcomes are expected to contribute to policy development supporting increased youth political participation in Indonesia.

In the field of teaching, curricula focused on gender perspectives can provide students with a deep understanding of the role of gender in various aspects of politics, communication, and international relations, as well as how gender issues affect social, economic, and political dynamics at local and global levels. These courses are designed to develop students' critical awareness of gender equality issues and empower them to become agents of change in creating a more inclusive society. By studying theories, practices, and case studies related to gender, students are encouraged to understand the challenges faced by women and other marginalized groups, while also designing relevant solutions to address gender inequality in various life domains.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

True democracy guarantees equal participation for all societal groups, including women and youth. Inclusive democracy ensures they have equal rights and opportunities to shape political processes, standing as key actors in nation-building rather than mere complements. Amid globalization, political shifts, and complex social changes, women and youth bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions responsive to societal needs. Politics, as a means to achieve the common good (bonum commune), embodies values like service, justice, honesty, solidarity, freedom, and responsibility. Achieving inclusive democracy in Indonesia requires equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, with equality as the core principle in governance and social life. This is vital to realizing the vision of Indonesia Emas—a prosperous, just, and advanced nation where everyone contributes optimally, free from discrimination, for national progress.

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