

## Capital Utilization of Incumbent Female Politicians (Case Study: Victory of Female Politicians in Three Legislative Election Periods in the Semarang Regency)



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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the capital utilization of two female politicians who have successfully maintained their positions for three consecutive terms in the Semarang Regency People's Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah/DPRD*). Periodically, the election results indicate a continued decline in the representation of women in the DPRD of Semarang Regency. Despite this, the two incumbent politicians in this article managed to retain their positions. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method, with data collection through in-depth interviews with two incumbent female politicians and several other informants, such as members of political parties, campaign teams, and voters. The findings in this study reveal that political capital, social capital, and economic capital play an important role in the victory of incumbent female politicians. This study also revealed that, despite the strong political and social capital of these two female politicians during their second and third terms, these factors did not diminish their need for economic capital to win the election.

**KEYWORDS:** incumbent female politicians, political capital, social capital, economic capital, and capital utilization.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Women are increasingly participating in politics. The latest data shows that the number of women serving as members of parliament worldwide has reached 26.5% (IPU, 2023). Despite the increasing participation of women in politics over time, their representation remains underrepresented. The representation of women in political life still falls short of expectations. This is primarily due to the ongoing obstacles that women encounter when attempting to actively participate in politics. In many countries, including Indonesia, social and cultural values that develop in society still support the perception that women are less competent than men. Patriarchal traditions and practices generally harm and limit women from being active in politics. We widely use the term patriarchy to describe a social system that institutionalizes male dominance. Meanwhile, patriarchy in politics refers to the attitude or view that politics should be a man's domain and women are less suited to being in that domain. The Indonesian Survey Institute (*Lembaga Survey Indonesia*, LSI) has revealed that Indonesian society still adheres to strong patriarchal values, which poses a significant obstacle for female candidates (White et al., 2023).

Like other countries around the world, Indonesia has made efforts to increase the number of women in politics. Indonesia carried out this effort by proposing a quota to increase women's representation. A series of debates and negotiations, both within and outside the House of People's Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat/DPR*) building, culminated in the introduction of a 30 percent legislative candidate quota in 2003, which saw its first implementation in the 2004 General Election. Law No. 12 of 2003 regulated this, mandating a 30 percent quota for women to nominate as members of the DPR and DPRD. In the following election, this regulation was then supplemented by an affirmative policy regulated in Law No. 10 of 2008, which requires a 30 percent quota in the central party management and a zipper system for candidate numbers, where every three candidate names must have at least one female name.

In the national parliament, in the 1999 election, women held 44 seats in the People's Representative Council, or only 8.80 percent of the total seats. This proportion increased to 65 seats in the 2004 election, or an increase to 11.8 percent overall. This female representation figure increased again in the 2009 election, with a proportion of 17.86 percent. Unfortunately, between 2014 and 2019, the growth in the number of women as members of the DPR stagnated—and even experienced a decline in proportion, to 97 out of 560, or 17.32 percent. In the 2019 election, the female representation figure again improved to 19.48 percent. In the last election in 2024, the female representation figure reached its highest result of 21.89 percent. Although still relatively low, this is the

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highest female representation figure in the history of women's journeys in Indonesia. The implementation of the women's quota policy has demonstrated an increase in women's representation in the national parliament, albeit not yet reaching 30 percent. However, in several regions, such as the DPRD of Central Java Provincial and DPRD of Semarang Regency, there has been a periodic decline in the number of women's representation based on election results. Other regions may also observe this trend.

Based on the results of the last three elections, the number of women's representatives in the DPRD of Semarang Regency, the location of this study, continues to decline. Although the number of women's representatives in Semarang Regency was still far from 30 percent in the 2014 election, the results were significant as they reached 20 percent. In the following election, this figure continued to decline. In the 2019 election, the representation of women in Semarang Regency decreased to 18 percent; however, the number of seats won by female candidates remained unchanged, specifically 9 (nine) seats. In the 2024 election, the representation of women dropped to 16 percent, resulting in a decrease of 1 seat.

**Table 1. Number of Female and Male Legislative Members in the Semarang Regency Regional People's Representative Council 2014-2024**

Election Year	Number of Female Legislative Members	Number of Male Legislative Members	Total
2014	9 (20%)	36 (80%)	45 (100%)
2019	9 (18%)	41 (82%)	50 (100%)
2024	8 (16%)	42 (84%)	50 (100%)

Source: (KPU Kabupaten Semarang, 2024)

Based on previous literature data, the low representation of women in legislative institutions is primarily due to the structural, institutional, and cultural obstacles that women must overcome (Prihatini, 2019). In a more practical context, this can be explained as follows: First, women encounter negative perceptions of politics as a dirty and masculine world, unsuitable for them. Second, public acceptance of women's leadership. Thirdly, the cost of participating in general elections continues to rise over time. Fourth, political parties implement strategies that put women in a disadvantageous position. The male-dominated party council in some parties decides the placement of candidates on the ballot. Fifth, the implementation of the open list system results in high levels of competition (both internal and external to the party), thereby increasing campaign costs; some female candidates are unable to bear these costs (Perdana & Hillman, 2020; Prihatini, 2019; Sumarto, 2017).

Thus, women who successfully win seats in parliament are those who have effectively overcome these obstacles and barriers, especially those who have won more than once. Previous research explains the winning factor of female legislative candidates through the concept of capital ownership. Bourdieu's theory categorizes capital into four types: 1) Social capital is social relations in society; 2) economic capital is capital that refers to material, such as money, property, and others that can be cashed; 3) cultural capital is capital that has the capacity to be exchanged for money and prestige, such as education, knowledge, and diplomas; 4) symbolic capital is intangible capital, not easily entered into the logic of knowledge, but can be converted into the other three capitals. (Bourdieu, 1986) Furthermore, Casey defines political capital as the accumulation of various types of capital owned by political actors or institutions in a political action, specifically the election (Casey, 2008).

Numerous studies have conclusively demonstrated the role of capital in women's electoral victory. Numerous studies have demonstrated that various forms of capital, including political capital from party elites and political parties, social capital from public trust, social networks, and organizations; symbolic capital from social status; cultural capital from knowledge and personality; and economic capital from money, contribute significantly to the victory of female candidates in legislative elections across various levels and regions in Indonesia. However, of the various capitals owned by women, the ones that play the most significant roles are political capital, social capital, and economic capital. Beyond capital, factors such as ballot numbers, electoral districts, and kinship with political or social elites also contribute to the victory of female candidates. (Fitriyah & Supratiwi, 2022; Indira S & Mariyah, 2021; Irwan & Wardani, 2021; Lagabuana et al., 2021; Roito & Valeria, 2021).

In this study, of the 5 incumbents elected to the Semarang Regency Regional People's Representative Council in the 2024 Election, the focus will be on 2 female incumbents who have successfully won the legislative elections for three consecutive election periods. These two women are Lily Sri Wachiduni Choiriyah from the Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrat*), and Isroatun from the National Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa/PKB*). This aims to elucidate the role of political, social, and economic capital in the three consecutive election victories of the two female incumbents.

## II. METHODS

The study employs a descriptive qualitative research method. We use descriptive qualitative methods to explore or understand the meaning that various individuals or groups of people interpret from social problems (Creswell, 2013). Descriptive qualitative research aims to address the formulation of the problem by conducting in-depth interviews and tracing data from various relevant

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documents to support the analysis. We conducted this research in the Semarang Regency area, focusing on the political, social, and economic capital of incumbent female politicians over three consecutive periods in the 2014-2024 election. The informants in this study include two female legislative candidates who were elected for three consecutive periods and several other informants who can provide information related to this research, such as members of political parties, campaign teams, and voters. The study utilizes two types of data: primary data, gathered through in-depth interviews with informants, and secondary data, sourced from government documents

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Profile of Incumbent female Politicians

The study focused on two incumbent female politicians who had won three consecutive elections in the Semarang Regency Regional People's Representative Council, specifically in 2014, 2019, and 2024. The first woman is Lily Sri Wachiduni Choiriyah from the Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrat*). Lily was born in Semarang City on May 16, 1970. She is a graduate of the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Sultan Agung, Semarang. She started her political career by joining the Democratic Party in 2008. Initially, she worked as a staffer at a contractor company from 2006 to 2008. At the time, the head of the office was a Democratic Party activist who was preparing to run as the chair of the party leader in the Semarang Regency Democratic Party Branch Conference (*Musyawarah Cabang/Muscab*) in 2008. Lily, a staffer at the time, received a request from her leader to assist in the preparation of the Muscab administration. The following year, she also actively helped the Democratic Party in the 2009 Semarang Regency Legislative Election. Since then, she has officially joined the management of the Semarang Regency Democratic Party. Lily first ran as a candidate for the Semarang Regency legislative seat in 2014. In her first nomination, she managed to defeat other candidates, including the secretary of the Democratic Party and the incumbent candidate. Due to her success, she ran again and managed to maintain her position in the 2019 and 2024 elections.

The second woman is Isroatun, a female politician from the PKB. She was born in Semarang Regency on August 24, 1981. She successfully obtained a Master of Law degree in 2022 at the Universitas Darul Ulum Islamic Center Sudirman. Unlike Lily, who had been involved in a political party long before her first candidacy, Isroatun only joined the PKB when she was going to run as a legislative candidate in the 2014 election. Before entering the world of politics, her husband had already been involved in politics at the village level and had been the village head since 2007 in one of the villages in Semarang Regency. At that time, Isroatun's motivation to run for legislative office stemmed from the perception of her village as underdeveloped. She believed that her election as a member of DPRD would provide her with the opportunity to contribute to the development of her village. Due to her social status as the wife of the village head, she actively participates in community organizations such as *PKK/Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (Family Welfare Empowerment), *Posyandu/Pos Pelayanan Terpadu* (abbreviation for Integrated Service Post, which is a government program that provides integrated health and child development services.), Fatayat and Muslimat—a women's and young women's wing, respectively, of NU (*Nahdlatul Ulama*, Islamic Organization in Indonesia). She ran for the first time in the 2014 election and continued to win until the next election in 2019 and 2024.

#### B. Political Capital

Casey defines political capital as the use of all types of capital owned by political actors or institutions to produce beneficial political actions and strengthen the position of the relevant political actors or institutions (Casey, 2008). Marijan defines political capital as the support from political parties, campaign teams, and the political experience of candidates, all of which reflect support from political forces that represent the interests of the people (Marijan, 2016).

The two incumbent women in this study possessed political capital during their first candidacy in 2014, which included their nomination by a political party, placement in a strategic electoral district based on their domicile, and a zipper system for serial numbers. The interview results revealed that affirmative action policies and zipper systems facilitated their entry into political parties and their nomination in the general election. The Democratic Party nominated Lily in her first candidacy with serial number 3 in the Semarang 1 electoral district, which encompasses three sub-districts: West Ungaran, East Ungaran, and Bergas. The Democratic Party played a significant role in Lily's candidacy in the 2014 election, having secured the second largest number of seats (13.3%) in the previous election, second only to the PDIP (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*) in the DPRD of Semarang Regency.

The PKB nominated Isroatun with serial number 2 in the Semarang 2 electoral district, which covered three sub-districts: Bawen, Tuntang, and Pringapus (which the next election added to the Banyubiru sub-district). The PKB serves as a significant political asset for Isroatun, as it consistently garners a consistent number of votes during elections in Semarang Regency. This shows that even though the political dynamics in Semarang Regency have experienced ups and downs, public support for PKB remains consistent. In addition, Isroatun also benefits from her fairly strong social status in the community, where she is the wife of the village head. This social status enables her to easily gain recognition and support from the community, particularly in her home village.

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As their popularity and reputation grew during their tenure as members of the legislature, the two women's political capital grew stronger in the next election. The strong network of campaign teams they had nurtured since their first candidacy in the 2014 election further strengthened this political capital. Initially, the two women's campaign teams primarily consisted of individuals from outside the party, but in the 2019 and 2024 elections, these individuals joined the party. Thus, the communication and strategies carried out between the female legislative candidates and their campaign teams became more intense and solid. Over time, the number of members on the campaign teams of both female legislative candidates also continued to increase. The incumbent status of the two women also contributed significantly to the increasing strength of the political capital they already had. During their tenure as Regional People's Representative Council members, their performance sufficiently represented the community's interests and established their credibility as candidates who delivered tangible results, not just empty promises.

### C. Social Capital

Bourdieu defines social capital as the actual or potential resources that individuals or groups acquire through the possession of "more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual recognition and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986). Putnam further defines social capital as the social relationships that community members establish in their daily lives, reflecting the outcomes of long-term social interactions that result in networks, patterns of cooperation, social exchange, and mutual trust, along with the norms and values that underpin these relationships. Putnam states that social capital is a mutual trust or sense of mutual trust. Putnam defines social capital as the mutual trust or sense of mutual trust between members of society and society towards its leaders (Putnam, 1993).

This study reveals a notable disparity in the social capital that Lily and Isroatun possessed during their initial candidacies in the 2014 election. Lily's social capital is significantly lower than Isroatun's. This is because, first, Lily and her husband are new residents; she was not born and raised in Semarang Regency. She also does not have any siblings or relatives who live in this area. Second, prior to her first candidacy, Lily did not participate in any organizations, which meant she lacked a social network to draw upon for her election campaign. Hence, it is evident that Lily's social capital during her initial candidacy was significantly limited.

At that time, Lily's social capital was limited to the network of the success team (*tim sukses*, the Indonesian term for campaign team) she formed, which consisted of acquaintances and friends of Lily and her husband, where her husband is a contractor. Lily continued to build a network by approaching the community through the success team that she formed. They participated in various community activities such as Yasinan (Islamic community) study groups, PKK, and sports communities, among others. Despite having limited social capital at the start of her candidacy, Lily's grew stronger in her second and third candidacies, reflecting her ongoing commitment to social engagement throughout her political career, which extended beyond the election. The number of members of her success team network continued to grow. The level of public trust in her also continued to increase. This is because the interactions formed from the social activities she attended gave birth to bonds between community members and herself. It is well known that Lily frequently distributes assistance to the community, both from government programs in the form of aspiration funds (*dana aspirasi*) and grants (*hibah*) and from her personal funds. This positively impacts Lily's image and increases the community's support for her as an individual. Lily's social capital was already robust when she received nominations for both the 2019 and 2024 elections. The social network that she successfully formed and maintained, both during her candidacy and throughout her political career, has grown into strong social capital. Thus, this social capital has contributed to Lily's victory for three consecutive terms in Semarang Regency.

Unlike Lily, who had limited social capital at the onset of her legislative candidacy, Isroatun has maintained a robust social capital since her initial candidacy. Several factors contribute to this: firstly, she has maintained her social status as the village head's wife from 2007 to the present; secondly, her husband is a native of Semarang Regency, hails from a prominent family, and has numerous family and relatives in the area; thirdly, she and her husband actively participate in the NU organization and have established connections with numerous religious figures or *kyai* (religious leaders) who hold significant influence in the community.

Isroatun's social status as the wife of the village head supports her social capital for several reasons. Firstly, during her first candidacy, her husband's inheritance from the previous year's village head election provided her with a solid mass base and campaign team in her village area. Secondly, as the wife of the village head, she has been actively involved in social activities such as PKK, Posyandu, and religious activities like Fatayat and Muslimat, even before she ran as a legislative candidate. Through these social activities, Isroatun has established connections and networks with numerous individuals, both within and beyond her village. Isroatun also benefits from the social status of her in-laws, who are respected religious figures in the surrounding community, which in turn increases public trust in her. She also establishes connections with religious figures by regularly visiting *Kyai* and other religious figures in her electoral district.

The social capital that Isroatun had at the beginning of her candidacy was indeed quite strong. This social capital also continued to grow along with Isroatun's increasing experience as a member of the legislature and the increasing public trust in her. This is due to Isroatun's commitment to maintaining her network by regularly participating in community activities such as village celebrations, earth alms, religious studies, and other social events. She also allocates assistance from both government funds, known as aspiration



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funds, and her personal funds. This ensures that when she runs for office in both the 2019 and 2024 elections, she already possesses a robust voter base based on the network she has established and maintained.

### D. Economic Capital

Economic capital is generally defined as economic or material resources used to achieve certain results. Campaign and election research has identified economic capital as the financial resources and economic attributes possessed by candidates (Yun, 2021). Economic capital refers to financial capital in the form of money that can come from legislative candidates themselves, political parties, or other parties. The study's interviews with two women indicate that each of their election candidatures requires economic capital.

This study revealed that Lily and Isroatun's first candidacy in the 2014 election relied on personal funds from their husbands to support their economic capital. Lily stated that her first candidacy relied on personal funds from her husband, who was a contractor and provided the economic capital. Like Lily, Isroatun received financial support for her initial candidacy from her husband, a village chief and a construction sector businessman. This underscores the fact that women often face financial constraints when attempting to enter politics.

In an open election system where the most votes are cast, legislative candidates must prepare a substantial amount of capital to cover their campaign expenses. This was stated by two women in this study: economic capital was used for operational costs for the campaign team, costs for making campaign equipment (*Alat Peraga Kampanye/APK*), and costs for other needs, such as giving gifts or goods to constituents. Candidates use the campaign as an opportunity to promote themselves to the public, even attempting to influence voters to choose them by providing assistance in the form of goods or other community services. Interviews with two women in this study revealed that they did, in fact, significantly assist the community during their political journey, either by providing financial support or by sourcing goods for the community from their personal funds. Therefore, their political expenses extend beyond the campaign period, often occurring well in advance.

Despite their inability to disclose the exact political costs they incur in each election, Lily and Isroatun have stated that the economic capital required for each of their nominations in the 2019 and 2024 elections is steadily increasing. Lily and Isroatun stated that out of their three legislative nominations, the 2024 election incurred the highest expenses. This is due to the ongoing increase in the price of goods and costs, as well as the dynamic nature of people's behavior. This study shows that despite the strength of these two women's political and social capital, they still require economic capital, and their needs continue to grow over time.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article explains that capital plays a significant role in the victory of incumbent female politicians for three consecutive terms in the Semarang Regency election. Despite the declining representation of women in the region, Lily and Isroatun were able to thrive due to their significant capital. Three key components contribute to the accumulation of this capital: 1) political capital, which stems from support from political parties, experience, and their incumbent status, bolstering their reputation and popularity; 2) social capital, stemming from their closeness to social networks and the relationships they maintain with the campaign team, organization members, and the community, both during their tenure in office and as the election period approaches; and 3) economic capital, derived from personal funds and utilized to mobilize all necessary components for a successful campaign. This article shows that the three main capitals—social capital, political capital, and economic capital—are important factors for female legislative candidates to win the contestation in the election. This article underscores that while female legislative candidates possess significant social and political capital, they still require economic capital, which is progressively increasing in value.

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