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Needed but Neglected: Women Activists as Vote Getters in Elections at the Local Level

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ABSTRAK

Dalam studi aktivisme perempuan dalam politik, peran aktivis perempuan yang dilihat dari perspektif keterwakilan perempuan cenderung menggarisbawahi peran mereka dalam perekrutan politik dan pengambilan keputusan dalam sistem pemerintahan setelah proses pemilihan selesai. Perspektif ini mengasumsikan bahwa proses politik bekerja lebih maju dengan menyediakan saluran bagi aktivis perempuan untuk mengartikulasikan kepentingan dan karier politik mereka. Namun, asumsi ini dapat menyesatkan dalam masyarakat bahwa proses politik didominasi oleh elite politik. Hal ini membuat rekrutmen dan kebijakan lebih sentral dan menonjol untuk publisitas dan membuat aktivis di tingkat akar rumput kurang signifikan. Kasus di kota Semarang di provinsi Jawa Tengah di Indonesia menunjukkan bahwa aktivis-aktivis perempuan hanya dijadikan pengambil suara dalam pemilihan tanpa kompensasi politik jangka panjang yang jelas dan bermanfaat untuk promosi kesetaraan gender. Di Indonesia, perempuan relatif terorganisasi dengan baik melalui organisasi masyarakat, sebagai PKK (Pemberdayaan Keluarga dan Kesejahteraan) dan asosiasi pedagang pasar yang menarik untuk dikapitalisasi oleh kandidat politik melalui aktivis perempuan mereka sebagai bagian dari tim pemenang atau dikenal secara lokal sebagai 'tim sukses'. Jaringan yang dimiliki oleh aktivis perempuan dipandang penting oleh politisi (partai politik dan kandidat) untuk membujuk pemilih perempuan dalam pemilihan. Namun, lebih sering, dalam fase pemilihan, keterlibatan aktivis perempuan dalam masalah ini terbatas hanya untuk mendapatkan suara dari sesama pemilih perempuan di komunitas mereka. Meskipun dalam konteks ini aktivis perempuan akar rumput terlihat diabaikan, pada kenyataannya, proses mikro dalam pemilihan, seperti dalam kampanye politik, dapat menjadi fase penting bagi aktivis perempuan untuk memperkuat posisi tawar mereka terhadap para elite seperti calon anggota badan legislatif untuk mengadvokasi kepentingan mereka, begitu para kandidat terpilih.

Kata kunci: aktivis perempuan, pendulang suara, mobilisasi, partisipasi, kesetaraan gender

ABSTRACT

In the study of female activists in politics, the role of women seen from the perspective of women's representation tends to revolve in political recruitments and decision making process after the elections. This perspective assumes that political process works in a more advanced level by providing channels for female activists to articulate their

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political interests and thus help with their future endeavors. However, this assumption can be misleading in the society that political process is dominated by political elites. This has made recruitment and policy more central and salient for publicity and render activists at the grass-root level less significant. The case in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia has told us that female activists are made merely as vote getters in elections without a clear long-term political compensation that is beneficial for gender equality promotion. In Indonesia, women are relatively well-organized through community organizations, such as PKK (Family Empowerment and Welfare) and traditional traders' association which are attractive to be capitalized by political candidates through their female activists as part of winning team or locally known as *tim sukses*. Network owned by female activists is seen crucial by politicians, political parties and candidates to reach female voters in elections. However, more than often in electoral phases, the involvement of female activists in this matter is limited merely for getting votes from their fellow female voters in their community. Although in this context, female activists at the grass-root level seem negligible, in reality, micro processes in election, as in political campaigns can be a crucial phase for female activists to strengthen their bargaining position against elites to advocates for their interests once the candidates are elected.

Keywords: female activists, vote getters, mobilization, participation, gender equality

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INTRODUCTION

This article discusses woman activists at the local level whose role is simply depicted as vote getters by politicians and political parties in general elections in Indonesia. Although their role is crucial to generate voters' attention at grass root level, their significant contribution for the candidates or parties is relatively neglected in post-electoral activities, especially in decision making at the local or national parliament. Despite the importance of the issue, scholarly works have not thoroughly discussed how it happens and how it has implications on women's access to policy making in real life. Existing studies have identified women candidature and its impact on women's representation by explaining how woman candidature's success can be linked to woman voters' support (Sundström and Stockemer 2015, 255), Non-Governmental Organizations' support (Drage 2001), and money politics (Rhoads 2012, 37). However, there is little attention on the role of woman activists especially in political campaigns and how it may or may not lead to political representation in decision making in post-electoral stages.

Why is it important to discuss the issue? Indonesia has been known to have implemented gender quota since 2004. Since the implementa-

tion of quota policy, the number of female candidates in elections has increased significantly up to 40 percent; however, those who succeeded to secure seats in the legislature never reached the significant number of representation (Hillman 2018, 323). It is found that there is only 11 percent of women in the legislature in 2004, 18 percent in 2009 and 17 percent in 2014 (Bland 2019). Meanwhile, the involvement of women in political campaigns as winning team (Indonesian: *tim sukses*), whether in a formal or non-formal unit, is quite common in almost every winning team across Indonesia. The low number of women to be elected in legislature (descriptive representation, Rosenthal 1995; Reingold and Harrel 2010; and Smith, Reingold, and Owens 2012), despite their active involvement in political campaigns, therefore, leads us to an interesting question to elaborate.

This is not to mention the outcomes of women's representation that explicitly advocate for gender equality (substantive representation, Erzeel and Celis 2016; Allen and Childs 2018). As widely known, gender mainstreaming in policy making is still like a dream far from coming true (Hillman 2018, 46). Some studies have tried to identify the underlying factors of this problem. In addition to the low number of female representatives, Hillman (2017, 41–42) identifies that party's domination explains institutional constraints for female representatives in policy making, confirming the assumption that female representatives have a problem with capability as compared to male representatives (Hillman 2017, 45–46). Apart from this debate, the next interesting questions to reveal are, "How are women linked with the legislature after the election periods? Do they still maintain their relationship with the elected lawmakers or not?"

The above-mentioned points are indeed crucial to be taken into account. The discussions of these problems will lead us to a deeper identification of the political dynamics of women, who are supposed to be policy beneficiaries, a face in the community in terms of building network for candidates during elections and elected policy makers after the elections. This is related to how women place themselves before the political parties, candidates, and elected representatives, which makes

scrutinizing women's roles during and after the elections to advocate for their interests intriguing. In this case, portraying local women's experience gives us a brief explanation on how this happens at the local level.

Indeed, discussing women's experience at the local level in building network with political parties, candidates and elected officials is inseparable from local woman activists. Woman activists in Indonesia have been known to have a crucial position and influence in the community. They are a support system for the government's programmatic policy at the local level, as well as the local key actors for other stakeholders such as the regional government as well as NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) concerning on the development and participation (Afrianty 2018). Due to their active involvement, these women usually become one of the crucial figures in the community. They have network within their community that connects the people, especially women, in particular programmatic activities. Heading to elections, political parties and parliamentary candidates usually approach and ask these women to be part of their team in mobilizing political support from their neighboring community to gain votes. However, it often happens that the mobilization does not have clear impacts on the betterment of women's lives. It is usually short-termed, and there are no further follow-ups on the tightening of the political linkage between these women and their groups with the political parties and the elected parliament members. Simply, they are needed but politically disconnected.

This article criticizes the perspective on women's representation that tends to be seen in the recruitment and decision making (Stockemer 2015), rendering women's contribution to I. Meanwhile, as this article reveals, representation issue can also be traced through micro phases of electoral processes, as in political campaigns, to unravel the disconnectivity of this issue in Indonesian political process. Yet, this problem is hardly discussed, although it is actually a crucial stage to make political bargaining and contracts with the parties and candidates. Considering the unfulfilled quota for women in elections, it can be an alternative route to advocate for women's representation; a route to

make sure that these women are supported in election will be in favor of women's interests.

This article uses Semarang, the capital city of Central Java, as a case study, in which the involvement of woman activists as vote getters in election 2019 and in the previous periods was quite common. Semarang is an industrial and business area from downtown to the south, and an educational center from downtown to the north. Semarang can be considered as an urban area, although some rural characteristics are still easily found in the west and south part of the city. It consists of 16 sub-districts and 177 villages (*kelurahan*). Its population is 1,668,578, consisting of 825,964 male and 842,614 female populaces, and had 1,134,279 eligible voters in 2019 elections. This number consists of 550,630 male and 583,649 female voters, so female voters represent a major number of votes that should be taken into account in decision making process, at least in Semarang.

Given the significant number of female voters in 2019 election, it becomes crucial to win the votes of women. In this matter, woman activists become an important element because they are among those who can connect candidates with other female voters. Therefore, it is not rare to find many women, especially as community activists, who became part of political campaigning team, both in 2019 presidential and legislature elections. The most important question dealing with female activists' involvement in political campaign is, "Do they see it as a strategic way to assure that their long-term interests (not short-term) in public policy are accomplished?" However, as what happened in former Semarang political campaign periods and in many other parts of Indonesia, there have been no clear impacts these women gain on policy making by getting involved in political campaigns.

This article uses qualitative methods and applied case study as an approach. The research is supported with direct observations and in-depth interviews as data collection methods. Researchers observed campaign processes during 2019 election and interviewed five female activists who have experience in community activism in Semarang during the 2019 elections, 2018 governor election and 2015 mayor election. The research

is also based on experience sharing with two NGO activists in the city. Reflected from its research findings, this article looks into the issue of power that is lagging between the activists and the political parties or political candidates in political campaigns. This indicates the clear need for awareness rising between women, so that they will be able to bargain not merely to be treated as vote getters, but more substantively as partners in policy making in the future.

POLITICAL PARTY CANDIDATES AND FEMALE ACTIVISTS IN LOCAL COMMUNITY: BETWEEN MOBILIZATION AND PARTICIPATION

Some scholars have been aware that women's empowerment even though having been supported with quota policy is never easy, moreover if related to political practices. Some studies do indicate that women's empowerment has brought about positive outcomes during the transition of democracy. As Waylen (2007, 521–522) identifies in the case of South Africa, women had won descriptive representation through the gaining of 30 percent quota in legislature body since the mid of 1990s, as well as substantive representation through the passing of Domestic Violence Act of 1998 and the Maintenance Act of 1998, that addressed substantive gender equality issues.

However, in some other cases, what is found more often is the steady progress of both descriptive and substantive representations. In Indonesia, for instance, instead of increasing the substantive representation, increasing descriptive representation is still a big challenge. Despite the implementation of quota policy since 2004, women have never reached significant number of seats in the parliament. This poses further implications on the progress of substantive representation, which has not shown significant breakthrough after the implementation of quota policy. Current debates on the 2018 Bill of Sexual Harassment Protection even reveal that among the protesters who are against the bill are women who are identified as anti-feminists supported by a conservative Moslem party, namely PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera) (Kartika 2019).

What happens in Indonesia confirms what Griffin, Newman, and Wolbrecht (2012, 36–37) found in the US Congress that women tend to be underrepresented in the legislature body, especially in which male and Republican members are dominating. As Griffin, Newman, and Wolbrecht (2012, 36) assert, women tend to be well represented when the political circumstances are liberal or more likely to support women's issues. In the US context, where they conducted the research, supports for women were easier to find when women and Democrats led the regional parliamentary. With the persistence patriarchy culture (Purwanti 2015) and the rise of new conservatism in Indonesia, including within the political parties and the national and local parliamentary members, the promotion of gender equality through descriptive and substantive representation still becomes a big task (Brenner 2011). Patriarchal system believes that men have better quality and capability than women and that they are supposed to be the leader for women. Similarly, in the new conservative society, women are prohibited to expand their roles in the public sphere in the name of religious beliefs. If they do beyond the boundaries, they have to be placed in the secondary position after men, again in the name of religious values. In the Indonesian context, regarding gender matters, the culture of patriarchy and the new conservatism have an intersecting point in terms of putting women aside and behind men, including in the legislature body, which has implications on policy making. As such, the slow progress in substantive representation is also well explained with the stagnant achievement in descriptive representation. This confirms the relatively stagnant score of freedom of the country, namely at 64 out of 100 in 2018, which brought the country in the partly free countries (Freedom House 2018).

What makes the case of the slow progress in both descriptive and substantive representation interesting to discuss is not only due to the fact that quota policy has been implemented more than a decade in a country like Indonesia. Rather, in empirical experience, there has also been a rise in the inclusion of women in political campaigns, some of whom identified as the supporters of new Islamic conservatism. Being a female activist in Indonesia is not a weird thing, like in the Middle

East countries. Indonesian women have even been formally involved in social activism since the new order, despite the criticism that the policy merely put women as the secondary actor in the country's development (see '*State Ibuism*', Suryakusuma 2011). Since the reform, more space has been opened for political participation, including for women, than in previous administration. There have also been more female regency government heads and governors. Having female activists in the community is not really a new thing. Although getting a top position in a plural organization (that comprises male and female members) is still an issue for women, their involvement in the organization can be considered as socially acceptable. Even, in conservative unions, women are given opportunity to be the front lines of the campaign (see for instance Neno Warisman and Ratna Sarumpaet, who campaign for anti-feminism and populism respectively).¹ However, there have been no considerable changes in the seat winning for women in national and local parliamentary body and gender equality improvement in the policy making.

Dealing with this, Reyes-Housholder (2018) has asserted that in order to win women's vote, regardless of the policy orientation of the candidates, female campaigners are always needed. She introduces a theory of gender-strategic mobilization, which describes a prominent idea that women are more effective than men at mobilizing female voters (2018, 70). She then identifies that women running for executive and legislature seats deploy at least three steps in their campaign (2018, 71). The first is by approaching their fellow women early in the campaign stages to build same-sex solidarity. The second, they invoke gender experience as women either as mothers or victims of sexism to share identity with female voters. In this stage, family matters, as the price of staple food, domestic violence, sexual harassment, children's education and equal wages are among the issues being exposed during political campaigns. The aim of exposing these issues is to convince female voters that they

¹ The difference we may be able to identify is while women in non-conservative parties face the giant wall of patriarchal culture within, in spite of their likeliness to be with gender equality advocates, women in new conservative side might be the supporters of the patriarchy itself.

are aware of the issues commonly faced by women. Finally, they leverage the shared identity as women to make a promise of pro-women reform in policy making. For male candidates, spouse and prominent female figures in their parties are the keys in their campaign to pull supports from female voters by evoking the issues of sexism and gender inequality to invoke female voters' trust on the candidates' commitment on gender equality promotion.

This situation tells us that social and political areas are getting more open for women, but for merely being supporters rather than holding control. Referring to Waylen (2007), the more open public space for women in many developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America is inseparable from the political context these countries have encountered in the last two to three decades. Political transformation from authoritarian regime to a more democratic one has shifted the political system in these countries. In a democratic transition, as these countries are experiencing, public participation is rising and generally seen to be more and more important. In this regard, the participation of women is thought to be strategic because it can lift up these countries' degree of democracy. The problem is, despite the rise of participation of women in public space (in election and post-election periods), there are still problems in policy making on women's protection and rights recognition. As Opello (2008, 337) asserts, even the rise share of seats for women in the legislature body, as in the case of Brittany region, France, does not always result in the rise of woman-friendly policies.

To deal with this, some explanations might be worth considering. The first explanation is that women live and grow in a conservative culture, leaving them thinking that gender equality is a critical agenda to accomplish (Stout and Kline 2011). The second, related to structural issues, is that women face tremendous issues of income inequality that they do not have the same resources as that of men to advocate for their interests (Stockemer 2017). The last is that they might not live in a conservative environment or face structural constraints. However, the typology of their participation is rather passive in nature (Aviel 1981). They participate in elections, but merely as voters. They might

be aware of the importance of advocating for gender equality in policy making, but they do not have enough capabilities to build strategies on how to realize their agenda. During electoral stages, they do not make political contracts with the candidates to secure their positions in policy making once the candidates are chosen. In the post-election stage, in policy making, they also make up the composition of public dialogue's participation, but again merely for formalistic objective. They are there to fill up the presence list, but not making a concrete voice for advocating for their own rights. As such, it is clear that there is a cut in political linkage that disables women to make sure their interests heard and prioritized in policy making.

Molyneux (1985) has identified what often happens in politics is mobilization without emancipation. Her research findings in Nicaragua revealed that even the social revolution failed to promote gender equality, despite the strong support from women for the revolution. Molyneux's argument has made the point clear; female votes are needed but not their interests. Referring to Aviel (1981, 173) conservative roles of women in family and society, in which women are seen responsible for family matters, domestic issues and secondary roles in society, have led to the assumption that women's participation is passive. Therefore, what comes up later among male, even sometimes female politicians is political mobilization rather than political participation. While participation requires activeness in voicing aspiration, mobilization does not. Further, participation is one of the crucial ways to gain access and control over resources and policy making while mobilization is believed to neither strengthen nor empower women. As such, participation positions women as a subject of politics and policy making, while mobilization places women merely as an object of these two things.

However, what makes mobilization rather than participation among women in countries experiencing democratic transition problematic is not only related to objectification of women in politics and policy making. Furthermore, it reveals a more serious problem, namely ambiguity of democratization processes the developing countries are currently and seriously promoting. On the one hand, politicians are keen to campaign

for participation as a token of democratization processes. However, what they are campaigning for is rather the passive one. If they have to open for active participation, they select who are allowed to take part and who are not. Rai (2017) finds that although political participation in India increases period to period and recognition for women's rights look to improve, it has not succeeded to pass the Women's Reservation Bill that tries to protect women from harassment and violence, which is a very basic problem for Indian women. Rai (2017, 74) also reveals that women are needed only for winning elections, but politicians and political parties never seriously take women protection and gender equality into account and treat them as issues to advocate for in policy making.

In this regard, Reger and Staggenborg (2006) reveal that there is a need for strengthening collective action strategies women's organizations are applying. In many cases, as Reger and Staggenborg (2006) argue, failure in promoting reform agenda despite the well-established organization of women in policy making is related to movement strategies. Reger and Staggenborg (2006, 309–320) mention that the weakness in women's movement can be explained in at least three aspects, namely leadership, tactics and organizational structure. This implies that reform for promoting gender equality cannot be done individually and sporadically. Rather, it has to be done continuously from electoral to post-electoral phases. In electoral phases, political contracts that are set up to firmly assert politicians' commitment for promoting pro-equality policy are the key. This phase, nevertheless, does not stand alone. It has to be equipped with the maintenance of political linkage with politicians—political parties, top executives and national and local representatives—to make sure that the contracts are well-obeyed. The sense of collectiveness, as well as, awareness of that struggle for gender equality promotion are continuous processes and are what seem to miss out in most women's movement in developing countries, including in Indonesia.

BEING MERELY VOTE GETTERS: THE CASE OF FEMALE ACTIVISTS IN SEMARANG, CENTRAL JAVA

This part discusses the experiences of women, especially activists in Semarang, being part of political campaigns in electoral processes. Female activists in this article refer to women that are active in social and political activism. Social activism may include: 1) *PKK* (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga – Family Empowerment and Welfare), a social organization that consists in every neighborhood, and is vertically organized in bigger administrative organizations, ranging from village, sub-districts, regency, province to national level; and 2) *pengajian*, Islamic congregation, charity organizations, organization of traditional traders, and other non-governmental organizations. Political activism includes organized sympathizers, members of political parties, political campaign team members, and funders of political parties or candidates in political campaigns.

Being female activists in Semarang is the same as being exposed to a wider network with policy makers, politicians and civil society organizations. Policy makers and politicians will need these women to build connection with other women in undergoing particular government's programs. Similarly, civil society organizations will also need them to succeed their empowerment programs. As widely known, the local parliament of Semarang is dominated by PDIP (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan), but the votes for PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa), PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan), PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera), PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional) and other Moslem parties could not be ignored. With the rise of new conservatism, slowly but surely, PKS and the other right-wing Moslem parties retain their seats in local legislature bodies. In Semarang, there are also some civil society organizations that are actively engaged in community development. Among them are PATTIRO that focuses on policy advocacy and Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (LBH) that focuses on legal advocacy for community. These organizations also have close relations with female activists given the nature of their work that often deals with gender issues.

Based on research findings, not all female activists and campaigners have to deal with a total political disconnection with elected officials and legislature members after electoral phases end. Some of them still make a contact with the policy makers they helped in the elections. Sometimes, they can still ask for if they encounter problems in having access to public services, i.e. the national identity card, access to health service in hospital, state-promoted health insurance and government's educational assistance. However, all of these things, despite their importance, do not have direct and clear impact on further promotion of gender equality, women's rights recognition and women's protection. It is because gender equality, women's rights recognition and women's protection need more than just sporadic responses. They require a more complex and systematic approach of policy advocacy. However, our interviews also reveal that disconnection after election is not rare. This leads to the question of mobilization rather than participation among female activists in political processes. This encourages us to assume that they are merely considered as vote getters to win for votes in elections instead of as a true partner for woman-friendly policy makers. Below are some stories about them.²

Arini

Arini is 49 years old and lives in South Semarang. She is a housewife and listed in multiple social organizations. She holds a strategic position in Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Coalition) of Semarang, becomes one of the motors in Peterongan traditional traders' association, and is active in parents' association Sompok Elementary School 1 and 2. Her husband is a parking officer at *Simpang Lima*, one of the business centers in the city. Her first son works as an online taxi driver, while the second one has just graduated from high school and is still looking for a job.

Arini's first political involvement was in the 2010 mayor election. Her decision to be active in politics was encouraged by the fact that

² The names of informants are alias. The real names are protected to make sure the informants' confidentiality.

the ruling administration at the moment underwent many relocation policies for traditional traders. Realizing that she had to advocate for their interest as a traditional trader, Arini decided to be involved in politics, believing that having good connection with policy makers would be beneficial to secure her living. She gave her political support to Sumarmo-Hendy, mayor and deputy mayor candidate, at the 2010 mayor election. She continued with being a success team for a legislature candidate from the Hanura Party in the 2014 election, as well as being a leader of Seknas Jokowi, a community campaign, to help Jokowi-JK win the 2014 presidential election. She is also a founder of Kerabat Semarang that supported the winning of Hendy-Ita as Semarang mayor and deputy mayor in 2015. She helped a PDIP candidate in her electoral region. She also became a motor for Srikandi Setia Jokowi that gathered women's support for Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin in the 2019 presidential election.

Arini's ability to build connection and gather people with the aim of mobilizing their support in elections cannot be separated from her experience as a beneficiary of LBH and PATTIRO, Semarang's advocacy and empowerment programs. By participating in LBH and PATTIRO's activities, Arini becomes aware of policy advocacy mechanism. Her relation with Ita, deputy mayor of Semarang, has resulted in Semarang government's willingness to build a specific room for breastfeeding women of Peterongan market traders. She also succeeded in encouraging the deputy mayor to issue a policy for cleaning Peterongan traditional market environment to minimize the wide-spread of endemic illness.

Ina

The same as as Arini, Ina is a housewife with two children and two grand-children. Her husband works as a laborer in a private company in Candi industrial regional cluster. In her neighborhood, Ina is a leader in PKK and Dasa Wisma, a state-promoted community activity to keep the environment clean, safe and healthy. She is also a treasury in the community's water supply organization. In addition, she is interested in

health issues that become one of her community's concerns. Ina is one of PATTIRO's partners in women's empowerment program.

Her first encounter with politics started about 5 (five) years ago, not long after she joined PATTIRO. A legislature candidate from PDIP, who is also her fellow in parent's association for elementary school students of Sompok elementary school, approached her to be his winning team to gain votes in Ina's neighborhood. This activity went on with Hendy-Ita's campaigns at the 2015 Semarang regional election where she teamed up with Arini. As a volunteer, her task was to present in Hendy-Ita's campaigns, as well as to help Hendy-Ita's winning team at the village level, including Candi and Candisari. As her experience improved, she was then recruited as a Srikandi Setia member to help Jokowi-JK win in the 2019 presidential election. In the legislature election, she joined Lely Purwanti's team, a female legislature candidate from PDIP, to win the votes in Tembalang and Candisari sub-districts that became Lely's electoral region. Her task as a Lely's team member was to coordinate female volunteers in Candi, which was to distribute 35 ballot boxes such as t-shirts, jackets, etc. However, unlike Arini, Ina usually did not maintain her contact with the elected officials and legislature members after the electoral periods.

Asti

Asti is a 44-year-old single mother of two. She runs a *warung*, small shop selling common daily needs, for a living in Peterongan traditional market. Her first child is in the second year of senior high school and her second one is in the second year of junior high school. In addition to being a traditional trader, she is also an active member in PKK, Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia, and has now been a leader of PPKLS (Semarang street vendors' association) for 5 years.

Her first encounter with politics happened in 2018. Arini was the one who asked her to join the voluntary team to help Ganjar-Taj Yasin in the 2018 Central Java's governor election. As a volunteer, Asti's task was to persuade her fellow traders in Peterongan market and her neighbors in her neighborhood to vote for Ganjar-Taj Yasin in the governor

election. She said that she was not given any target. Her main task was only to socialize the candidate to her surrounding environment. She only needed to tell her neighbors to choose the candidate with the example cards of presidential candidates given by the candidate's campaign team. In 2019, like Arini and Ina, she joined Srikandi Setia to support Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin in the presidential election. Her main task was to socialize Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin's programs to the public, and distributed the example cards for practice with her fellow neighbors. She did a door-to-door method of socialization to encourage other people in their neighborhood to vote for Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin. In the legislature election, she also became a volunteer for a candidate. Luckily, the candidate won and thus secured a seat in city parliamentary body.

After volunteering in political campaigns, Asti felt more confident to communicate with public officers. She also feels more open to deliver her aspirations to policy makers. As a leader of the traders' association, she believes that there are many issues that need for advocacy in policy making. She also gains more access to empowerment programs, promoted either by local government or civil society organization.

Tria

Tria is a 43-year-old mother of two children that are still registered as senior high and elementary students. She lives in the southern part of Semarang. Her husband works in a supermarket as a team member in one of the company's management divisions. Unlike Arini, Ina and Isti, Tria is a housewife that does not have a day job. She is also not listed as a member of social organization outside her neighborhood environment. However, she is known as an activist in her community. She is the leader of PKK in her housing complex. She also often goes to a *pengajian*. Her activities in the *pengajian* become a medium for her to connect with volunteers of PKS in her neighborhood. Although not being a formal campaigning team member, as a volunteer, Tria was active in promoting Prabowo-Sandi in the 2019 presidential election, and a male candidate from PKS for the regional legislature election, who happened to be her neighbor. As a volunteer for a PKS candidate, she

did not a PDIP volunteer at her house to campaign for PDIP candidates. Interestingly, Tria's husband is a supporter for Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin. In the interview, she said, "We might have different political preferences; however, it is not a problem for us at all."

Afi

Afi is Tria's neighbor in her housing complex. She is 36 years old, married, and has two children who are still in the elementary school and kindergarten. Her husband works in a private company and is a member of PKS party. Like Tria, Afi is a member of the *pengajian* in her housing complex. She is also an active member in PKK and Dasa Wisma. In the *pengajian*, she is part of the committee that helps the *pengajian* community leader organize the activities. In the 2019 election, her task was to help PKS campaigning team to win the votes in her housing complex. While her husband was registered as a formal member of PKS's political campaigning team, she was rather active in the informal environment. She was keen to encourage her neighbors to choose Prabowo-Sandi, a male legislature candidate of PKS. She actively promoted the candidate either in the *pengajian*, her neighborhood or on social media, such as Whatsapp groups.

What is seen from the written stories above is that most women are now open for active political activities. On the one hand, it is a big progress, as compared to when in the New Order period, where being active in practice politics was seen as a taboo subject. However, among the stories collected from observations and in-depth interviews as written above, we can see that the involvement of women in political campaigns is not equipped with clear orientation for promoting gender reform agenda. Arini and Asti's experience might show us about the whole picture of women's awareness of advocacy strategies. However, what they are doing is still limited, sporadic, and not systematic. There is no clear mission being asserted, either in political campaign phases in the form of a firm political contract or in post-electoral phases (policy making).

Dealing with this, an informant in a civil society organization asserts that women's involvement in political campaigns brings good news on the one hand. They now have connection with political elite who act as policy makers in the city. They can make a contact with mayor or deputy mayor once they need help with certain problems relating to public service. On the other hand, however not many female volunteers in political campaigns can have such access. Most of them remain substantially disconnected from policy makers. Even if they do have connection with policy makers, it is rather personal in nature. The connection is not transformed or institutionalized into a collective asset that will bring a wider advantage for further transformation agenda in policy making to promote gender equality, women's right recognition, and women's protection.

MOBILIZATION RATHER THAN PARTICIPATION: WOMEN ACTIVISTS AS VOTE GETTERS IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

What we can see from the discussion above is that the involvement of women in politics still revolves in the mobilization sector, rather than direct participation. As most scholars generally affirm, women's participation is crucial for transforming political structure to be more equal and just for women (Fuszara 2010 and Lowndes 2010). Participation is seen to potentially bring impact on women's empowerment (Atcherson 1987) rather than mobilization. As in the case discussed above, Arini, for instance, is the one who has the strongest connection with policy makers in the city among the other female activists we interviewed during field research. However, there is no clear long-term reform agenda she is going to promote in the city's policy making. What she does in Peterongan market, pushing the local government to provide room for breastfeeding mothers, is important, but it is rather short-term oriented, and practical in nature. Meanwhile, gender transformation could only be gained if the changes touch strategic areas, such as education and the other empowerment programs. Strategic areas refer to areas of movement that can lift up women's status from being sub-ordinate to

being equal with men in domestic and public sectors. Unfortunately, women, although generally known as activists in the society, sometimes could not differentiate between practical and strategic moves in politics. Practical moves are rather superficial, while strategic moves let women access the keys in decision making. By being activists who have networks with other women, these women actually hold one of the keys. However, during the campaigns, they do not utilize it to build stronger contracts with politicians and political parties. In this regard, such awareness among women becomes crucial.

Similarly, political elites, who approached Arini, Ina, Asti, Tria and Afi to ask them to be volunteers in their political campaigns, also did not have clear missions for gender reform. It might have been because they were lacking awareness of gender equality, or simply, they did not care about it. They did not realize that campaigning for gender equality could also have been a strategic move for winning votes in elections. They only thought of short-term goal, which was to gain votes and win election. Sometimes, for politicians, promoting equality is also even seen not politically beneficial because it means the opening of wider political competition. The more open women for participation, the braver they are to compete in political recruitment; and thus the more difficult political competition status quo politicians would face in general elections. Therefore, instead of invoking gender reform, they rather choose to keep silent. Moreover, as those activists do not request political contracts to sign as a compensation for helping them winning the elections, they are free to choose whether to fulfill or not fulfill the missions for promoting gender equality, women's right recognition and women's protection.

In this regard, Reger and Staggenborg's point (2006), as well as Rai's (2017), has been clear that democratization does not always significantly bring progress for gender equality promotion. In many occasions, men's privilege is still not questioned, while women's sub-ordination is seen as an acceptable situation. Those scholars also clearly argue that barriers for promoting gender-friendly policy often come from two sides, women that do not comprehend the strategies for pushing political movement

and politicians and those who never seriously fight for gender-related policies in the legislature processes.

From the case of Semarang female activists, we can clearly see that they are only treated as vote getters. As we might be generally aware, being female activists in the community hold a strategic role. As discussed earlier, being an activist means having connection to political elites and policy makers, on the one hand and with the community members, on the other hand. They are trusted by both elites and community members, as well as capable of running a program, approaching community members, mobilizing mass, and gathering votes. However, we can also clearly see that there is a disconnection between what these women did in political campaigns with gender reform agenda aimed to promote gender-friendly policies during the city's decision making. Similarly, from the supply side, there is no clear policy orientation towards gender reform. They might respond to a particular issue, which is practical and easy-doing, such as providing rooms for breastfeeding mothers. Nevertheless, a clear strategy for breaking patriarchal system in the political structure, as well as in decision making has never been done. Thus, it is clear that in political campaigns, female activists are actually needed, but as women, their true needs for equality, rights recognition and protection in public policy are neglected.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion we can see that the involvement of female activists in political campaigns is so far still merely to gather votes. They are mobilized by politicians, political parties and legislature candidates to further mobilize their fellow women to devote their votes for these parties in the general elections. There is no clear benefit from this activity for on gender equality promotion, except a rather personal and sporadic connection, which is still not well institutionalized and established. This explains to us that the role of women in the electoral phases is only as mobilization instead of participation, which further brings unfavorable consequences in pro-gender reform. The case as this article discusses explains one of crucial problems in gender equal-

ity promotion in electoral and post-electoral processes, some of whose focuses are so far more on post-electoral phases. Therefore, there is a need for awareness strengthening among female activists to be firmer with political parties and candidates who have made them involved in political campaigns, to have commitment for advocating for gender equality in decision making once elected.

Indeed, Semarang only depicts a small fragment of female activists' mobilization as vote getters in politics. There is a need to scrutinize the experiences of female activists in the other local areas to gain a better comprehension of the bigger picture. If needed, comparison writing between cities is highly recommended to conduct to highlight more detailed information on female activists' experience in political campaigns and its further implication on gender equality promotion in decision making.

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