

NAVIGATING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND POLITICS OF CANDIDACY: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION (2012-2022)

Witriani¹, Zusiana Elly Triantini², Najah Nadiah Amran³, Mufliha Wijayati⁴

^{1, 2} State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta Indonesia, ³Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,

⁴State Islamic University of Jurai Siwo Lampung, Indonesia,

witriani@uin-suka.ac.id, zusiana.triantini@uin-suka.ac.id, najah@ukm.edu.my,
muflihawijayati@metrouniv.ac.id

Abstrak

Wacana mengenai kepemimpinan perempuan di Indonesia sebagian besar berpusat pada politik praktis, di mana perempuan sering kali diposisikan sebagai aktor sekunder sekadar untuk memenuhi kuota 30% alih-alih sebagai pemimpin strategis. Persepsi yang berakar pada norma patriarki dan ketergantungan berbasis kekerabatan ini mengaburkan signifikansi kepemimpinan perempuan yang kian berkembang di institusi akademik. Studi ini mengkaji sosok rektor perempuan di Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri (PTKIN) di Indonesia dengan mengidentifikasi empat pola kepemimpinan kolegal, personal, posisional, dan kekuasaan yang dipersonalisasi yang masing-masing dibentuk oleh rekam jejak politik mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode campuran (*mixed methods*) yang memadukan survei singkat dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur serta diskusi kelompok terarah (*Focus Group Discussion* atau FGD). Survei memberikan gambaran umum mengenai perspektif responden tentang universitas yang responsif gender, sementara wawancara dan FGD memperdalam analisis mengenai kebijakan, strategi, dan praktik pengarusutamaan gender di perguruan tinggi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa rektor perempuan tidak sekadar mereplikasi logika kuota politik, melainkan mendorong transformasi institusional melalui beragam pola kepemimpinan yang mengintegrasikan pertimbangan gender ke dalam tata kelola universitas. Hal ini memiliki signifikansi ganda. Pertama, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada khazanah pengetahuan mengenai kepemimpinan perempuan dengan mengalihkan fokus dari politik elektoral ke kepemimpinan akademik, sebuah ranah yang relatif belum banyak dikaji. Kedua, penelitian ini memberikan wawasan strategis bagi para pembuat kebijakan dengan menunjukkan bagaimana institusi perguruan tinggi dapat berperan sebagai agen pengarusutamaan gender, serta memberikan masukan bagi kerangka kerja masa depan terkait pengembangan kepemimpinan, kebijakan responsif gender, dan reformasi kelembagaan di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Rektor Perempuan, Universitas Islam, Kesetaraan Gender, Politik Pencalonan.

Abstract

The discourse on women's leadership in Indonesia has largely centered on practical politics, where women are often positioned as secondary actors fulfilling the 30% quota rather than as strategic leaders. Rooted in patriarchal norms and kinship-based dependency, this perception obscures the growing significance of women's leadership in academic institutions. This study explores female rectors in Indonesian State Islamic Universities (PTKINs), identifying four leadership patterns—collegial, personal, positional, and personalized power—each shaped by their political trajectories. The research applies a mixed method, combining a short survey with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The survey provided a general mapping of respondents' perspectives on gender-responsive universities, while interviews and FGDs deepened the analysis on policies, strategies, and practices of gender mainstreaming in higher education. Findings reveal that women rectors do not merely replicate political quota logic but instead advance institutional transformation through diverse leadership patterns that embed gender considerations into university governance. This has twofold significance. First, it contributes to the knowledge map on women's leadership by shifting attention from electoral politics to academic leadership, a relatively underexplored arena. Second, it provides strategic insights for policymakers by demonstrating how higher education institutions can become agents of gender mainstreaming, informing future frameworks on leadership development, gender-responsive policy, and institutional reform in Indonesia.

Keywords: Female Rectors, Islamic Universities, Gender Equality. Candidacy Politics.

INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership in higher education remains significantly underrepresented, despite increasing female academic participation worldwide. More women are earning advanced degrees, yet they are less visible in top administrative roles. Structural inequalities, such as the glass ceiling, mentorship gaps, and pay disparities, further hinder women's career progression (Dzuhayatin, 2020; Singh et al., 2023; Welten et al., 2022). In 2022, women earned 47% of all research doctorates, but still held only about 33% of college president roles in the U.S (Flynn, n.d.). Scholarly reviews emphasize that gender imbalance at the professional level remains entrenched, reflecting how discriminatory practices and institutionalized bias restrict women's progression (Mifsud, 2019). Together, these insights demonstrate that despite progress in academic participation, systemic inequalities and cultural sexism continue to restrict women's advancement to senior leadership positions in higher education.

Indonesia reflects the global pattern of gender imbalance in higher education leadership, where women remain underrepresented despite their increasing academic participation. Although women in Indonesia have gained greater access to higher education and now represent a significant portion of students and lecturers, their progression into strategic leadership positions has not kept pace (Marcoes, 2019). This disparity is shaped by structural barriers such as qualification requirements (e.g., professorship and doctoral credentials), alongside cultural and institutional norms that privilege male leadership. Studies of

Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education (SIHE) institutions show that women often face a dual challenge of meeting formal academic criteria and overcoming patriarchal cultures that marginalize their leadership aspirations (Kholis, 2017).

Data specific to Islamic higher education underscores this issue: from 58 Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri (PTKIN), only 9 (approximately 15.5 %) are led by women. Moreover, among 588 professors in these institutions, only 77 (13 %) are female; these professors form the electorate in rector selection, making it structurally challenging for women to be elected (Khodijah, 2022). These insights reveal that despite increased female participation in academia, entrenched structural and cultural barriers, especially within Islamic higher education, continue to limit women's representation in senior leadership roles in Indonesia.

Previous studies on gender mainstreaming in Indonesia have largely focused on policy frameworks and general representation in universities, while empirical studies specifically examining women's leadership trajectories in higher education institutions remain scarce (Helaluddin et al., 2022; Indriyani et al., 2021). Research on gender stereotypes further shows that women are often perceived as more caring and collaborative but less competent in domains considered masculine, reinforcing barriers to their leadership in academic institutions (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Blau & Kahn, 1996; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). While studies in politics demonstrate how women leverage social and cultural capital to gain influence (Bourdieu, 1985; Rai, 2012, p. 210) there is still limited discussion on how women academic leaders mobilize similar resources within university

governance. This gap highlights the need for research on women's leadership in Islamic higher education, particularly in relation to gender mainstreaming projects and institutional transformation.

This article examines the trajectories and strategies of women leaders in Indonesian Islamic higher education (PTKI) within the framework of gender equity and mainstreaming. Research on women's leadership in faith-based universities is still limited, even though PTKI plays a central role in shaping religious and social discourse. At the same time, the state has introduced a gender mainstreaming policy, such as Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000, but its impact on leadership opportunities for women in higher education remains unclear. Studies show that women leaders often develop adaptive strategies to overcome structural and cultural barriers in academia (O'Connor, 2015). In PTKI, however, patriarchal norms and restricted access to decision-making persist despite gender mainstreaming programs (Khodijah, 2022; Kholis, 2017); Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2022). By linking women's leadership with both gender policy frameworks and institutional realities, this article contributes to global debates on gender and leadership while offering insights for more inclusive university governance in Indonesia.

This research focuses on nine State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN) currently led by female rectors, and several other institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs with a significant representation of female vice-rectors and deans. To enrich the analysis, particular attention is also focused on UIN Imam Bonjol in West Sumatra, which provides a distinctive case. The university is not only led by a female rector but is also embedded in a matrilineal

cultural context, making it especially relevant for examining the intersections between cultural traditions, women's leadership, and gender representation in higher education governance.

This article is structured as follows. The next section outlines the research design, including the methodological approach, data collection, and analysis strategies. This is followed by a presentation of the findings, which highlight the experiences, strategies, and agency of women leaders in Islamic higher education institutions. The discussion section then situates these findings within the broader literature on gender, leadership, and gender mainstreaming, emphasizing both theoretical and practical implications. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main contributions of the study and reflects on future directions for advancing gender equity and inclusive leadership in higher education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative-driven design aimed at developing an in-depth understanding of women's leadership trajectories and strategies in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Indonesia. While a descriptive survey was conducted to map the presence of female leaders, the primary emphasis of this research lies in qualitative exploration through interviews and focus group discussions.

The unit of analysis consists of female leaders in Indonesian higher education, particularly in PTKIN under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The study focuses on five female rectors and selected vice-rectors and deans to capture diverse perspectives on leadership practices and gender mainstreaming within institutional settings.

NAVIGATING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND POLITICS OF CANDIDACY:

Witriani, Zusiana Elly Triantini, Najah Nadiah, Mufliha Wijayati

Baseline Survey Mapping

A preliminary descriptive survey was carried out to map the presence of female rectors and vice-rectors across PTKIN and to assess institutional indicators of gender-responsive campuses. The data were obtained from reports of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, institutional documents, and secondary literature. This mapping functioned as a contextual background and informed the selection of cases for qualitative analysis.

Qualitative Data Collection

The core of the study lies in qualitative data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five female rectors and selected vice-rectors and deans, using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives. To enrich the findings, a focus group discussion (FGD) was organized with some interview participants and gender experts, enabling collective reflection on the intersection between women's leadership and institutionalization of gender equality.

Data Analysis

All interviews and discussions were recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically. Thematic coding was guided by two central research questions and informed by Bourdieu's framework of social capital: cultural, political, religious, and economic. The analysis examined how leadership practices translated into gender-responsive institutional programs and policies.

Credibility was enhanced through triangulation across survey, interview, and FGD data. Ethical protocols were strictly followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymization of participants and institutions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Mapping Women's Leadership in PTKIN (Contextual Baseline)

For a decade, there has been a significant increase in the number of female rectors, either in public universities or in Islamic religious universities in Indonesia. Although it is not something new, the increase is leading to a positive trend. In public universities, the election of female rectors is a new phenomenon post-reform. In 2018, Novita (2018) noted that there were only four female rectors among 97 state universities (PTN) in Indonesia. After 4 years, which is in 2022, there were nine female rectors among 125 PTN

Despite the representation of women as rectors in Indonesian state Universities increasing from 4.12% in 2018 to 7.20% in 2022, they remain underrepresented as male rectors still dominate leadership. Within PTKIN, nine women currently serve as rectors among 58 institutions nationwide. This continuing disparity illustrates that women's leadership in higher education is still far from reaching parity and requires deeper scrutiny to understand the underlying challenges.

Although Indonesia has introduced gender mainstreaming frameworks, such as Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000 and Ministerial Regulation No. 68/2015, which formally provide avenues for women's participation in leadership, their practical impact remains limited. The modest representation of women in PTKIN leadership suggests that the increase is less a result of systematic policy implementation and more an outcome of individual women overcoming multiple barriers. These barriers manifest in structural requirements, such as academic rank and managerial experience, as well as in cultural challenges, including gender

stereotypes, social resistance, and normative constructions of women's roles. Hence, examining these barriers is essential to explain why the presence of women leaders in PTKIN, despite recent gains, continues to face significant obstacles.

Structural and Cultural Barriers to Women's Leadership in PTKIN

The baseline mapping indicates that, out of 58 PTKIN across Indonesia in 2022, only nine are currently led by female rectors, representing approximately 15.5% of total leadership positions. While this figure reflects gradual progress compared to previous years, it also underscores the persistent gender imbalance at the highest level of academic leadership. Interviews revealed that women's underrepresentation is not merely a numerical issue but closely tied to entrenched institutional and cultural barriers.

A deeply rooted obstacle to women's leadership at PTKIN is embedded within institutional structures. The academic rank requirement, stipulated in Ministerial Regulation (PMA) No. 68/2015, demands that candidates for rector positions hold a doctoral degree and at least the rank of *professor* for UIN or *senior lecturer* for IAIN and STAIN (Article 3, letter [b] PMA 68 of 2015). In practice, the proportion of female lecturers at these higher academic ranks remains significantly lower compared to male lecturers (Marcoes, 2019; Nurmila, 2021). Interviews with institutional stakeholders further confirm that female academics often face difficulties in pursuing doctoral studies and securing promotions due to limited institutional support systems. One rector reflected, *"the biggest challenge for women is the difficulty of advancing to professor level, since support systems for research and promotion are weaker for female lecturers"* (Interview, R3)

This structural imbalance narrows the chance of eligible female candidates, thereby restricting women's access to rector positions despite their academic competence. Consequently, structural prerequisites serve as gatekeeping filters, systematically disadvantaging women in leadership succession processes.

Moreover, another qualification that prospective rectors must fulfil is managerial experience as a head of the department for at least two years (Article 3, letter [a], paragraph 3, PMA 68 of 2015). So female rector candidates are the only candidates in the rector election processes, such as in Palembang, Melabouh, Majene, and Ponorogo, or there are only two female candidates among a number of male rector candidates, such as in Kendari and Metro.

In addition to structural constraints, cultural barriers continue to shape the trajectory of women in academic leadership. When leadership is implicitly coded as masculine, deeply rooted gender stereotypes foster skepticism about women's capabilities. Female rector candidates frequently encounter negative labelling and resistance rooted in societal expectations of women's roles in both the public and domestic spheres.

Informant	Statement	Coding
R1	Because I was not the expected candidate, people doubted me and questioned why a woman should lead. I had to prove my capacity twice as hard.	Skepticism toward Women's capacity
R1	When the issue of women as leaders was pushed, activists defended me. But later the rejection came again, this time	Subordination.

NAVIGATING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND POLITICS OF CANDIDACY:

Witriani, Zusiana Elly Triantini, Najah Nadiah, Mufliha Wijayati

	saying I was not local. I had to remind them of my family's roots, that my father was once a regent here.	
R5 (ponorogo)	Being rector as a woman means carrying double expectations. Not only must we lead effectively, but we are also expected to embody patience, morality, and nurturing qualities that male leaders are rarely asked for	Social Expectation (Stereotyping)

Such cultural constraints echo broader scholarly findings that strict cultural norms and legal frameworks have historically hindered women's access to leadership (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). Ultimately, these pressures force women to demonstrate not only professional competence but also social acceptance, thereby amplifying the weight of leadership responsibilities

Cultural obstacles related to the social system and cultural values of gender construction, stereotyping, and standardization of roles in domestic and public spaces remain latent problems for women's leadership. Strict cultural norms and legal constraints have hindered women from attaining leadership positions (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). Interviews with several female rectors show their hard work to overcome the cultural obstacles. The negative labelling attached to women is the main issue that female rector candidates must face. This labelling is intertwined with the construction of standardization of public-domestic roles and subordination views, and also doubting (underestimating) women's abilities. So that the hard challenge faced by female rectors, on the one hand, is to convince

others of their leadership capacity and also to accept the burden of high expectations for subsequent leadership tasks.

These structural and cultural barriers highlight that women's pathways to leadership in PTKIN remain highly constrained, even amid a growing number of female rectors. The interplay between formal regulations, academic rank requirements, and persistent gender stereotypes systematically narrows women's opportunities to compete on equal footing with men. At the same time, cultural expectations and identity politics intensify the burden placed on women leaders, demanding that they simultaneously demonstrate competence, legitimacy, and moral authority. Recognizing these barriers is essential for understanding not only the rarity of women's leadership in higher education but also the extraordinary efforts required for those who succeed.

Capitals and Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

Beyond structural and cultural barriers, female rectors mobilized different forms of capital to strengthen their leadership legitimacy. The capital of social, cultural, and intellectual, provided not only personal credibility but also broader recognition from academic and social communities.

Examples from interviews and career trajectories of rectors highlight how networks, heritage, and scholarly expertise shaped their acceptance. Thus, analyzing these capitals helps explain why certain women succeeded in reaching the rectorate despite persistent gendered constraints.

In addition to the structural and cultural obstacles, to reach the highest leadership position, the elected female rector candidates generally have organic intellectual capital according to their respective scientific bases,

as well as social and/or cultural capital on a local or national scale. *First*, the experience of the nine rectors of the State Islamic Religious Universities has an intellectual base that organically grows and is maintained as an academic career.

Intellectual capital remains one of the most decisive factors in university leadership. For UINs, professorship is a formal prerequisite, whereas IAINs and STAINs require at least a doctorate and a senior lecturer position (according to PMA No. 68 of 2015). Many female rectors demonstrated strong scholarly profiles, with academic careers that organically developed into leadership readiness. For instance, Professor R6 of IAIN Kendari was the only professor among six rector candidates, reflecting how academic authority can differentiate women candidates in a competitive field. Yet, in other contexts, such as IAIN Metro, R4 was elected even before achieving professorship, indicating that intellectual capital, while crucial, often intersects with other forms of resources and support in shaping leadership outcomes.

The *second* fact is that cultural capital significantly shaped the acceptance of female rectors within their institutions and communities. In several cases, genealogical roots, noble lineage, or religious heritage became an implicit source of legitimacy. For instance, in Palembang, noble titles such as *Nyayu* or *Nyimas* signaled embeddedness within local aristocratic traditions, while in Jakarta and Majene, family ties to respected religious or political figures enhanced credibility. These cultural resources often softened resistance against women leaders who otherwise faced gendered skepticism. As one rector explained, her acceptance depended on “two verifications” of lineage, underscoring how deeply cultural markers influence

perceptions of leadership capacity. Such testimonies highlight how cultural capital not only supplements academic and managerial credentials but also anchors female leadership within local value systems.

Respondent	Quotation	Context
R1	“I have to use two verifications: ‘I am the son of Mr. R, the former Regent, and my grandfather was a trader and Tengku.’ That became a condition for me to be accepted.”	Explaining lineage as a requirement for legitimacy in Melabouh.
R2	“In Palembang, the name <i>Nyayu</i> already carries weight. People respect it, and it helped me to be seen as capable of leading.”	Referring to noble family heritage and its social recognition.
R3	“My father was a well-known religious scholar, and this background gave me a stronger voice in the Senate.”	Leveraging religious family reputation in institutional politics.
R4	“Some still doubted me as a woman, but when they remembered my family’s role in the community, the resistance was lessened.”	Emphasizing cultural acceptance rooted in family reputation.

NAVIGATING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND POLITICS OF CANDIDACY:

Witriani, Zusiana Elly Triantini, Najah Nadiah, Mufliha Wijayati

As illustrated in Table 1, several respondents highlight how their family background, whether as descendants of religious leaders, local nobility, or regional leaders, played a decisive role in legitimizing their leadership. These accounts underscore that, beyond personal qualifications, the embeddedness of leaders within cultural and genealogical networks functions as symbolic capital that strengthens women's pathways into the highest levels of university leadership.

The third, managerial track record, constitutes a crucial determinant for women's eligibility to ascend to the rectorate. As required by PMA No. 68 of 2015, candidates must demonstrate leadership experience in academic or administrative units, which, for women, serves not only as a formal prerequisite but also as a proving ground for resilience and competence. For instance, R1 explained how her experience leading the Center for Gender and Child Protection (PSGA) prepared her to face resistance: *"Because I am not the expected person, I was shaken. When I was at STAIN [as chairwoman], I was shaken up too. Maybe I was trained to be shaken up at PSGA."* Such positions provide women with practical exposure to conflict management and the negotiation of institutional trust, thereby strengthening their legitimacy as candidates.

In addition to resilience, managerial experience functions as a platform for advocacy and strategic leadership. R5 emphasized that her concurrent role as head of PSGA and the Research and Community Service Institute enabled her to promote gender mainstreaming policies at the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Similarly, R3 built an extensive portfolio through diverse managerial posts, ranging from Women's Studies Center and Language Development Unit to Senate

Secretary and Internal Supervisory Unit, demonstrating her readiness for higher leadership. Other trajectories include W, who played a pivotal role in establishing STAIN Majene, and the Rector of UIN Bukittinggi, who oversaw the institution's transformation from STAIN to IAIN and finally UIN. These accounts confirm that managerial capital is not merely a regulatory requirement but also a form of symbolic capital that legitimizes women's ascent to university leadership.

In addition to cultural and managerial factors, social capital emerges as a crucial determinant in legitimizing female leadership within Islamic higher education. Social networks, particularly those rooted in religious, professional, and alumni communities, often provide external reinforcement and symbolic support that strengthen the candidacy of women rectors. As one rector emphasized, connections to Muslimat NU, *pesantren* alumni associations, and even political institutions such as the General Elections Commission (KPU) served as important platforms for recognition and acceptance. These affiliations illustrate how leadership is not only assessed through individual merit but also through the ability to mobilize trusted social networks.

Interview data further confirm that nearly all elected female rectors leveraged long-standing memberships and networks to enhance their legitimacy. R1 explained that her early involvement in *pesantren* networks "opened doors to collaboration with religious leaders and reduced skepticism toward female leadership." Similarly, R4 noted that her affiliation with Muslimat NU created "a circle of trust and credibility" during her candidacy. Beyond religious organizations, engagement in broader professional networks also strengthened institutional visibility. As R5 stated, her past collaboration with the Ministry

of Religious Affairs and involvement in national commissions “gave assurance to the Senate that my leadership would bridge the university with state institutions.” These accounts highlight that social capital, manifested through trust, solidarity, and external endorsement, plays a pivotal role in ensuring the acceptance and sustainability of women’s leadership in PTKIN.

The overall findings highlight at least two important insights regarding the appointment of female rectors in Islamic Higher Education Institutions. First, their election is largely shaped by superior qualifications, which encompass ethnicity, gender, age, scholarly networks, and social capital. Even when some candidacies were initially perceived as symbolic or a test of courage, the very act of meeting the administrative requirements, doctoral education, academic rank, and managerial experience signaled implicit institutional endorsement. This finding resonates with Bourdieu’s notion of capital, where intellectual, social, and cultural assets intersect to shape opportunities and recognition within structured fields of power. Thus, women’s ability to mobilize these forms of capital represents both a precondition and a legitimizing force for their leadership trajectories.

Second, without disregarding the political dynamics surrounding the process, the election of female rectors reflects an assessment of their suitability and eligibility as leaders. The formal mechanism stipulated in PMA 68 of 2015, ranging from file selection, senate assessment, and vision–mission presentation, to ministerial decision, offers procedural openings that indirectly expand women’s opportunities to compete. This aligns with feminist institutionalism (Mackay et al., 2010), which argues that institutional rules, even when seemingly neutral, can create new

entry points for marginalized actors. In this case, the qualitative assessments by senate members often became spaces where female candidates could demonstrate vision, expertise, and credibility beyond rigid structural barriers. The evidence underscores that women’s leadership in PTKIN is not merely an outcome of individual agency but a negotiation between institutional structures, political processes, and diverse forms of capital.

2. The Context of Women's Leadership in State Islamic Universities

Women’s leadership in Islamic Higher Education cannot be fully understood without situating it in its broader institutional and regulatory context. While barriers and various forms of capital, intellectual, cultural, and social, shape the trajectory of female leaders, state regulations ultimately determine the entry points and legitimacy of their leadership. This makes it crucial to connect the micro-level struggles of women rectors with the macro-level policy frameworks that govern their elections.

Regulatory changes have opened new opportunities for women to lead Islamic higher education institutions. Ministerial Regulation No. 68 of 2016 granted full authority to the Minister of Religious Affairs in the appointment of rectors, shifting power away from university senates and internal networks that had often reproduced gender bias. For instance, R4 was appointed as Rector of IAIN Ponorogo despite initial doubts, while R1, who was not an internal candidate, was unexpectedly invited to apply. She recalled, “*I never imagined I would meet senior professors... but with the knowledge I had, I joined the process sincerely,*” illustrating how the regulation created space for women

NAVIGATING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND POLITICS OF CANDIDACY:

Witriani, Zusiana Elly Triantini, Najah Nadiah, Mufliha Wijayati

candidates to compete on the basis of their capacity. Thus, the regulation not only served as a formal procedure but also functioned as a new entry point that expanded women's access to leadership in PTKIN.

The interplay between formal regulations and women's capital is crucial for understanding the advancement of female leadership. While regulatory change opens the door, intellectual, social, and cultural capital remain essential prerequisites to overcoming structural and cultural barriers. This resonates with the broader literature on gender equality in higher education: affirmative policies serve as an entry point, yet success also depends on individual capital and strategies of actualization. O'Connor (2015), for instance, highlight how policy frameworks interact with women's agency and resources in shaping leadership trajectories. Therefore, the rise of women rectors in PTKIN is best understood through the dynamic interaction of barriers, capital, and regulation.

3. Female Leaders and Cultural Acceptance

Having examined the regulatory framework and the various forms of capital that influence the appointment of female rectors, it is equally important to understand how these dynamics interact with the broader cultural context. The acceptance of women in top university leadership is not determined solely by qualifications or regulations but also by prevailing cultural norms and institutional histories. In this regard, the following section highlights how cultural acceptance, or resistance, has shaped both the opportunities and challenges faced by female rectors in State Islamic Universities.

The legitimacy of female leadership in State Islamic Universities is shaped not only by regulations and qualifications but also by the level of cultural acceptance on each

campus. Where women have historically held rector positions, such as at IAIN Ponorogo and IAIN Metro, this precedent creates a supportive environment for new women candidates. As noted by the Chairwoman of the Center for Gender and Child Studies of IAIN Ponorogo, *"IAIN Ponorogo is accustomed to female leaders, because before 2010, our rectors were women many times, starting from Mrs. Siti Maryam ... she became rector."* This institutional memory helped R5 and R3 gain recognition and legitimacy, demonstrating that prior female leadership fosters self-confidence and wider acceptance for subsequent women candidates.

In contrast, campuses such as UIN Jakarta, IAIN Kendari, and STAIN Meulaboh represent contexts where women rectors broke a long tradition of male domination. Here, resistance was more visible, ranging from subtle rejection to open protests. R1 recalled *"multiple demonstrations, from gender issues to critiques of my origin ... students were mobilized to seal the campus and reject my leadership."* Similarly, R3 admitted that it took years before she was fully accepted: *"When I first started, it was my struggle to make people see that women have the ability ... the problem is just a matter of likes and dislikes."* These experiences highlight how cultural resistance acts as a glass ceiling, reflecting broader patriarchal academic norms and campus politics. Yet, through persistence and adaptive strategies, female rectors gradually secured recognition, showing that cultural legitimacy can be negotiated even in hostile environments.

Other forms of cultural rejection were also encountered by R5 (IAIN Ponorogo), R4 (UIN Jakarta), and R3 (IAIN Metro) upon their election as rectors. While not manifesting as frontal demonstrations like R1's experienced, low support and the reluctance of

key campus figures to cooperate with the newly elected rectors represented another subtler form of rejection. In UIN Jakarta's case, for instance, the dismissal of the Vice Rector by R4, which escalated to court, clearly marked the pinnacle of the resistance she faced as the elected Rector.

However, with all the obstacles and challenges faced, it can be said that these female rectors still have a high vision and self-confidence. The rejection is indeed fully realized and considered as part of the risk of their position. Leveraging their authority, they consequently developed diverse leadership models to navigate this complex environment

From Negotiation to Assertiveness: Strategic Leadership Models of Female Rectors

Female rectors in State Islamic Universities often navigate resistance by adopting leadership strategies that emphasize collegiality and prosocial power. Rather than escalating conflict, they choose negotiation, inclusion, and compromise to build stability. R3, for instance, explained how she dealt with unexpected opposition: *"My principle when I formed the cabinet was to embrace all the competitors. I gave them all positions, of course, with their respective capacities."* This strategy occurred early in her leadership. In the second year of his leadership, R3 dismissed several officials and staff on the grounds of being uncooperative and unproductive.

Similarly, R1 at STAIN Meulaboh survived early demonstrations by engaging students in dialogue and incorporating rivals into campus governance. As Inayah Rohmaniyah notes, feminine leadership prioritizes teamwork and negotiation over domination, showing that this approach can effectively reduce tensions and foster

legitimacy in polarized academic environments.

The effectiveness of this collegial strategy lies in its ability to transform adversaries into collaborators and build trust among sceptical communities. At IAIN Ponorogo, for example, R5 inclusive style allowed her to consolidate authority despite being the only female candidate. While such approaches may appear cautious or "playing safe," they were pragmatic responses to the realities of campus politics, which often remain entangled with gendered hierarchies and factional rivalries. These cases highlight how negotiation and inclusion function not as signs of weakness but as deliberate strategies of survival and legitimacy within patriarchal structures.

At the same time, several female rectors demonstrated a contrasting model of personalized or authoritative power. In contexts where opposition persisted, they responded with firmness, decisive action, and assertive policies. For example, R4 at UIN Jakarta dismissed two vice rectors despite legal disputes, while the rector of IAIN Kendari issued controversial policies such as banning the burqa and expelling students affiliated with radical groups. R1 also described her determination during land disputes: *"For me, the important thing is to try; if the Minister thinks I am incapable, I will be fired, but I will not resign."* These examples suggest that while prosocial strategies reflect a feminine model of leadership, adopting assertive and sometimes masculine styles can also be an effective means of consolidating authority.

Such personalized or masculine patterns of leadership demonstrate that female rectors are not confined to gendered expectations of "soft" leadership. By embracing assertiveness, competition, and

NAVIGATING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND POLITICS OF CANDIDACY:

Witriani, Zusiana Elly Triantini, Najah Nadiah, Mufliha Wijayati

uncompromising authority, they strategically appropriate what Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) describe as hegemonic masculinity. Far from undermining their legitimacy, these approaches sometimes enhance it, signalling capacity and strength in the eyes of both supporters and opponents. Taken together, the coexistence of prosocial and personalized models reveals that women leaders in Islamic universities deploy hybrid strategies, blending negotiation and firmness, relational trust and authoritative command, in order to navigate the deeply patriarchal and politically complex environment of higher education.

Glass Ceilings Revisited: Female Rectors and the Unfinished Project of Gender Equality on Campus

Gender mainstreaming within Indonesian higher education is mandated through Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000, which requires institutions to integrate gender equality into planning, implementation, and evaluation processes (Nurhayati, 2022). In practice, however, the implementation of gender-responsive policies remains uneven. While most State Islamic Universities (PTKIN) already host Centres for Gender and Child Studies, which ideally serve as engines of advocacy and monitoring, the structural barriers of patriarchal culture and religious bias often hinder their effectiveness. As highlighted by the Chair of the Center for Gender and Child Studies at UIN Bukittinggi, although nearly 25% of female lecturers occupy mid-level positions, attaining the rectorate remains highly challenging due to cultural resistance rooted in both religion and custom. This underscores the paradox that women's increased participation in academic administration does not necessarily translate into equitable access to the highest leadership positions.

Interview data further illustrates this complexity. Out of nine PTKIN led by female rectors, only two, IAIN Metro and IAIN Ponorogo, have issued formal rectoral decrees on gender mainstreaming and sexual violence prevention. Other campuses, such as UIN Jakarta, UIN Palembang, UIN Imam Bonjol, and UIN Bukittinggi, show limited institutional support. As one Chair of a Gender and Child Studies Center critically noted, *"Although there is already justice for men and women, the policies related to gender mainstreaming are still very lacking. We expect more gender equality on campus. But in reality, female rectors are more emotionally sensitive and more easily get angry. Many are dissatisfied. In terms of infrastructure fulfilment, basic services related to gender mainstreaming are still lacking."* This testimony reflects the gap between symbolic representation and substantive transformation, suggesting that the mere presence of a female rector does not automatically guarantee a more gender-responsive university.

Yet, these perceptions of female rectors as "overly emotional" or "easily angered" stand in contrast to evidence of their substantive contributions to institutional reform. Several rectors have successfully expanded the role of Gender and Child Study Centres (PSGA) beyond symbolic advocacy by securing budgets, integrating gender-sensitive curricula, and institutionalizing policies on gender equality and sexual violence prevention. For example, at IAIN Metro and IAIN Ponorogo, formal rectoral decrees were issued to strengthen gender mainstreaming, demonstrating that women leaders not only occupy symbolic positions but also translate their authority into concrete institutional commitments. This suggests that while gendered stereotypes persist, they do not diminish the capacity of female rectors to

drive transformative agendas that embed gender justice within the governance of Islamic higher education institutions.

Interestingly, nearly all of the appointed female rectors have backgrounds as activists or former heads of Centers for Gender and Child Studies. This trajectory effectively functions as a form of “*candradimuka crater*,” a crucible that equips them with both advocacy skills and academic legitimacy. For instance, R3 emphasized that her tenure as rector was marked by consistent support for the Center’s programs, particularly in budgeting and resource allocation. Yet, such support is often understood narrowly as financial provision rather than comprehensive institutional integration of gender perspectives. In this sense, female rectors navigate a delicate balance between asserting their authority as university leaders and avoiding the perception that they prioritize “women’s issues” at the expense of broader institutional agendas.

The Indonesian case resonates with patterns observed in neighbouring Malaysia. Studies on the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) show that while women’s representation in academic leadership has increased, gender mainstreaming is still framed more as an administrative compliance than as a transformative practice (Ismail, 2014; Razak, 2021). The political opportunity structure, as in Indonesia, provides women leaders with pathways to nomination, but cultural acceptance remains fragile. In both contexts, patriarchal resistance often emerges not only in the form of overt opposition but also through subtle undercurrents of scepticism toward women’s authority.

Women’s leadership in Islamic universities across the Middle East remains significantly constrained. This limited representation stems from deeply embedded

patriarchal structures and state-centred control, which continue to reinforce institutional hierarchies unfavourable to women. Recent studies (Hammad et al., 2023) confirm that even where gender reforms exist, women’s authority is undermined by institutionalized patriarchy and cultural resistance. Compared to this setting, Indonesia’s appointment of multiple female rectors across PTKIN represents a relatively progressive shift. Yet, the persistence of implementation gaps in gender mainstreaming policies demonstrates that formal achievements in representation do not automatically translate into substantive gender equality on campus.

In North Africa, the trajectory of women’s leadership in higher education reveals a more dynamic but uneven picture. Tunisia’s robust legal reforms and emphasis on women’s civic participation have fostered stronger female governance representation. In contrast, Morocco’s state-led gender equality policies coexist with powerful cultural conservatism in religiously affiliated institutions. Charrad & Zarrugh (2014) trace Tunisia’s shift toward inclusive gender policies after the Arab Spring. Meanwhile, Ensour et al., (2017) highlight how, despite legal advances, women in Morocco continue to face structural and cultural impediments in public roles. When compared to Indonesia, these cases highlight that institutional reforms and political will alone are insufficient without deeper cultural acceptance at the campus level. Thus, female rectors in Indonesian PTKIN occupy an ambivalent position: their rise marks a significant breakthrough against patriarchal structures, yet it also underscores the unfinished task of embedding gender-responsive practices within Islamic higher education.

NAVIGATING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND POLITICS OF CANDIDACY:

Witriani, Zusiana Elly Triantini, Najah Nadiah, Mufliha Wijayati

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals several important findings regarding the presence of female rectors at State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN) in Indonesia. The backgrounds of these leaders are diverse, ranging from cultural upbringing and professional trajectories to organizational maturity and activism in gender mainstreaming. Their leadership patterns also vary; collegial power, personal power, position power, and personalized power, with the latter two appearing most frequently in practice. These findings enrich existing scholarship by showing that female rectorship is not a uniform phenomenon but rather a complex negotiation of qualifications, social capital, and political dynamics in the midst of patriarchal structures.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this research advances the debate on gender and leadership in higher education by foregrounding the intersections of gender, power, and institutional culture in Islamic universities. By classifying female leadership into distinct yet overlapping patterns, this study not only complements earlier works but also proposes an analytical lens through which future research can better understand the ways women navigate authority within religious and patriarchal academic contexts. This contributes to the broader discourse on gender-responsive governance in higher education, particularly in settings where religion and tradition strongly inform institutional norms.

At the policy level, this research underscores the urgency of institutionalizing stronger support systems for female leadership in Islamic higher education. The persistence of patriarchal resistance, limited gender mainstreaming implementation, and uneven institutional backing reveal that current policies, though progressive in intent, remain

insufficient in practice. Ministries and university senates need to ensure that female leadership is not only possible but also sustainable by mandating clear regulations on gender mainstreaming, establishing robust monitoring mechanisms, and integrating gender-responsive governance into accreditation and quality assurance frameworks. By addressing these gaps, policies can move beyond symbolic inclusion toward substantive transformation, ensuring that the presence of female rectors translates into broader institutional equity and justice.

Finally, this study acknowledges its limitations, particularly the reliance on in-depth interviews that inevitably highlight subjective, personal experiences of informants. Narratives of rejection, resistance, or acceptance are often filtered through the informants' own positionalities, emotions, and retrospective reflections. While this personal dimension enriches the understanding of lived realities, it may also produce partial or contested interpretations. Future research could therefore triangulate these experiences with broader quantitative data or comparative studies across regions, such as in Malaysia, North Africa, or the Middle East, to provide a more comprehensive perspective on women's leadership in Islamic higher education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Place any acknowledgement here. For example, This work was supported by the Research Fund provided by xxxxxxxxxxxx. Avoid identifying any of the authors prior to the review.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This article cannot be separated from the contribution of each author. This article is the

result of collaborative work among the authors. Witriani, Zusiana Elly, and Mufliha jointly designed the research, conducted data collection, and carried out the analysis. In the writing process, Witriani, as the first author, prepared the initial draft of the manuscript. Zusiana Elly was responsible for presenting the data obtained from the research process. Mufliha contributed by identifying and integrating relevant scholarly literature to strengthen the significance of the research findings. Najah contributed to the finalization of the manuscript by enhancing the literature review and refining the overall structure of the article.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) GENERATED TEXT DECLARATION

Authors must disclose the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process by adding a statement at the end of their manuscript in the core manuscript file, before the References list. The statement should be placed in a new section entitled 'Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process'. Statement: During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used [NAME TOOL / SERVICE] in order to [REASON]. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication. This declaration does not apply to the use of basic tools for checking grammar, spelling, references etc. If there is nothing to disclose, there is no need to add a statement. Example: This article has utilized artificial intelligence (AI) technology, specifically ChatGPT by OpenAI, as a support tool in drafting and content review. All facts have been re-verified by the author to ensure accuracy and contextual relevance.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, D., & Andersen, K. (1993). Gender as a factor in the attribution of leadership traits. *Political Research Quarterly*, 46, 527–545.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299304600305>
- Alsubaie, A., & Jones, K. (2017). An Overview of the Current State of Women's Leadership in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia and a Proposal for Future Research Directions. *Administrative Sciences*, 7(4).
<https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci7040036>
- Blau, F. D., & Kahn, L. M. (1996). Wage Structure and Gender Earnings Differentials: An International Comparison. *Economica*, 63(250), S29–S62. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2554808>
- Bourdieu, P. (1985). The Forms of Capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Greenwood Press.
- Charrad, M. M., & Zarrugh, A. (2014). Equal or complementary? Women in the new Tunisian Constitution after the Arab Spring. *Journal of North African Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2013.857276>
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity. *Gender & Society*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>
- Dzuhayatin, S. R. (2020). Gender glass ceiling in Indonesia: Manifestation, roots and theological breakthrough. *Al-Jami'ah*.
<https://doi.org/10.14421/AJIS.2020.581.209-240>
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573–598.

NAVIGATING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND POLITICS OF CANDIDACY:

Witriani, Zusiana Elly Triantini, Najah Nadiah, Mufliha Wijayati

- <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573>
- Ensour, W., Al Maaitah, H., & Kharabsheh, R. (2017). Barriers to Arab female academics' career development. *Management Research Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/mrr-08-2016-0186>
- Flynn, K. (n.d.). *White Men Continue to Dominate Academic Leadership Roles*. Academic Leadership By Gender.
- Hammad, W., El Zaatari, W., & Al-Abri, K. (2023). Researching higher education leadership and management in Arab countries: A systematic review. *Management in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08920206231156289>
- Helaluddin, Alamsyah, & Purwanti, D. (2022). Kesetaraan Gender di Perguruan Tinggi: Masihkah Sebatas Konsep? *Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Hak Anak*, 5(2).
- Huddy, L., & Terkildsen, N. (1993). Gender stereotypes and the perception of male and female candidates. *American Journal of Political Science*, 119–147. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111526>
- Indriyani, I. A., Hikmawan, M. D., & Utami, W. K. (2021). Gender dan Pendidikan Tinggi, Studi Tentang Urgensitas Kampus Berprespektif Gender. *Jurnal Ilmiati Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 6(1).
- Ismail, N. S. A. (2014). *Perlaksanaan Dan Amalan Gender Mainstreaming: Kajian Ke Atas Sektor Nur Syakiran Akmal Ismail*.
- Khodijah, N. (2022). *Rektor UIN Palembang: PMA 68 Beri Ruang Terbuka Kepemimpinan Perempuan*. https://kemenag.go.id/nasional/rektor-uin-palembang-pma-68-beri-ruang-terbuka-kepemimpinan-perempuan-z0c235?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Kholis, N. (2017). *Barriers to Women's Career Advancement in Indonesian Academia: A Qualitative Empirical Study*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/yicemap-17.2017.27>
- Mackay, F., Kenny, M., & Chappell, L. (2010). New institutionalism through a gender lens: Towards a feminist institutionalism? *International Political Science Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512110388788>
- Marcoes, L. (2019). Kampus Tak Punya Perspektif Adil Gender, Saatnya Perempuan Memimpin. *Tirto.Id*.
- Mifsud, D. (2019). Introduction: The positioning and making of female academics—A review of the literature. In *Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26187-0_1
- Nurhayati, A. (2022). *Dokumen Operasionalisasi Perguruan Tinggi Responsif Gender*. Yayasan Rumah Kita Bersama.
- Nurmila, N. (2021). Proposing Feminist Interpretation of The Qur'an and Affirmative Policy to Support Women Leadership In Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education. *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam*. <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2020.192.125-140>
- O'Connor, P. (2015). Management and gender in higher education. In *Management and Gender in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2015.1057977>
- Razak, Z. A. (2021). *Research Centre Recognised for Role in Reducing Gender Gap*.
- Sanbonmatsu, K. (2002). Gender stereotypes and vote choice. *American Journal of Political Science*, 20–34.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/3088412>

Singh, S., Sharma, C., Bali, P., Sharma, S., & Shah, M. A. (2023). Making sense of glass ceiling: A bibliometric analysis of conceptual framework, intellectual structure and research publications. *Cogent Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2181508>

Welten, V. M., Dabekaussen, K. F. A. A., Davids, J. S., & Melnitchouk, N. (2022). Promoting Female Leadership in Academic Surgery: Disrupting Systemic Gender Bias. *Academic Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.00000000000004665>