

FEMALE LEADERS CREATING STEPPING LADDERS Exercising Strategic Agency in Religiously Affiliated Universities of Indonesia and the USA

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Abstract

This article aims to draw on the lessons and experiences of female leaders for what approaches should be nurtured and adopted in breaking the 'glass ceilings.' This research examines pathways to female leadership and public acceptance of their roles. The article offers strategies for the next generation of emerging female leaders, drawing from narratives of five female leaders in five religiously affiliated universities in Indonesia and three in the United States. This article argues that an intense external discourse could expedite the internal institutional force of change for female university leaders. A collective solidarity among professional peers is pivotal for women to reach leadership positions, however the institutional force must be sustained with a conducive social and political support. The 'stepping ladders' illustrate how women's tracking to the leadership roles and building up a path to advance the chances remained a critical challenge, as exercising an ultimate command under the shadow of patriarchal can complicate the question of who is the true leader? The research contributes to widen the vision of what female leadership in the universities have advanced, highlighting the external and internal influence that entrenched and nurtured such development. These influences should be adaptable and structured to response to the critical call to reach the quantity and quality of female leadership to advance authority and agency contexts.

[Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengambil pembelajaran dan pengalaman para pemimpin perempuan mengenai pendekatan apa yang harus dikembangkan dan diterapkan dalam mendobrak 'langit-langit kaca'. Penelitian ini mengkaji jalur kepemimpinan perempuan dan penerimaan masyarakat terhadap peran mereka. Artikel ini menawarkan strategi untuk generasi pemimpin perempuan masa depan, yang diambil dari lima narasi pemimpin perempuan di lima universitas berafiliasi keagamaan di Indonesia dan tiga di Amerika Serikat. Artikel ini berargumentasi bahwa wacana eksternal yang intens dapat mempercepat perubahan kekuatan institusional internal bagi para pemimpin perempuan di universitas. Solidaritas kolektif di antara rekan-rekan profesional sangat penting bagi perempuan untuk mencapai posisi kepemimpinan. Kekuatan kelembagaan harus ditopang dengan dukungan sosial dan politik yang kondusif. 'Tangga loncatan' ini menggambarkan bagaimana upaya perempuan dalam mencapai peran kepemimpinan dan membangun jalur untuk meningkatkan peluang, masih menjadi tantangan, dimana menjalankan peran kepemimpinan tetapi berada di bawah bayang-bayang patriarki dapat mempersulit dalam menjawab pertanyaan tentang siapakah pemimpin yang sebenarnya? Penelitian ini berkontribusi untuk memperluas visi mengenai kemajuan yang dicapai oleh kepemimpinan perempuan di universitas, dengan menyoroti pengaruh eksternal dan internal yang memperkuat dan memupuk perkembangan tersebut. Pengaruh-pengaruh ini harus dapat disesuaikan dan lebih terstruktur demi menanggapi tuntutan penting untuk mencapai kepemimpinan perempuan baik secara jumlah dan kualitas guna memajukan konteks otoritas dan lembaga.]

Keywords

Stepping ladders, strategic agency, female leaders, religiously affiliated universities

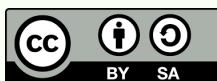
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Introduction

This paper will review how “Glass Ceiling Theory”¹ is practically experienced by female leaders in universities, developing a set of practices for the enhancement of women in leadership roles. This publication will aim to enhance quantity but also the quality. It will focus on answering how women in leadership in religiously affiliated universities in Indonesia and the United States advance the empowerment missions of women. In doing so, this paper will look at women leaders’ roles and contributions to increase gender representation and social changes in both countries, assessing the institutional forces/policies/initiatives in place.

Glass ceiling theory describes vertical discrimination against women in the workplace.² However, work-and-family balance, which is personal, is believed to be the supporting factor as to why the glass ceiling continues to extensively deny women from becoming decision makers in their organizations.³ Therefore, in the context of inequality regimes structural, cultural, and personal factors work hand in hand as barriers, stopping women from reaching the top.⁴

The critical questions being asked include the following: How women can navigate their opportunities to win this battle? Where to begin? And as the barriers are complex and patriarchy is omnipresent in social lives, is it possible for women to go against them? It is interesting to deeply consider how these complexities define women’s experience world in the educational sector, considering this sector has a particular mechanism for promoting social transformations. We must establish whether it is possible for women to immerse themselves into the regimes while making changes from within? How should women employ their agency, which constitutes personal autonomy, in this complex setting, which

¹ Joan Acker, ‘From Glass Ceiling to Inequality Regimes’, *Sociologie Du Travail* 51, no. 2 (19 May 2009): 199–217, <https://doi.org/10.4000/sdt.16407>; Eleanor Wilson, ‘Diversity, Culture and the Glass Ceiling’, *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 21, no. 3 (13 October 2014): 83–89.

² Joan Acker, ‘Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations’, *Gender & Society* 20, no. 4 (1 August 2006): 441–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206289499>.

³ Audrey Babic and Isabelle Hansez, ‘The Glass Ceiling for Women Managers: Antecedents and Consequences for Work-Family Interface and Well-Being at Work’, *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.618250>.

⁴ Acker, ‘Inequality Regimes’.

may require what we call "a collective agency".⁵ This study simply draws lessons learned from both systems as opposed to performing comparative analysis. We look closely at three historically and currently religiously affiliated universities in the United States, Boston University, Tuft University, and Brandeis University, and five (5) State University for Islamic Studies in Indonesia.

The data were collected via a combination of participant and non-participant observations, as well as in-depth interviews with five female rectors in five Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, namely, UIN (State Islamic University) Raden Fattah of Palembang, IAIN (State Institute of Islamic Religion) Ponorogo, East Java and Metro Lampung, and STAIN (State Higher School of Islamic Religion) of Meulaboh Aceh and Majene West Sulawesi⁶. The data collected from the United States universities include discussions with a female Dean of Heller School of Brandeis University, Director of the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs (CURA) at Boston University, female leaders from Tuft University, and secondary interviews with several chairs of departments and universities' feminists' lectures in the Boston area of the United States.

This narrative research uses a qualitative method that is designed to explore the experience of female leaders in religiously affiliated universities in Indonesia and the United States to uncover the opportunities and challenges they face as well as contributions they make. It also observes the discussions and responses pertaining to the issues of female leadership among the academia of the universities to extend the contemporary discourse on authority and agency. The primary considerations of the data collection are geographical representation, historical essence, the socio-political character of the institutions, and accessibility. The secondary data were obtained from documents, academic journals, or information on the university web, which may be relevant to the research questions, particularly regarding the 'public discourse' within the institutions about female leadership. Data analysis is concurrent with the data collection process, which corresponds to what

⁵ Atun Wardatun, 'Matrifocality and Collective Solidarity in Practicing Agency: Marriage Negotiation among the Bimanese Muslim Women in Eastern Indonesia', *The Journal of International Women's Studies* 20, no. 2 (2019): 42–57, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol20/iss2/4/>.

⁶ Those nomenclatures are all for higher education where the scope and the numbers of departments each has varied. While UIN can open 'non-Islamic studies' such as sociology, law, science; IAIN and STAIN only focus on Islamic studies, such as Islamic law (Syariah), Islamic education (Tarbiyah), Islamic Philosophy (Ushuluddin). However, IAIN should have at least three departments while STAIN may only have one department.

Creswell calls “the data analysis spiral”⁷. Data analysis of qualitative research is not a distinct step but, rather, should occur concurrently with data collection and data representation.

Stressing the fact that both countries have essentially different structures of leadership, hiring processes, and connections with the government is vital in framing the growth and/abridgement of the institutions of both countries. Differences in access and leadership structure between American and Indonesian universities influence the collection of data but not necessarily the validity of the findings, as data from the three American universities in the form of, in addition to in-depth interviews, online resources and archival research are not all available from Indonesian universities.⁸

The presentation in this paper will first explain current condition of female leadership around the world, particularly in Indonesia and the USA. It will then explain the policy aspects (institutional forces) and solidarity (collective agency) that support women in efforts to break the glass ceiling. This can be referred to as capital for building the ladder they need to reach higher positions. Using this capital, the paper will then explain how women face challenges and take opportunities that exist. We aim to elaborate how women navigate limited conditions, and how this is not as smooth as it is for men, who have escalators built into the conditions of life that still give privilege to certain groups. This paper will end with a proposal to facilitate breaking the glass ceiling and creating other alternatives for women to have equal access, participation, opportunities, and benefits in academia.

⁷ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Singapore: Sage Publications, 2007), 182; John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2nd ed. (California: Sage Publications, 2009).

⁸ We have identified three objective–subjective points of resources: First, resources from Indonesian reveal “thick description”, as opposed to the objective approach we have performed for American resources. Second, all universities researched in the United States are private universities; in Indonesia, we examined state universities. The context of this decision is that the First Amendment of the United States’ Constitution strongly states that religion and state must be separated to ensure democracy by showing no preference to any religion. Conversely, in Indonesia, the state has a strong mission to promote religion using government funding. Third, religiosity is kept private in the United States, particularly by those who aspire to hold public roles, for fear that the articulations of certain religious denominations by default harbors a vision of discrimination; conversely, in Indonesia, those who aspire towards leadership positions should verbalize their religious affinity to showing their depth of moral character. As the positions of leadership are often still debatable for women, applying religious rhetoric and reliance is often favourable.

Unfinished Gender Issues of University Leaders

It has been an undeniable fact that women tend to be positioned in lower-level management⁹, although it is argued that women contribute greatly to an organization¹⁰. Women and their male counterparts, in fact, are key to the fast progress of any organization.¹¹ Morley has indicated that “the areas of gender, higher education, and development have rarely intersected, leading to silence in terms of policy, literature, and research.”¹² However, it is believed that education plays vital role in raising gender-responsive awareness, building leaders’ capacity for social change.¹³ The arguments ring true up to the present, as the discussion about female leadership in religiously affiliated higher education has not attracted serious attention academically until recently.¹⁴

Institutional infrastructure including gender-related areas in public spheres and legislative mechanisms for gender development for educational leaders are conspicuously deficient in Hong Kong.¹⁵ Significant transformations in Kazakhstan and the active

⁹ Raewyn Connell, ‘Glass Ceilings or Gendered Institutions? Mapping the Gender Regimes of Public Sector Worksites’, *Public Administration Review* 66, no. 6 (2006): 837–49, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4096601>.

¹⁰ Alice H Eagly and Linda L Carli, ‘The Female Leadership Advantage: An Evaluation of the Evidence’, *The Leadership Quarterly* 14, no. 6 (December 2003): 807–34, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.004>.

¹¹ K Ramsay and M Parker, ‘Gender, Bureaucracy, and Organisational Culture’, in *Gender and Bureaucracy*, ed. M. Savage and M. S. Anne Witz (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

¹² Louise Morley, ‘Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education’, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Women in higher Education: Issues and challenges, 28, no. 2 (1 May 2005): 209, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2005.04.008>.

¹³ Ramya Subrahmanian, ‘Gender Equality in Education: Definitions and Measurements’, *International Journal of Educational Development*, International and National Targets for Education: Help or Hindrance?, 25, no. 4 (1 July 2005): 395–407, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2005.04.003>.

¹⁴ Samah Hatem Almaki et al., ‘The Path of Leadership Experience of Muslim Women Leaders in Higher Education’, *International Business Management* 10, no. 15 (January 2016): 2967–72, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309112721_The_path_of_leadership_experience_of_muslim_women_leaders_in_higher_education; Samah Hatem Almaki et al., ‘Challenges Faced Muslim Women Leaders in Higher Education’, *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 6, no. 3 (5 September 2016): 75–86, <https://doi.org/10.5901/jesr.2016.v6n3p75>; Tasneem Amatullah, ‘Female Leadership Narratives in Higher Education in Qatar in the Light of Islamic Leadership Framework’ (Dissertation, Miami University, 2018); Norzaini Azman, ‘Malaysian Women in Higher Education Leadership: Promise Without Progress’, *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, no. 9 (2021): 15–18, <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Womens-Rep-in-Higher-Ed-Leadership-Around-the-World.pdf>; Nina Nurmila, ‘Breaking Patriarchal Gender Stereotype. Being A Female Rector of the Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia/ISBI Bandung, West Java, Indonesia’, *Kawalu: Journal of Local Culture* 5, no. 2 (24 December 2018): 107–30, <https://doi.org/10.32678/kawalu.v5i2.1885>.

¹⁵ Linda Chelan Li and Irish Chui Ping Kam, ‘Women in Higher Education Leadership: Challenges in Hong Kong’, *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, no. 9 (2021): 11–13, <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Womens-Rep-in-Higher-Ed-Leadership-Around-the-World.pdf>.

participation of women in higher education reformation have not automatically scaled up the numbers of female leaders in higher education.¹⁶

Despite geographical differences, similar issues happen in higher education in South Africa¹⁷, Ghana¹⁸, and Malaysia¹⁹. Even in Australia, where its university sectors are “highly feminized” in terms of the numbers of academics, non-academics, and students, the executive positions held by women are still low, in that across thirty-nine universities only ten chancellors are female.²⁰ Conversely, in Finlandia, the country with the highest level of gender awareness, only 29 % university rectors and 38 vice-rectors from fourteen universities are female.²¹ Overall, the issue of female leaders in higher institutions is the “unfinished business” of gender inequality.²²

It is worth pointing out that forty-eight of the top 200 universities in the world are led by women, and that thirteen of them are located in the USA, such as Sally A. Kornbluth at MIT, Carol Christ at University of California Berkeley, and Elizabeth Megill at Cornell University. Unfortunately, Boston University, Brandeis University, and Tufts University, although included in the top 200, are not currently led by female presidents. Brandeis University has had female presidents, namely Evelyn E. Handler (1983–1991) and Lisa Lynch (interim).²³

¹⁶ Aliya Kuzhabekova, ‘Women’s Leadership in Higher Education in Kazakhstan’, *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, no. 9 (2021): 13–15, <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Womens-Rep-in-Higher-Ed-Leadership-Around-the-World.pdf>.

¹⁷ Adèle Moodly, ‘Reconstructing Notions of Leadership: The Gendered Nature of South African University Spaces’, *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, no. 9 (2021): 20–22, <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Womens-Rep-in-Higher-Ed-Leadership-Around-the-World.pdf>.

¹⁸ C. Adu-Yeboah, G. Y. Oduro, and D. Takyiakwaa, ‘Women’s Leadership in Ghanaian Higher Education: A Matter of Tokenism, Equality, or Equity’, *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, no. 9 (2021): 18–20, <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Womens-Rep-in-Higher-Ed-Leadership-Around-the-World.pdf>.

¹⁹ Azman, ‘Malaysian Women’s in Higher Education Leadership’.

²⁰ Amalia Di Iorio, ‘Breaking the Barriers for Women in Higher Education: An Australian Perspective’, *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, no. 9 (2021): 24–26, <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Womens-Rep-in-Higher-Ed-Leadership-Around-the-World.pdf>.

²¹ Terhi Nokkala, ‘Women in Academia in Finland: A Success Story?’, *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, no. 9 (2021): 26–28, <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Womens-Rep-in-Higher-Ed-Leadership-Around-the-World.pdf>.

²² Tessa DeLaquil, ‘Striving to Achieve the “Unfinished Business” of Gender Equality: The Case of Women’s Leadership in Higher Education’, *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, no. 9 (2021): 36–37, <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Womens-Rep-in-Higher-Ed-Leadership-Around-the-World.pdf>.

²³ Brandeis University, ‘Past Presidents of Brandeis University’, Brandeis University, n.d, <https://www.brandeis.edu/president/past/index.html>; BU, ‘Presidents » Timeline’, Boston University, n.d, <https://www.bu.edu/timeline/category/presidents/>; BU, ‘Tenure and Promotion | Arts & Sciences’,

Table 1. University's Profile

	Brandeis University	Boston University	Tufts University
Founded	1948	1839	1853
Religious Affiliation	Jewish	Methodist (Christian)	Universalists (Christian)
Female President	2 Prof. Evelyn Erika Handler (1983-1991) and Lisa Lynch (Interim)	None	None
Numbers of Students	3,591	36,000	12,648
Faculty member (Professor/Lecturer/Instructor)	783	10,000	1,288
School (Fakultas), Program, Centers	61	300	250

Meanwhile, the five state Islamic campuses studied in Indonesia are all led by female rectors. IAIN Ponorogo has been led by a female rector for four terms. These include the two terms when it was known as STAIN, with Maryam Yusuf at the helm (2010–2017), the one term of 2017–2021, when it changed its status to IAIN), and the 2021–2025 term led by the current rector, Mrs. Evi Muafiyah. Meanwhile, the other four campuses currently have a female rector or chair for the first time.

Female rectors for Islamic higher education in Indonesia were inaugurated in 1985–1994 at IAIN Alauddin Ujung Pandang South Sulawesi when Dra. Andi Rasdianah was appointed as the first female rector at the institution. Since then, there have been fourteen (14) female rectors of Islamic higher education across the country. This institution was followed by STAIN Pamekasan (2004–2008), where Maryatul Qibtiyah took up the position as the Rector. This positive precedent has inspired many other Islamic universities to act accordingly.²⁴ This growing (and fluctuating)²⁵ number of female rectors in Islamic

Boston University, n.d, <https://www.bu.edu/cas/faculty-staff/faculty-staff-handbook/faculty-personnel-matters/tenure-and-promotion-policies-and-practices/>; Tufts, 'Gender and Intersectional Analysis | The Fletcher School', Tufts University, accessed 6 November 2023, <https://fletcher.tufts.edu/programs/courses/fields-study/gender-and-intersectional-analysis>; Tufts.

²⁴ STAIN Ponorogo (2010–2017) led by Maryam Yusuf; when, the institutions turned into IAIN, Maryam became the first Rector for 2017–2021. Rukmina Gonibala at the STAIN Manado North Sulawesi (2012–2015). She then became the first rector of IAIN Manado (2015–2019). Ridha Ahida was appointed as the

higher education in Indonesia over the last ten years deserves sufficient attention and cannot be overlooked.²⁶

Table 2. Rector and University

Session	Rector's Name	Institutions
1984–1995	Andi Rasdiyanah	IAIN Sultan Alauddin Makasar, South Sulawesi
2004–2008	Maryatul Qibtiyah	STAIN Pamekasan, Madura
2010–2017	Maryam Yusuf	STAIN Ponorogo, East Java
2015–2019	Rukmina Gonibala	STAIN Manado
2015–2019	Ridha Hida	IAIN Bukittinggi, Padang, West Sumatera
	Rukmina Gonibala	STAIN Manado
2017–2021	Enizar	IAIN Metro Lampung
	Maryam Yusuf	IAIN Ponorogo, East Java
2019–2023	Amani Lubis	UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta
	Inayatullah	STAIN Teungku Dirundeung Meulaboh Aceh
	Faizah binti Awad	IAIN Sultan Qaimuddin Kendari Central Sulawesi
2020–2024	Nyayu Khodijah	UIN Raden Fattah Palembang, South Sumatera
2021–2025	Evi Muafiyah	IAIN Ponorogo, East Java
	Ridha Ahida	UIN Sjech M. Djamil Bukittinggi, West Sumatera
	Nurjannah	IAIN Metro Lampung
	Martin Kustati	UIN Imam Bonjol Padang
	Wasilah Sahabuddin	STAIN Majene, West Sulawesi
2023–2027	Nurhayati	UIN Sumatera Utara Medan

first female rector at IAIN Bukittinggi, West Sumatera, from 2014–2019, and she has been continuing her second term since 2019.

²⁵ At the end of this research process, two female rectors could not continue their leadership in the second period, namely, Amani Lubis from UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and Inayatullah from STAIN Tengku Dirundeng Meulaboh Aceh. However, one female rector was elected for UIN North Sumatra Medan, Nurhayati (2023–2027).

²⁶ In 2017–2021, Prof. Dr. Enizar, was appointed as the first female rector of IAIN Metro Lampung. On January 7th 2019, Prof. Amany Lubis was appointed to the position by the minister of religious affairs as the first female rector of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta in Indonesia (for the term of 2019–2023) together with Dr. Inayatullah (STAIN Meulaboh Aceh). Their top position was then followed by Prof. Faizah binti Awad's inauguration on 8th April 2019 for IAIN Kendari, south east Sulawesi. In 2020, there was one more female rector, Prof. Dr. Nyayu Khodijah (2020–2024) at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. And in 2021 there were five female rectors for the term 2021–2025, namely, Dr. Evi Muafiyah (IAIN Ponorogo, East Java), Dr. Ridha Ahida (IAIN Bukittinggi, West Sumatera), Dr. Nurjannah (IAIN Metro, Lampung), Prof. Dr. Martin Kustati (UIN Imam Bonjol, Padang), and Prof. Dr. Wasilah Sahabuddin (STAIN Majene).

A well-known professor (HFN) at Boston University, who has also researched Indonesia extensively, explained two phenomena well. Firstly, in general, there is a policy focused on the involvement of women. This is felt to have been relatively successful, but we should note that the issue of minorities and under-representation in the USA is mostly focused on the issue of race.

“there's more of a pool but there's also now a *deliberate policy emphasis* and general consensus here at BU is that the struggle for inclusion of women has succeeded. However, there are still a few symbols like the presidency that we might expect to see more changes. But in terms of faculty representation that struggle has not over but it is prevailed where new horizons and press is working for underrepresented minorities”²⁷

He further describes that the percentage of Boston University's faculty is 9% African American and 8% Hispanic, while African Americans represents 12% of the total population of the United States. Asian Americans are not included among underrepresented minorities as they are not thought of as underrepresented any longer, although African Americans and Hispanics are.²⁸ In the USA issues of gender and race intersect in.²⁹ Mainah and Perkins stated that “opportunities for advancement for female faculty members of color have increased; however, a deeper level of exclusion persists.”³⁰ According to Combs³¹, women of color must overcome the dualities of race and gender, as well as the prejudices attached to them, in order to succeed in their careers and gain a better position within their organizations than their Caucasian counterparts.³²

Meanwhile, in Indonesia, based on the experience of a female professor (DZT) who also currently serves as a dean at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, it cannot be denied that there is a strong affirmative action for the entry of women to the senior leadership in

²⁷ Interview with HFN, January 16th 2023

²⁸ American Association of University Professors, ‘Tenure: What Is Academic Tenure?’, AAUP, 30 June 2006, <https://www.aaup.org/issues/tenure>; AAUW, ‘Fast Facts: Women Working in Academia’, AAUW: Empowering Women Since 1881, n.d, <https://www.aauw.org/resources/article/fast-facts-academia/>.

²⁹ Interview with BJ, October 28th 2022

³⁰ Fredah Mainah and Vernita Perkins, ‘Challenges Facing Female Leaders of Color in U.S. Higher Education’, *International Journal of African Development* 2, no. 2 (7 July 2015): 5–13, <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/ijad/vol2/iss2/3>.

³¹ Gwendolyn M. Combs, ‘The Duality of Race and Gender for Managerial African American Women: Implications of Informal Social Networks on Career Advancement’, *Human Resource Development Review* 2, no. 4 (2003): 385–405, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484303257949>.

³² Interview with RS, November 10th 2022

higher education. This affirmative action does not negate meritocracy, meaning that these women have met the educational requirements (doctor and professor), structural ranks (VI A), and functional positions (head lector). Indeed, the influence of other factors such as the closeness of communication, and similarity of background also affects their selection as senior leaders. In addition, the issue of ethnicity or regional origin is also a major factor.

"After the selection and decision is no longer centralized in the faculty senate, women have more opportunities. There is a more focused assessment by the ministry of religion although there are still several other determining factors that are certainly not just a matter of gender representation as the only consideration. For example, the issue that leaders should come from the area where the campus is located to ensure a broad understanding of the sociological structure of the area and public acceptance in order to facilitate their leadership duties."³³

Research by Muluk³⁴ uncovers the fact of the lack of female leaders at Islamic Higher Education (IHE), with reference to State Islamic University in Aceh Indonesia, in spite of their increased access to pursuing education in this sector. Furthermore, they are less productive in that they conduct less academic work and make less money than their male colleagues. Unfortunately, higher education institutions have not taken many steps to narrow this gap.³⁵ Qibtiyah³⁶ found that there are three different groups in Indonesian Islamic with universities with regard to their responses to gender equality issues including female leadership, namely: literalist, moderate, and progressive. While the first one views men as having a higher status than women, moderate groups think that they both equally complement each other. The latter group holds an opinion that men and women are equal.

Institutional Forces: Paradigm, Policies, and Strategies

Among the factors that determine the success or failure of women or other minority groups in terms of occupying leadership positions is the support of the paradigm of

³³ Interview with DZT, December 22th 2022

³⁴ Safrul Muluk, 'Women and Leadership in Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia', *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities* 1, no. 2 (1 May 2014): 172–90, <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v1i2.27>.

³⁵ Nur Kholis, 'Gender Career Productivity and Success in Academia in Indonesia's Islamic Higher Education Institutions', *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 6, no. 2 (1 December 2012): 341–66, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2012.6.2.341-366>.

³⁶ Alimatul Qibtiyah, 'The Conceptualisation of Gender Issues Among Gender Activists and Scholars in Indonesian Universities', *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 30 (November 2012), <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue30/qibtiyah.htm>.

equality, written policies, and strategies to implement these policies. These three elements are referred to as institutional forces in this paper.

Both Indonesia and the USA have written policies on women's access and participation. However, in the context of this research, efforts to strengthening access to women's participation through a more systematic movement appear to be more pronounced in the USA. The focus of the movement is on strengthening the substantive level of participation step by step, not directly aiming for the top position. There is a belief that, with sufficient patience, the top position will be obtained through the meritocratic system. This level of participation is different from that of Indonesia where, at the lecturer level, the movement is not particularly strong, and neither are its strategies, so that steps towards the top are often hit and miss.

The table 3 below illustrates the existence of institutional forces, which include paradigms, policies, and strategies. In general, both in Indonesia and the USA, various forms of institutional forces exist, but to different degrees. The internalization of four waves of feminism describes the “paradigm” under consideration, while “policies” appears in the forms of affirmative action. Meanwhile, “strategies” refer to the existence of women’s and gender studies, pressure from media, and social–religious movement.

Table 3. Forms of Institutional Force to Women’s Leadership

Basic Forms	Implementation
Paradigm	Internalization of Feminism
Policies	Affirmative Action
Strategies	Women’s and Gender Studies Center Media Pressure Social–Religious Movement

Those institutional forces have given women a better position in the last thirty years (USA) and in the latest decade (in Indonesia), overcoming their previous marginalization from the political process on campus. However, personal qualities along with collective solidarity play significant roles in advancing to a top position.

Gender studies programs on Indonesian and American campuses constitute a core strategy which is influential in several ways. First, this center provides discussions related to the internalization of fourth-wave feminism (in the USA) and the reinterpretation of religious texts through a gender perspective (in Indonesia). These discussions have changed

many paradigms related to gender roles in the academic world and at the community level. Secondly, the center creates what we call "collective solidarity", both within the campus by encouraging affirmative action and with external parties such as the media and socio-political and religious movements.

Nurmila proposes women-friendly Qur'anic interpretations and affirmative policy to increase the number of female leaders in Indonesian Islamic higher institutions.³⁷ This reinterpretation of religious teachings related to gender equality and policy advocacy has colored the activities of the Center for Gender and Child Studies/PSGA (formerly called the Center for Women's Studies/PSW) on Indonesian Islamic campuses since its emergence in the 1980s.

Women studies were popular in 1960s in the USA. Women's studies is an academic field that draws on feminist and interdisciplinary methods to place women's lives and experiences at the center of study, while examining social and cultural constructs of gender; systems of privilege and oppression; and the relationships between power and gender as they intersect with other identities and social locations such as race, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, and disability.

A formal mentoring system for faculty going through tenure track is also in place at Boston University, so candidates "can get good advice from colleagues from the beginning, but the best mentoring policy and climate means that all members of the department are involved in giving guidance to faculty members on the tenure-track".³⁸ According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of women's and gender studies degrees in the United States has increased by more than 300% since 1990 and, in 2015, there were more than 2,000 degrees conferred. These days, women's studies programs include gender and sexuality studies, and many of the programs explore and question the relationship of race, class, sexuality, ethnicity and more to encourage students to investigate the broader field of gender. LHW describes that since the 1980s, the role of women studies program have been fundamental in boosting female hiring across universities. "We have

³⁷ Nina Nurmila, 'Proposing Feminist Intepretation of The Qur'an and Affirmative Policy to Suport Women Leadership In Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education', *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam* 19, no. 2 (2020): 125–40, <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2020.192.125-140>.

³⁸ BU, 'Tenure and Promotion | Arts & Sciences'.

the power to request for a meeting with the President when the position become available to ensure the hiring process accommodating women representation”³⁹

Despite the differences in the orientation of women's studies centers in Indonesia and in the USA, as mentioned above, there are actually similarities that can be underlined. This study center has enabled collective solidarity between women and men to clear the path for women to progress. While Indonesia focuses more on literacy and policy, the USA focuses on action such as a mentoring system, an approach which is almost absent in Indonesia. Collective solidarity is built through women’s studies centers from a shared awareness that women have the same capacity as other groups, but that in most socio-cultural processes and systems belittling and marginalization occur. In many experiences, forming a network of relations like this produces a strategic group that pushes women forward in the arena.

An example in this regard is the PSGA of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. This institution is a women's association that has succeeded in bringing gender mainstream resonance in Islamic religious universities (PTKI) to develop a perspective in policy making, budgeting, and campus program design. The climax is the formation of a gender-responsive cabinet from the leadership of the Rector Prof. Al-Makin. Even though he is not a woman, the voices of women's groups are considered. As a result, the composition of female officials who lead faculty units and institutions is balanced quantitatively with male officials. PSW/PSGA, for certain experiences, became a pressure group and also an intellectual network that formulated a vision and mission for female candidates. The role of this group can be clearly seen in the process of NJ as rector of IAIN Metro Lampung.

Collective solidarity involving men and cross-organizational support in nominating female candidates is possible, partly, because there is in-group competition among men. Frictions or internal negotiations sometimes cause stalemate to become a factor of socio-political mobilization. Female candidates are deliberately encouraged as an alternative, being considered to have the ability to bridge the various interests of the competing parties. There were also those who "turned a corner" amid fierce competition with male candidates. However, in the end it was accepted as a form of compromise. Meanwhile, women have persuasive skills and interpersonal communication in expanding networks.

³⁹ Interview with LHW, December 12th, 2022

Facing Multiple Challenges, Taking Limited Opportunities

The American Council on Education (2021), working with Boston College, reported “an international brief for higher education leadership around the world”, with specific attention paid to female leaders, highlighting systemic and invisible barriers. Likewise, Morley and Crossouard have studied the barriers to as well as enablers of women’s leadership in six Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.⁴⁰ Among their interesting findings is that family is a hindrance to female leadership, while private universities provide more chances for women’s careers than public (state) alternatives. Nurmila found that support from the husband to exchange gender roles, whereby the man takes over domestic duties, is an utmost support for women’s careers as university leaders.⁴¹

Our study finds that the ambivalence of family roles can be a support system as well as a challenge for women's leadership careers in higher education. For women in academia, the family–work balanced has always been an important consideration in choosing the path of becoming a campus bureaucrat. For most women in the field, being a lecturer, without additional assignments, is the most comfortable choice. With that choice they can balance between career and family. Women are often expected to juggle multiple roles, including caregiving responsibilities and their careers. This can make it challenging for women to prioritize their careers and can impact their ability to progress.

The issue of reproductive cycles is also an issue among women. There is a perception that this will be a burden on individuals or the institutions they lead if they occupy senior positions and then experience long periods of maternity leave; however, it should be noted that Indonesian academics experience more a fluid work-and-family balance compared to what occurs in the USA. This is because career demands and promotion processes are different, and in the USA it is felt to be much more complicated. Reproductive issues and childcare duties are major issues that act as challenges for academics in America. The fact that it is very difficult to find domestic help and that families are nuclear and not cohesive

⁴⁰ Louise Morley and Barbara Crossouard, ‘Women in Higher Education Leadership in South Asia: Rejection, Refusal, Reluctance, Revisioning’, Research Report on the British Council-funded project (UK: Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER), University of Sussex, 2012).

⁴¹ Nurmila, ‘Breaking Patriarchal Gender Stereotype’.

makes it difficult for women who are still carrying out childcare duties to have a full career. So, the choice between having children and a career becomes a prolonged dilemma.

LHW has shared her experience as to why she opted out of the tenure-track position due to her domestic duties. She is a single mother with doctorate degree on 'Feminism During Maoist Era to Xi's R.' Lihua migrated from China 30 years ago to the United States:

“...It is very difficult for women to go for tenure track job, partly because of our domestic duties. Twenty years ago, I was divorce, with a young child to care for. The pressure and the burden for anyone to go through the tenure process is absolutely unthinkable to me. As that also include possibility of moving to different states, where the tenure job available. For this reason, I gave to give up tenure job opportunity”⁴²

Meanwhile, Indonesian society is undergoing the transition process from an extended family to nuclear family. However, it is much easier to find household assistants and childcare programs that are still relatively accessible. This provides a wider opportunity for academics in Indonesia to balance family, work, and psychological well-being.

Interestingly, family support is an essential consideration for females entering academia in terms of reaching leadership positions. Support can be in the form of blessings, prayers, time and material availability, as well as involvement in all processes or stages. Family is defined as the circle of the nuclear family, especially the husband, parents and children. NK's experience shows that family support is vital to enabling her to achieve goals. Before she deciding to run as a candidate, the first thing she did was negotiate with her academican husband at the same university on the family division of labor and childcare, being especially keen to ensure that the children are not affected negatively by her carrier path.⁴³ The experience of MY, who is fully supported by her husband, is similar to NK's. She must be far away between Malang and Ponorogo to continue her studies to the doctoral level, living in a boarding house with her son who is studying at the same campus. Her husband, a civil servant (PNS), lives in Ponorogo, while at the same time being with their youngest child and looking after the house. When Maryam advanced to become chair in the first term, her husband advised her to compete seriously and fairly.⁴⁴ The other rector, NJ, believes that her mother's prayers and blessings were the main

⁴² Interview with LHW, December 12th, 2022

⁴³ Interview with NK, December 28th, 2022

⁴⁴ Interview with MY, December 19th, 2022

contributor to her success. When she first intended to run for office, she asked her mother's opinion and she was hesitant at first, believing this process would be as costly as any other political process and that they did not have the capital to do so. NJ convinced her mother that this process was not like ordinary politics, and instead prayer and sincerity. Her mother then advised NJ to stick to the "intention" of worship in undergoing the process, and she would thus surely occupy the position of rector later.⁴⁵

The experience above shows that family can be a supporting factor or a barrier to advancing one's career. As the smallest social institution, this also illustrates the opportunities and challenges faced by women in other fields, for example institutional and social. This is because that which occurs in the family is a representation of communal awareness, especially related to gender roles.

In addition to family issues, there are several social–psychological hindrances⁴⁶ that can impact women's ability to progress in their careers. These include stereotypes, self-doubt, implicit bias, and lack of role models. Female academics often face stereotypes and biases that suggest they are less competent, less ambitious, or less committed to their careers than men. These stereotypes can be held by both men and women and exert serious impacts on women's ability to advance in their careers. Self-doubt among female academics is a consequence of these stereotypes. Many develop imposter syndrome, which lead them to underestimate their abilities or feel like they do not belong in their positions. This can impact their confidence and their ability to advocate for themselves in the workplace.⁴⁷

Implicit bias refers to unconscious biases that individuals hold based on social identities such as gender, race, or ethnicity which show the intersectionality of gender issues.⁴⁸ These biases impact how women are evaluated in the workplace and can result in

⁴⁵ Interview with NJ, December 29th, 2022

⁴⁶ Crystal L Hoyt, 'Social Psychological Approaches to Women and Leadership Theory', in *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership*, ed. Susan R Madsen (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), 85–99.

⁴⁷ Hoyt; Dorothy Ferary, 'Women's Leadership in a Diverse Higher Education Landscape: The Case of Indonesia', *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, no. 9 (2021): 30–32, <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Womens-Rep-in-Higher-Ed-Leadership-Around-the-World.pdf>; Devi Pramitha, 'Women in Educational Leadership From Islamic Perspective', *EGALITA* 15, no. 2 (24 December 2020): 15–26, <https://doi.org/10.18860/egalita.v15i2.10805>.

⁴⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016); Ashley Gray, 'Black Women and Intersectionality in US Higher Education', *International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, no. 9 (2021): 32–33, <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Womens-Rep-in-Higher-Ed-Leadership-Around-the-World.pdf>; Shahla Haeri, *The Unforgettable Queens of Islam: Succession, Authority and Gender* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

women being overlooked for promotion or being held to different standards than men. Furthermore, female academics struggle to see themselves in leadership positions due to a lack of female role models in their organizations or industries. This can make it difficult for women to envision themselves as leaders and can impact their career aspirations.⁴⁹

This study also found that individual capacity is a very important aspect of women's career advancement. Thus, in addition to the challenges at various levels that women face, whether individual, family, structural or cultural, they also realize that increasing personal hard and soft skills and capacity is an effective enabler for competition for the position of rector.

Interestingly, Indonesian female leaders focus on spiritual achievements, such as personal closeness to God, in addition to academic and administrative skills. Meanwhile, female academics in the USA emphasize social skills such as cultural humility as an important aspect of success. “Women who aspire to be a leader have to have multifaceted talent, capacity, and spiritual strength. Meeting all the requirements to be a leader alone wouldn't be enough to get elected.”⁵⁰ The interviewees believe that this aspect comes into play and is even considered the principal one. EM, one of the rectors interviewed, quotes the Quranic verse that “God gives power to whom he wills.”⁵¹ The dean (MM) of Heller School of Management and Policy of Brandeis University believes that “...skills required for good leaders either the leaders are coming from those communities or another island but they have to have the cultural humility and awareness, not just the population to be served but also the culture of the institution.”⁵²

Religious perspectives factor into personal reasons and have always been a cornerstone in a career as a higher education leader for respondents from Indonesia. The issue of religion, and the influence of religious consciousness on personal determination to achieve a position, is almost impossible to discuss in the context of the United States,

⁴⁹ Ferary, ‘Women’s Leadership in a Diverse Higher Education Landscape’; Hoyt, ‘Social Psychological Approaches to Women and Leadership Theory’; Pramitha, ‘Women in Educational Leadership From Islamic Perspective’.

⁵⁰ Interview with WL, November 15th, 2022

⁵¹ Interview with EM, November 18th, 2022

⁵² Interview with MM, January 12th, 2023

where spiritualities and religions are private matters.⁵³ Conversely, in Indonesia, this awareness emerges itself in the narratives delivered by women leaders.

In the United States, religiosity, particularly the faith of those who aspire to take public roles, is kept quiet out of the fear that the articulations of certain religious denomination by default may be viewed as harboring discrimination; conversely, in Indonesia, those who to aspire leadership positions find it desirable to verbalize their religious affinity to show their depth of moral characters. As positions of leadership are often still debatable for women, applying religious' rhetoric and reliance is often a favorable strategy.

Moving Forward: Social Transformation through Personal Achievement

Changing views about women in a patriarchal culture is not easy because women are already imaged to constitute a second class after men. Thus, the appointment of female university leaders provides hope for changing these stereotypical views. Their success provides an accurate, positive image of women. These female leaders all share a strong determination to fight for their position and a positive female self-image, demonstrating their ability to lead. As all informants admit, a positive self-image is not built immediately but is a collection of various factors that have helped them in the process of growth and development, including family support that does not differentiate between men and women, the hard work they undertake themselves, and success stories from women within their social network.

University leadership is recognized as an opportunity for community service and intellectual engagement, offering greater space for academic benefits. EM emphasized community service as one of the motivations for occupying that position, with the intention of fulfilling the role for the benefit of the people and nation. For her, educating and thus transforming society is a noble task, and higher education is a place of struggle that provides an opportunity to contribute.

⁵³ James Lankford and Russel Moore, 'The Real Meaning of the Separation of Church and State', TIME, 16 January 2018, <https://time.com/5103677/church-state-separation-religious-freedom/>; Hana M. Ryman and J. Mark Alcorn, 'Establishment Clause (Separation of Church and State)', The Free Speech Center, 2009, <https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/establishment-clause-separation-of-church-and-state/>.

An interesting variety of personal reasons is the intention to contribute to the area of origin through transformation in the field of education. This is illustrated by the experience of WL, Head of STAIN Majene, South Sulawesi. Thus far, her overseas journey in studying and serving as a lecturer in South Sulawesi has provided her with sufficient capital and experience for her to undertake community service in West Sulawesi. She intended this dedication to be in the form of social change through the field of Islamic education in her hometown. She feels that her contribution so far as a local princess in Majene has been limited to just researching the community. While research can provide a theoretical basis and scientifically explain regional problems, she feels it is necessary to appear as a policy maker, especially in the education sector, in order for her work to be more applicable in regional development.

There is a self-assessment in the form of internal awareness of knowledge capacity and self-ability. In this case, there is an awareness of women's agency, i.e., the capacity and ability to act in wider spaces.⁵⁴ In some sense, agency is tied to a woman's self-worth, giving encouragement to these women leaders to be involved in the political process on campus. The existence of this women's agency seems to have formed a separate perspective among campuses, transforming the space into a red carpet that requires female lecturers to make an effort in the process of becoming university leaders. This description of women's agency is represented by two things. The first is the way female chancellors perceive themselves in the world of knowledge and power relations. The second is the substantive academic works they have produced apart from the formal-administrative titles they hold. These female university leaders view women's positive self-perception as the basis for involvement in the public space and power-sharing arena. For example, NK from UIN Raden Fatah Palembang emphasized that women are capable of leading like men and should have the same opportunity and division of tasks.

“Even though Palembang society is patriarchal, I grew up in a situation where women have a place. Since childhood, I was raised in a family where children were

⁵⁴ Maud L. Eduards, 'Women's Agency and Collective Action', *Women's Studies International Forum* 17, no. 2 (1 March 1994): 181–86, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(94\)90024-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(94)90024-8); S Fuchs, 'Agency (and Intention)', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology*, ed. G Ritzer (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Mounira M. Charrad, 'Women's Agency Across Cultures: Conceptualizing Strengths and Boundaries', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Special Issue - Women's Agency: Silences and Voices, 33, no. 6 (November 2010): 517–22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2010.09.004>; Wardatun, 'Matrifocality and Collective Solidarity in Practicing Agency'.

Female Leaders Creating Stepping Ladders

given equal opportunities to advance, be equal and share tasks in the public space. My family has a home industry business and our 11 children (6 girls, 5 boys) have our own division of tasks, but the tasks don't discriminate. For example, I also have the task of pumping water like my brothers. The principle that was taught to us, if men can do the tasks then women should be able to do. So if someone belittles women, I fight back.”

In terms of managerial and academic work, female rectors are not inferior to their counterparts among male officials and academics. Without having to compare, each oversees the production of research they are proud of, a sign of the breakthroughs being made on the campuses they lead. During NK's leadership, her achievements included bringing in outstanding students at the national level, attaining a UIN Green Metric for campuses that care for the environment, receiving the Most Sustainably Improved University award, developing a larger role for professors by providing adequate office facilities, and seeing 15 study programs successfully accredited as Very Good and 6 as Excellent. NK is currently entrusted as Chair of the Sumatran Chancellor's Forum and received the Best Academic Leader Award 2021.

Those female academics have been developed their agency and readiness for leadership in higher education. It is clear that, in spite of the systemic and cultural barriers in higher education and society, women continue to seek opportunities for leadership, with successful women leaders finding ways to support other women individually through mentorship and leadership development. There should be more systematic efforts to mainstream gender with regard to all policies and practices across the board to achieve substantive outcomes in gender equity. As mentioned, the institutional forces should come more into play to boost female individual competency and achieve social changes.

There are two forms of social change produced by women's leadership in religiously affiliated universities: practical changes and strategic changes. These two elements complement each other. Practical change is manifested in the existence of positive self-image, role models and renewable motivations from other women, enabling them to be more confident in taking the same path. Meanwhile, strategic changes refer to collaborative vibes, progressive vision, and vibrant work atmosphere as a result of women's more intense involvement in an organization because of their role as leaders.

In addition to the changes that occur, several personal, family, institutional, and social-cultural challenges are also faced by women. This study found that the challenges

faced by women are indeed much more severe than those faced by men, while the expectations of the academic community towards women's leadership have never been lower than those of male leadership. This further places women's achievements of success as a matter of course if they do not record a much more significant difference and progress than male leadership

Structural and political approaches have been pivotal to women's promotion to key leadership roles; however, governments and universities should develop more reliable and universal paths to promotion. Indonesia is similar to the case in the United States in that the dominant number of women in second-tier positions in premier universities, including at Boston University, Brandeis University and Tuft University, should be evidence enough that women are beyond capable of being leaders of universities. Both countries have shown substantial efforts to break "the glass ceiling" in leadership, but have been taking too long to achieve substantial outcomes.

Breaking the glass ceiling requires individuals to challenge these barriers and advocate for change. This can involve taking risks, speaking out against discrimination, and building strong networks of allies and mentors. It also requires organizations to take steps to address the systemic barriers that prevent women and minorities from advancing. These steps include implementing policies to promote diversity and inclusion, providing equal opportunities for development and advancement, and ensuring that hiring and promotion practices are fair and unbiased.

Some of the steps mentioned above, as seen in the description of the experiences of previous female rectors, have been implemented in various ways and to different levels of success. In Indonesia, for example, the emergence of women rectors has also been complemented intervened by policies to realize equal rights, such as the fit-and-proper test conducted at level of the Ministry of Religion to ensure that women who meet administrative and academic requirements can apply. These women have tried to break down their own fears or outside judgments that often see women who want to come forward as too ambitious because women are still seen as less capable. This showed up in the experience of NK and IN, who was encouraged to apply to become a female rector by the oblique comments from her colleagues.⁵⁵ While progress has been made in recent years,

⁵⁵ Interview with NK, December 28th 2022 and IN, December 23th 2022

the glass ceiling still exists in many universities and other sectors. Breaking through will require a sustained effort by individuals, organizations, and society as a whole to address the underlying biases and systemic barriers that hold people back based on their gender, race, or other characteristics.

Conclusion

Breaking the glass ceiling is a term that refers to the act of shattering the invisible barriers that prevent certain groups of people, particularly women and minorities, from reaching high-level positions in their fields. It is a metaphor for the obstacles that these individuals face in their careers, often due to systemic biases and discrimination. In this study, the term 'stepping ladders' is used as an illustration that the implications of women's leadership for opportunities for other women are still not very promising, especially in terms of institutional and social factors. What is built is only personal awareness and self-confidence, which is also still limited to certain women. Not all women realize that women's leadership is a significant aspect that with a positive impact on them. This then affects their perspective on the issue of increasing women's representation in higher education.

Gender, race, and religion are complex and interconnected factors that have significant implications for discussions about minority rights in both America and Indonesia. Both countries have a history of struggles for minority rights, but the contexts and challenges faced by minority groups in each country are distinct and shaped by different cultural, historical, and political factors. Effective agency in leadership depends on a range of factors, including individual strengths and weaknesses, situational factors, and organizational culture and context. Ultimately, the most effective leaders are those who are able to adapt their style and approach to meet the needs of the situation and the people they are leading.

Female leaders in higher education in this study have used their agency effectively with the support of institutional forces and collective solidarity. Although this agency has not had a more significant impact in increasing the number of other females, It is important to underline that their presence has provided a more vibrant atmosphere and balanced gender awareness in educational sectors as well as other lecturers.

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