

Female Candidates, Social Capital, and Family Networks in The 2024 Indonesian Local Elections

Raegen Harahap

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau Indonesia
corresponding author E-mail: raegen.harahap@uin-suska.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the factors driving the political success of non-elite female candidates in the 2024 Ogan Ilir Regency Legislative Elections. While recent research on women's political representation in Indonesia often emphasizes elite-driven paths, this study highlights the agency of female candidates navigating the alternative route of non-elite. Through grassroots mobilization, cultural alignment, and strategic use of family resources, these female candidates build trust and engage diverse voter bases. Using the concepts of social capital, relational networks, and family-focused strategies, the study reveals that integrating these forms of capital allows candidates to adapt effectively to socio-political challenges. These findings suggest that non-elite female candidates can overcome structural barriers and achieve electoral success by leveraging personal connections and community networks. This study provides valuable insights into advancing women's representation in patriarchal societies and contributes to a broader discussion on gender equality in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Family Network; Female Candidates; Legislative Council, Ogan Ilir Regency; Social Capital

INTRODUCTION

In many developing countries, structural and patriarchal barriers are still very pervasive in limiting women's opportunities to enter and succeed in political contestation. Although globally women's participation in representative institutions has increased (Paxton & Hughes, 2022), the path they take to achieve political positions is often narrow, dominated by "elite-driven" paths that rely on the strength of family connections or the support of political dynasties (Jalalzai & Rincker, 2018; Labonne et al., 2021; Rai, 2012; Russell et al., 2023). Hess (2016) observes this phenomenon in the United States, noting that political dynasties are the safest path for women seeking political office. Similar patterns have emerged in various contexts, such as in

India (Basu, 2016), in Chile (Shair-Rosenfield & Hinojosa, 2014), in the Philippines (Labonne et al., 2021), and in thirteen democracies (Folke et al., 2021; Lee & McClean, 2022). Indonesia follows this pattern, with research by Buehler (2015), Dewi (2018), and Perludem (2018). It has been revealed that approximately 41% of female members in the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR-RI) rely on family relationships as their primary political capital. At the local level, (Ichsan Kabullah & Fajri, 2021) and (Wardani & Subekti, 2021) have well documented how women are often strategically promoted to consolidate dynastic influence rather than to advance authentic gender representation.

Beyond the elite-driven, women's alternative pathways to politics have become a topic that is gaining increasing attention in the study of political representation. Previous studies, such as Choi (2019), have elaborated on three main patterns extensively: elite paths that rely on family relationships and inherited political capital; grassroots paths built through social movements and community networks; and the middle path taken by middle-class professional women as part of career advancement. This pattern has been supported empirically by various studies. For example, in Indonesia, such as (Bayo, 2021), (Jakimow et al., 2023), (Yumasdaleni et al., 2022), and (Dewi et al., 2023), well-documented examples exist on how women candidates succeed by building political capacity and professionalism and personal narratives to build public trust.

In the United States, the use of social capital by non-elite female candidates is also growing, for example in studies of differences in participation between black and non-black women (Caiazza & Putnam, 2005; Pyeatt & Yanus, 2017), and in the Pacific Islands, the conversion of symbolic capital by developing the potential of professionalism into political power (Spark et al., 2019). In general, these studies show that non-elite women, including the typological framework formulated by Choi (2019), tend to assume that non-elite women take a dominant path—either through

community legitimacy or professional capital—as the primary strategy in political contestation, which oversimplifies the reality on the ground.

This study argues that the political trajectories of non-elite women cannot be fully captured by Choi's (2019) typology of single-path strategies, by practicing hybrid political strategies: integrating grassroots religious legitimacy, philanthropic reputation, and family networks that demonstrates in the 2024 Legislative Election in Ogan Ilir Regency, South Sumatra against the success of a female candidate: Zainab (PDI-P). In this case, these female candidates do not simply choose one path, but strategically combine grassroots legitimacy based on religion and philanthropy with the mobilization of family networks, resulting in a configuration of political forces that is flexible and adaptive to local social dynamics. In this study, we explored the agency of female candidates and how they shaped their own political trajectories, even in complex patriarchal contexts. As seen in the case of Ogan Ilir Regency, South Sumatra, by strategically utilizing non-traditional resources, non-elite female candidates such as Zainab (PDI-P) recorded significant electoral victories in 2019 and 2024.

The core of this study highlights perseverance and strategic adaptation as the key to success. Elections are a space where female candidates learn to build political legitimacy through field experience—even if they have to compete against incumbent male candidates and masculine political networks. In Ogan Ilir, this perseverance is reflected in Zainab's ability to participate repeatedly in the electoral cycle, accumulating social capital and voter trust through long-term engagement. As a former teacher and activist, she did not rely on only one path (such as the elite or grassroots). However, she integrated various forms of capital, such as non-dynastic family reputation (maternal philanthropy in mosque construction and social assistance), grassroots networks (collaboration with religious leaders and women's groups), and cultural strategies (alignment of religious values in campaigns). This hybrid approach allows her to erode gender bias in patriarchal societies while

building a loyal support base. Her years of political experience have not only enriched her capacity but also made her known to voters as a consistent figure, overcoming information barriers that often hurt female candidates.

Under such conditions, we employed an analytical framework that highlights the interactions between social capital (Coleman, 2009), relational capital (Putnam, 1995), and family networks (Jalalzai & Rincker, 2018). This study shows how the two candidates utilize different resources to overcome structural barriers. Zainab built a support base through her family's religious and philanthropic network. This woman's electability indicates that the strength of formal institutions does not always dictate the path of women's political success in the region; rather, it is also influenced by the strength of strategically formed, fragmented, and positioned informal networks. On that basis, this article poses two key research questions: (1) How do non-elite female candidates leverage social capital, relational networks, and family resources to overcome barriers to political participation? (2) In what ways do grassroots mobilization and culturally adaptive strategies enable women to establish political legitimacy beyond traditional elite paths?

In this article, the findings in this study not only contribute to the development of a theoretical framework on gender and political participation in patriarchal societies by showing that non-elite women's political paths not only follow the typologies that (Choi, 2019) has identified—the elite path, the grassroots path, and the middle path—but can also be hybrids that combine elements of these different paths. This study will broaden the understanding of social capital conversion, relational capital, and family networks by placing them in a local political context colored by patriarchal values and segmentation of the voter base. Zainab's case illustrates that in conditions where men still dominate formal institutions, women's political legitimacy can be built through the adaptation of strategies that integrate cultural values, non-dynastic family influence, and digital- and economic-based campaign innovations. Indirectly, this study challenges the dominant assumption that

women's political success in patriarchal societies can only be achieved through elite connections, and expands the theoretical framework by adding temporal dimensions, constituent segmentation, and hybridization of political paths as determinants of the success of women's representation. These findings also confirm that the democratization process in the context of patriarchy does not only depend on structural reforms, but also on the ability of women candidates to cultivate informal resources into legitimate and effective political capital. Through this case examination, this study expands the framework of (Choi, 2019) by placing "hybrid strategies" as a new analytical category relevant to understanding non-elite women's political agency in patriarchal societies. Therefore, the findings of this study not only enrich the gender and political literature in Southeast Asia but also offer a conceptual foothold for policy design that supports non-elite women to access and maintain political positions outside established elite structures.

This article is divided into five parts. After this introduction, the second part outlines the research methodology, which adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the political trajectories of two successful non-elite female candidates in Ogan Ilir Regency. This section details the reasons for selecting cases, data collection techniques (including semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field observations), and the analytical procedures used to identify key themes and strategies. The third part analyzes the dynamics and challenges of women's representation in Ogan Ilir Regency, including historical trends and contemporary barriers. The fourth section examines the case study in depth, documenting how a candidate's background and strategic approach made it possible to overcome systemic barriers and secure electoral victory. In this section, we explain how family reputation (distinct from dynastic power), grassroots involvement, and innovative campaign strategies create an alternative path to political success. The final section discusses the conclusions of our findings to improve women's political representation in Indonesia and similar patriarchal contexts, while identifying directions for

future research.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative case study approach to examine the political strategies of non-elite female candidates in the 2024 legislative election in Ogan Ilir Regency, South Sumatra, Indonesia. The study focused on successful candidates, Zainab (PDI-P), who secured seats without political dynastic connections. This case was selected through purposive sampling based on electoral success, non-elite backgrounds, and contrasting strategic approaches within the same electoral district. Data collection uses triangulation through three primary methods (Berends & Deken, 2021). First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants, including two female candidates, five campaign team members, three community leaders, and five voters. Second, the document analysis examines election results, campaign materials, media coverage, and historical data on women's representation. Third, field observations are carried out at campaign events, community meetings, and meetings where candidates interact with voters. The analysis process begins with the systematic organization and coding of the data using deductive codes from the conceptual framework and inductive codes that emerge during the analysis (Creswell et al., 2006). The thematic analysis identified patterns related to forms of capital mobilization, strategies for navigating gender barriers, and contextual factors that influence campaign effectiveness.

A comparative analysis then examines the similarities and differences between the two cases, focusing on how each candidate tailors their approach to the local context. The ethical procedure includes obtaining informed consent from all participants and offering pseudonyms, although both focus candidates choose to be identified by their real names. Data were triangulated to minimize bias, and reflexive practices addressed the researcher's position during the study. Limitations include the limited generalizations inherent in case studies, the potential influence of the election period on data collection,

and constraints in capturing all voter demographics (Busetto et al., 2020).

Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into alternative pathways for women's political participation in patriarchal contexts. By analyzing the electability of successful non-elite female candidates in different social, economic, and campaign strategy contexts, the study opens up a new analytical lens to understand the variations in grassroots-based political success in patriarchal societies. This approach allows the identification of factors that are both contextual and cross-case, such as the role of non-dynastic family networks, adaptation of strategies to voter segmentation, and the integration of cultural values with political innovation. Thus, this method expands the literature on women's political participation by showing that success is determined not only by access to resources but also by the ability to convert social and relational capital in different political landscapes strategically. This strategy yields insights that are difficult to achieve through a single case study, while underlining the value of comparative approaches as a tool to enrich theories of women's political representation in developing countries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

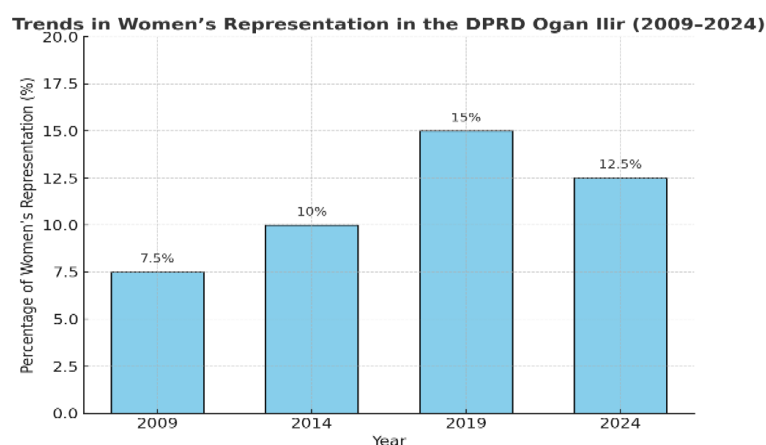
Women's Political Representation in Ogan Ilir Regency: Dynamics and Challenges

Ogan Ilir Regency, one of the 17 districts/cities in South Sumatra Province, was established through regional division in 2005. This division aims to improve the efficiency of the government and the implementation of public services in the regions. However, the culture of the people in Ogan Ilir is still heavily influenced by patriarchal values derived from religious values and traditional customs, which has a significant impact on women's participation in politics. The data presented in Graph 1 highlights the fluctuations in women's political representation in the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) from 2009 to 2024. These figures reveal ongoing challenges for women in achieving fair representation, despite intermittent

progress. In this context, the proportion of women's representation increased from 7.5% in 2009 to 15% in 2019, indicating a gradual shift in society's acceptance of women in leadership roles. However, this upward trend is not sustained, as representation declines to 12.5% in 2024, highlighting persistent structural and cultural barriers in the region (Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kabupaten Ogan Ilir, 2024).

The fluctuations in representation from year to year are in line with broader research findings that highlight a pool of female candidates who have connections to political elites. Candidates who do not have similar connections face significant obstacles, suggesting that the broader system remains unsupportive of women in politics. In addition, fluctuating representations reflect voter preferences shaped by ingrained cultural norms. While the reputation of family and social capital may temporarily alter perceptions, prolonged cultural skepticism of women's leadership in patriarchal societies limits their long-term impact. For example, in the 2024 election, Zainab's success underscores the power of private networks but also exposes the vulnerability of other female candidates who do not have those resources. Therefore, the percentage of women's representation shows progress but highlights the ongoing challenges in achieving gender equality.

Graph 1. Trends in Women's Representation in the Ogan Ilir DPRD



Source: KPU (General Election Commission), 2024

The 2024 Ogan Ilir Regional Election features 528 candidates vying for 40 district-level legislative candidates (DPRD) seats. Table 1 profiles the five selected female candidates, showing their diverse paths to political success. Rani Susilawati (Gerindra), Talitha Safa (Democrat), Zainab (PDI-P), Raden Ayu Amrina Rosyada (Hanura), and Dwi Rosalina (Golkar). Of the five female candidates, three are from political dynasties or have family ties to local elites (Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) Kabupaten Ogan Ilir, 2024). Zainab emerged as the elected candidate using a non-dynastic strategy. Therefore, the selection of these female candidates highlights how family reputations and innovative strategies interact with each other in achieving electoral success. For example, Zainab's grassroots approach resonated with a different voter base, demonstrating the adaptability required to navigate patriarchal contexts.

Table 1: Profile of Elected Women Candidates in the Ogan Ilir DPRD (2024)

Candidacy	Party	Voice	Background
Rani Susilawati	Gerindra	3.876	Elite families of local businesses
Talitha Safa	Democrat	3.764	Daughter of a member of the South Sumatra DPRD
Zainab	PDI-P	3.372	Elite/non-political dynasties
Randy O'Neill R.	Hanura	2.965	Political dynasty
Dwi Rosalina	Golkar	3.259	Party cadres

Source: KPU (General Election Commission), 2024

More interestingly, as Table 1 shows, these female candidates secured seats in elections for two terms (2019-2024 and 2024-2029), underlining their personal abilities and capacities as elected female politicians. Zainab, a politician from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), has managed to retain his seat for a second term. Zainab ran in constituencies with diverse voter turnout. As a former teacher and women's empowerment activist, she is known for her consistent advocacy for women's and children's

rights and promoting women's participation in regional development. Zainab also has a strong track record in women's organizations, including the Family Welfare Empowerment Program (PKK), where she actively mentors women's religious study groups.

The success stories of these female candidates reflect the complex socio-political dynamics in Ogan Ilir, especially in the context of challenges to women's electability. Women from families with established reputations are better equipped to navigate the patriarchal political environment, securing electoral trust more effectively. A decline in representation between 2019 and 2024 could indicate that individual strategies alone are insufficient to drive systemic change, particularly without broader institutional support for female candidates. Although there has been a brief increase in representation, the downward trend highlights deep-rooted structural challenges, such as the dominance of male political networks and limited capacity-building programs for women.

These two female candidates have successfully overcome structural constraints through intelligent and targeted adaptive strategies. One of the main strategies involves integrating into the local social order by leveraging the reputation of their prominent families, who have extensive networks, as well as through social, religious, and economic activities. This approach not only strengthens their relationship with voters but also fosters a sense of trust and emotional closeness with them. Through this strategy, they can gather voter sympathy without relying solely on political dynasties. By leveraging effective social adaptation strategies, community support, and personal branding, women in Ogan Ilir have great potential to shape local politics into a more inclusive, representative, and responsive force that meets the needs of the community. Therefore, the success of this candidate offers new hope for women in Ogan Ilir and other areas to advocate for their political rights and contribute more significantly to regional development.

Zainab Electoral Success: leveraging family, networking, and civil engagement

Zainab, born in 1987, came from a simple family, where she was raised as a farmer's child and later became a housewife. Historically, he officially entered the political stage in 2014 when he joined the Indonesian Justice and Unity Party (PKPI). At the time, he was running in another constituency, and he realized that his background as someone who was not from his constituency would make it difficult to get elected. In 2019, he moved to the area where he lived and subsequently ran for the DPRD Election in Constituency V of Ogan Ilir Regency. Although a newcomer to the Dapil, he successfully defended and secured his seat as a second legislative member, collecting the most votes in Electoral District V of Ogan Ilir Regency. Zainab won her election by a landslide, securing more than 2,973 votes. Despite being a newcomer, his vote count far exceeded that of the male candidates from the same constituency, particularly in Constituency V, Ogan Ilir Regency. Zainab's victory was even more impressive considering that the male incumbent, Sonedi Ariansyah, a two-term veteran, collected just under 2,335 votes, and Marzuki Abdul Karim only got 2,290 votes. (see Table 2).

Table 2. Total Votes in Constituency V of Ogan Ilir Regency (2024)

Elected Legislators	Party	Voting
Rani Susilawati	Gerindra	3.876
Zainab	The Struggle of the Struggle	3.372
Marzuki Abdul Karim	Hanura Festival	2.929
Arif Fahlevi	National Democratic Party (Nasdem)	2.683
Muhammad Ilham	Prosperous Justice Party	2.385
Huzaimin	Gerindra	2.285
Ahmad Rizki Aditiya	National Awakening Party	2.244

Source: KPU (General Election Commission), 2024

In reflecting on the success of her campaign, Zainab (Interview, December 9, 2024) attributed her achievements to "the seeds we have sown for decades." This statement refers to his family's long-rooted philanthropic and social contributions in Tanjung Batu, building a reputation as a family that cares and is committed to the well-being of the community. Zainab, Tartila's daughter—a respected local philanthropist—inherited a rich family heritage of values of devotion and generosity. Capitalizing on this legacy, Zainab launched her campaign as a natural successor to her family's philanthropic traditions, strengthening trust and loyalty among voters. His family's philanthropic legacy played a central role in building the foundation of his campaign. Over the years, his family's contributions in the form of mosque construction, assistance to the underprivileged, and support for social events have created a reservoir of goodwill among the people of Ogan Ilir. These philanthropic activities provide Zainab with a strong platform to reach out to her constituents. A resident of Tanjung Pinang Village, PM, stated, "Mrs. Zainab and her family are good to everyone." (Interview, December 9, 2024).

This philanthropic approach, instead of taking place in the months leading up to elections in 2019 and 2024, underscores its long-standing commitment to improving local welfare, which includes distributing essential items such as food packages, school supplies, and basic household items to families in need. Zainab also provides support for community infrastructure, such as funding for the installation of street lights and the provision of event tents for communal activities. This grassroots strategy reflects the broader patronage-based tactics common in Indonesian elections, where candidates often leverage personal or communal resources to build trust and loyalty among voters (Aspinall et al., 2021; Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2018; Ichsan Kabullah & Fajri, 2021; Warburton & Aspinall, 2019).

Zainab's strategy, however, is embedded in the cultural and social fabric of her community, which reflects a relational and long-term approach to patronage. Her beneficiaries are diverse, including women's groups,

underprivileged families, and local youth organizations, reinforcing her image as a leader who embodies empathy and inclusivity. A strong and well-organized campaign team significantly supports Zainab's outreach. Therefore, by framing herself as the successor to her family's legacy, Zainab was able to overcome gender bias in rural communities that are still dominated by male leadership. This sentiment is reinforced by his ongoing philanthropic efforts, which have allowed him to build legitimacy and win over conservative voters in Ogan Ilir.

The second resource Zainab uses in her campaign is an extensive family network that serves as a campaign team – made up of community, religious, and traditional leaders. This network is the central pillar in conveying Zainab's campaign message while strengthening her legitimacy in the eyes of voters. In forming the campaign team, he involved more than 70 members in Tanjung Pinang Village, about 40 members in Tanjung Lalang Village, and about 50 additional members in Constituency V, which includes two sub-districts. As Zainab revealed: *"I have many teams in Tanjung Pinang Village, which number about 70 people, and in Tanjung Lalang Village, around 40 people. Not to mention other areas outside the village. In Electoral District V, in those two districts, we have teams everywhere, although some are larger and others are smaller, with a total of about 50 people."* (Interview, December 9, 2024).

Our findings indicate that Zainab collaborates closely with community and religious leaders who have significant influence in the local community, particularly in strategic villages like Payaraman and Tanjung Batu. In addition, Zainab also worked closely with influential religious figures and community elders, taking advantage of their position to act as an intermediary between her and the electorate. This intermediary helps amplify its campaign message, ensuring that it reaches even remote villages.

At the same time, religious and traditional leaders who are members of the Zainab family network help provide more accurate insights into the needs and expectations of the community. With this collaboration, Zainab can design

policies and programs that are relevant and on target, in accordance with the aspirations of the local community. These figures, known as respected authorities, played a crucial role in building public trust in Zainab as a candidate who understood local values and was committed to the well-being of the people. Their support helps expand Zainab's reach in the local community, bridges communication between candidates and the community, and facilitates the delivery of compelling campaign vision, mission, and programs. Interestingly, all of these campaign teams are not only tasked with delivering the campaign message but also actively engaging with the community to build a stronger emotional connection between Zainab and her voters.

The team facilitates dialogue and organizes meetings with the community, as well as relevant activities, to strengthen Zainab's relationship with her constituents. This approach suggests that Zainab's strategy not only relies on family popularity but also leverages existing social and cultural structures to strengthen support. In practice, this strategy gives Zainab a significant advantage. Large campaign teams spread across different regions provide the flexibility to reach more voters. At the same time, collaboration with community leaders creates synergies that strengthen Zainab's position as a candidate supported by various segments of society. Thus, this strategy not only increases Zainab's visibility in the eyes of voters but also ensures that public support is fully optimized to increase her electability in political contests.

Nonetheless, the social capital, rooted in the family's reputation for philanthropy and having a successful team, has gone beyond transactional patronage to foster lasting relationships with its constituents, but this has not been enough to reach its constituents. In this case, the third strategy is Zainab, engaging in a comprehensive grassroots mobilization strategy that relies heavily on personal engagement and cultural alignment. In the months leading up to the 2024 elections, Zainab actively participated in various community

events, often held in local villages, Islamic study groups (*taklim majlis*). For example, during an event at a mosque in Tanjung Raja. The daily activities he engages in position him as an approachable leader. He explained, "*I actively participate in events organized by religious organizations by attending every one of their meetings.*" (Interview, December 9, 2024).

This consistent presence reinforces his image as a compassionate leader who genuinely cares about the development of society. Important. In this case, the strategy is firmly rooted in religious and cultural values, reflecting the traditional character of the Ogan Ilir community. By framing its contributions in the context of religious values, Zainab effectively reinforces its cultural legitimacy, deeply resonating with the traditional norms of its constituents. Zainab's grassroots approach goes beyond symbolic movements to include tangible initiatives. She organized programs that provided social assistance, including food packages, household items, and educational materials, especially targeting underprivileged families and women's groups. This strategy reflects the common patronage-based approach seen in Indonesian elections, but Zainab's campaign emphasizes relational and cultural relationships rather than purely transactional exchanges.

Zainab's existence is undoubtedly an extreme case. Drawing on his family's philanthropic heritage, he skillfully integrated their values into his campaigns, increasing his appeal among voters. By personalizing her outreach and engaging directly with local grassroots groups, she strengthens her relationships with the community. For example, Zainab collaborates with local organizations to improve infrastructure, such as installing street lights and supporting the development of public facilities. This effort strengthens his image as a leader who is deeply rooted in community service and care. Through the mobilization of her grassroots network, Zainab built a loyal voter base that values her alignment with traditional values and her sincere commitment to meeting local needs. His campaign shows how cultural continuity and grassroots engagement can effectively navigate the

complexities of local political dynamics in Indonesia. Through her leadership, Zainab has underlined the importance of tradition and community in securing electoral success, offering a model for female candidates to balance progressive leadership with respect for cultural norms.

CONCLUSION

Research on women's political representation in Indonesia generally focuses on structural and institutional factors, especially the "elite-driven" path that relies on family connections or political dynasties (Buehler, 2015; Dewi, 2018; Perludem, 2018). However, the study focuses on non-elite female candidate agencies, specifically how female candidates navigate patriarchal local contexts and create alternative pathways to political power. The study took a different path by focusing on non-elite female candidate agencies, specifically how female candidates harness social capital and form adaptive strategies to navigate patriarchal local politics, in the context of Ogan Ilir, where male power relations are still dominant and women's access to formal political resources is limited. The patronage of the elite is limited; Zainab's story shows that political victory is not solely the result of structural luck, but also the product of careful strategic calculation. Zainab departs from a different starting point, but operates in a space that often closes the door to female candidates without big names or established political capital. Zainab built her political move from the grassroots – her religious and philanthropic activities over the years became a source of moral legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. A vast network of families, though not part of a political dynasty, was strategically mobilized to expand support. Therefore, Zainab's success is not just about choosing one path, but creating a hybrid strategy that combines grassroots elements broadly.

Referring to the typology of (Bayo, 2021; Choi, 2019; Jakimow et al., 2023), which rigidly divides the political participation path of non-elite women. Non-elite female candidates typically take one of three main paths:

grassroots, middle, or elite. However, Zainab challenges this typology through a hybrid approach that combines elements from various paths. In this case, Zainab does not just rely on a single source of legitimacy. However, she strategically combines philanthropy-based family reputation, active involvement in religious networks, and community mobilization through traditional and religious leaders.

This hybrid approach enables Zainab to establish a credible political profile while reaching a segment of conservative voters that has been challenging for female candidates to access. This context confirms that the political success of non-elite women at the local level depends not only on perseverance and repeated participation in elections, as demonstrated in NTT (Bayo, 2021), in West Sumatera (Dewi et al., 2023), and in Medan (Yumasdaleni et al., 2022), but also on the ability to integrate different forms of capital adaptively to local socio-political dynamics. In Zainab's case, this layered grassroots strategy not only expanded the reach of the campaign but also built long-term emotional bonds with constituents, thereby eroding the gender bias that hindered acceptance of women's leadership. Thus, this case expands Choi's framework by revealing that the boundaries between lines of women's political participation are fluid and negotiable according to the context.

Another crucial finding in this study, which is no less important, is the disruption of the elite's path to power. In Ogan Ilir, where 41% of female legislators depend on dynastic connections, this indicates that hybrid strategies are effective in securing electoral victories. However, it must be admitted that they are not yet sufficient to break through broader institutional barriers. In this case, Zainab was able to prove that electoral success can be achieved through community-based mobilization and a non-political family reputation. His involvement in organizations such as the PKK and the taklim assembly is not just a campaign strategy, but a long-term investment in relational capital. This suggests that political parties can be a conduit for non-

elite women to move from the grassroots path to strategic positions, without relying on dynasties.

The lesson from Ogan Ilir suggests that perseverance alone is insufficient (Bayo, 2021); it requires the capacity to adapt and experiment with new strategies. Zainab, for example, combines a traditional approach (philanthropy) with innovation (campaign digitalization) to reach young constituents. Similar patterns may apply in other patriarchal regions of Indonesia, especially in areas with strong collaboration between women's empowerment organizations and civil society institutions. These non-formal spaces become critical sites for women to accumulate political capital when access to formal institutions is limited. Thus, the study confirms that behind structural challenges, women's agency can open up alternative pathways to political representation. Zainab's success is not just an individual victory, but proof that democratization in the patriarchal system requires the conversion of informal resources into inclusive political forces.

Zainab's success story in the 2024 political contest in Ogan Ilir Regency shows that a hybrid approach not only increases the chances of victory but also opens up a new understanding of non-elite political agency in the patriarchal system. This strategy confirms that women can position themselves as credible political actors without relying entirely on elite patronage or family political legacy. Furthermore, their success shows that social capital conversions can be a transformative mechanism to overcome limited access to formal political resources. However, these success stories do not remove the deep-rooted structural limitations. First, the private networks that underpin victory are fragile and difficult to maintain outside of election momentum. Second, institutional barriers continue to limit opportunities to maintain political positions in the long term. Thus, while hybrid strategies are effective as a gateway to the political arena, their sustainability requires stronger and more consistent institutional support.

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