



Marginalized Women in the Political Agenda of North Sumatra: Aspirations for welfare and Legal Protection

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the extent to which gubernatorial candidates in North Sumatra incorporate women's rights and welfare into their policy agendas, with specific attention to marginalized women. Although the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia mandates the state to safeguard the welfare of all citizens, many women in marginalized positions continue to experience limited access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and legal protection. Using a qualitative research design, this study draws on in-depth interviews with 12 marginalized women in Medan, including domestic workers, small-scale traders, women with disabilities, and housewives from economically disadvantaged households. The research explores women's expectations regarding gubernatorial policies that could improve their access to welfare services, education, healthcare, and legal safeguards. The findings indicate that patriarchal social structures, unequal access to public services, and ongoing gender-based violence remain dominant challenges for marginalized women in North Sumatra. Despite gradual improvements in gender equality, substantial disparities persist. While the policy platform of the gubernatorial candidate pair Muhammad Bobby Afif Nasution and Surya identifies women's empowerment as a strategic priority, the proposed initiatives lack clear operational frameworks. Conversely, the policy agenda of Edy Rahmayadi and Hasan Basri Sagala places limited emphasis on gender-related concerns. Marginalized women express a strong demand for policies that support skills development, access to micro-capital, and more effective legal protection, accompanied by transparent and accountable governance. This study highlights the need for more concrete and inclusive policy commitments to ensure that women's empowerment becomes an integral component of regional development in North Sumatra.

Keywords: Election, Marginalized, Politics, Protection, Women.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji sejauh mana calon gubernur Sumatera Utara mengintegrasikan isu hak dan kesejahteraan perempuan ke dalam agenda kebijakan mereka, dengan perhatian khusus pada perempuan marginal. Meskipun Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945 mewajibkan negara untuk melindungi dan menyejahterakan seluruh warga negara, kenyataannya banyak perempuan dalam kelompok marginal masih mengalami keterbatasan akses terhadap pendidikan, layanan kesehatan, peluang ekonomi, serta perlindungan hukum. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik wawancara mendalam terhadap perempuan marginal, yang meliputi pekerja rumah tangga, pedagang kecil, perempuan penyandang disabilitas, serta ibu rumah tangga dari keluarga berpenghasilan rendah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali harapan perempuan terhadap kebijakan calon gubernur yang berpotensi meningkatkan akses mereka terhadap kesejahteraan, pendidikan, kesehatan, dan perlindungan hukum. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa struktur sosial patriarkal, ketimpangan akses terhadap layanan publik, serta



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masih maraknya kekerasan berbasis gender merupakan tantangan utama yang dihadapi perempuan marginal di Sumatera Utara. Meskipun terdapat perbaikan secara bertahap dalam upaya mewujudkan kesetaraan gender, kesenjangan yang ada masih cukup signifikan. Platform kebijakan pasangan calon gubernur Muhammad Bobby Afif Nasution dan Surya menempatkan pemberdayaan perempuan sebagai prioritas strategis, namun belum didukung oleh kerangka implementasi yang jelas. Sebaliknya, agenda kebijakan pasangan Edy Rahmayadi dan Hasan Basri Sagala relatif minim dalam menyoroti isu-isu gender. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya komitmen kebijakan yang lebih konkret, inklusif, dan terukur agar pemberdayaan perempuan dapat menjadi bagian integral dari pembangunan daerah di Sumatera Utara.

Kata kunci: Marginal, Pemilihan, Perempuan, Perlindungan, Politik.

1. Introduction

The establishment of the Indonesian state is fundamentally aimed at ensuring a decent and prosperous life for all citizens. This principle is explicitly affirmed in Article 27 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which guarantees every citizen the right to employment and a decent livelihood. Furthermore, Article 28I paragraph (4) of the Constitution emphasizes that the protection, promotion, enforcement, and fulfillment of human rights constitute the responsibility of the state. These constitutional provisions clearly indicate that the state bears an obligation to protect and promote the welfare of all citizens without exception, including women.

Women's rights and welfare have become a central concern in global social and political discourse, particularly following the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW serves as a comprehensive legal framework that encourages states to formulate and implement policies supporting women's empowerment across political, economic, and social spheres. Through binding reporting and evaluation mechanisms, CEDAW reinforces state accountability in advancing gender equality and safeguarding women's rights.¹ At the national level, Indonesia has incorporated these principles into its legal framework, including Law No. 11 of 2009 on Social Welfare, which assigns responsibility to both central and regional governments to implement inclusive welfare policies, explicitly encompassing women and other vulnerable groups.²

Despite these normative commitments, gender-based inequalities remain prevalent in Indonesia. Data from the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan) indicate that women continue to experience high levels of gender-based violence, including psychological, physical, sexual, and economic abuse.³ These conditions demonstrate that state protection mechanisms have not yet functioned optimally, particularly for women in marginalized positions.

The issue of women's welfare is especially relevant within the context of local electoral politics. In the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, female voters constituted a numerical majority, accounting for more than half of the total registered electorate.⁴ This demographic reality underscores the strategic and normative importance of integrating women's issues into electoral agendas. Women's empowerment, understood as the process of enhancing women's capacity to access resources, exercise agency, and improve their quality of life, is therefore not only a matter of social justice but also a critical dimension of democratic governance.⁵

Nevertheless, structural barriers continue to hinder women's empowerment. Patriarchal social norms, limited access to education, economic inequality, and insufficient institutional support constrain women's participation in public life and restrict their access to welfare resources.⁶ These obstacles are particularly pronounced among marginalized women, including domestic workers, informal traders, women with

¹ L. M. Gandhi Lopian, 2012, *Disiplin Hukum yang Mewujudkan Kesetaraan dan Keadilan Gender*, Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, page 45.

² Law No. 11 of 2009 on Social Welfare, Articles 6–7.

³ National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan), 2024, *Catahu 2023: Annual Report on Violence against Women*, Jakarta: Komnas Perempuan, page 12.

⁴ Nizar Aldi, 2025, "KPU Sets Permanent Voter List for North Sumatra Gubernatorial Election," *Detik Sumut*, page 1.

⁵ A. Suhardi, 2019, Empowerment of Marginalized Women Through Life Skills Education Programs, *An-Nisa*, Vol 10 (1), page 67.

⁶ Agung Utama and Titin Hera Handayani, 2016, Women's Empowerment Models for Poor Communities, *Jurnal Penelitian Humaniora*, Vol 19 (2), page 154.

disabilities, and women from low-income households, who face intersecting forms of discrimination based on gender, class, and social status.

Within political campaigns, gender issues are frequently addressed in a symbolic or rhetorical manner, without being translated into concrete and measurable policy commitments. Previous studies indicate that although women's political participation has increased, gender-responsive and inclusive policies have yet to become a consistent priority in local governance.⁷ As a result, marginalized women often remain excluded from policy formulation processes, despite their significant role in social and economic development.

Against this background, this study seeks to analyze how gubernatorial candidates in North Sumatra articulate policies related to women's rights and welfare, and to assess the extent to which gender issues are substantively incorporated into their political agendas. Furthermore, this research explores the aspirations of marginalized women regarding policies that could enhance their access to welfare, education, healthcare, and legal protection. By foregrounding the voices of marginalized women, this study aims to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of gender-responsive governance and to provide policy-relevant insights for regional development in North Sumatra.

2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine the incorporation of women's rights and welfare into the policy agendas of gubernatorial candidates in North Sumatra, with particular emphasis on marginalized women. A qualitative design is considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of lived experiences, perceptions, and aspirations that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods.⁸ This approach allows the study to foreground women's voices, especially those who are often excluded from formal policy-making processes.

The research was conducted in several districts and municipalities in North Sumatra that represent diverse socio-economic conditions. The subjects of this study consist of marginalized women, including domestic workers, small-scale informal traders, women with disabilities, and housewives from low-income households. These groups were selected using purposive sampling, based on criteria relevant to the research objectives, namely women who experience structural barriers in accessing welfare services, education, healthcare, and legal protection.⁹

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guidelines. This technique enabled respondents to freely express their experiences and expectations while allowing the researcher to maintain focus on key research themes. Interviews explored respondents' perceptions of women's welfare, experiences of marginalization, access to public services, and expectations toward gubernatorial policies related to women's empowerment and protection. In addition to interviews, document analysis was conducted on policy platforms, campaign materials, and public statements of the gubernatorial candidate pairs to identify how women's issues were framed within their political agendas.¹⁰

The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. Interview transcripts and documents were systematically coded, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring patterns and themes related to women's welfare, protection, and political representation.¹¹ To ensure data validity, triangulation was applied by comparing interview findings with documentary evidence and relevant secondary sources. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process by ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity of all research participants.

Consistent with the qualitative research design and purposive sampling strategy applied in this study, the selection of informants was based on their direct experiences with structural marginalization and limited access to welfare-related public services. In total, this study involved twelve informants who were identified as belonging to marginalized groups relevant to the research objectives.

The informants were classified into four categories of marginalized women. The first category consisted of domestic workers, who are particularly vulnerable due to informal employment arrangements and limited labor protection. The second category included women engaged in informal economic activities, such as small-scale traders and micro-entrepreneurs, who commonly experience income instability and restricted

⁷ Gustiana A. Kambo, 2017, Strengthening Women's Identity in Local Elections, *The Politics: Journal of Political Science*, Vol 3 (1), page 1.

⁸ Lexy J. Moleong, 2017, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, page 6.

⁹ Sugiyono, 2019, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, Bandung: Alfabeta, page 85.

¹⁰ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2018, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, California: Sage Publications, page 121.

¹¹ Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, 2014, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, California: Sage Publications, page 31.

access to social security programs. The third category comprised women with disabilities, who face compounded forms of marginalization related to accessibility barriers, social stigma, and unequal access to public services. The fourth category involved housewives from low-income households, whose economic dependency and limited access to education, healthcare, and legal protection place them in a structurally vulnerable position.

In addition to marginalized women, this study also engaged key informants from partner institutions that actively work on women's issues at the grassroots level. These partners included representatives from women's rights non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, disability advocacy groups, legal aid institutions, and local election monitoring bodies. Their perspectives provided important contextual and institutional insights into policy implementation, structural constraints, and the broader political dynamics surrounding women's welfare and protection in North Sumatra. All participants were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and to comply with ethical research standards.

3. Result and Discussion

This study reveals that marginalized women in North Sumatra experience persistent and interconnected forms of vulnerability related to welfare, access to public services, and legal protection. Based on interviews with twelve informants across four categories of marginalized women, the findings demonstrate that socio-economic marginalization is not solely caused by individual limitations, but rather by structural and institutional factors that systematically disadvantage women.

Domestic workers reported unstable income, lack of employment contracts, and the absence of social security coverage. Most informants in this category indicated that their work is perceived as informal and unregulated, resulting in limited recognition by the state and exclusion from labor protection mechanisms. Access to healthcare and social assistance programs was described as bureaucratically complex and often dependent on intermediaries, such as community leaders or informal networks.

Women engaged in informal economic activities, including small-scale traders and micro-entrepreneurs, emphasized economic insecurity as a dominant concern. While several informants demonstrated entrepreneurial capacity, they faced constraints related to limited access to capital, lack of skills training, and minimal government support. Informants highlighted that existing empowerment programs were either not accessible or not designed to accommodate the realities of informal sector workers.

Women with disabilities experienced compounded forms of marginalization. In addition to economic vulnerability, they reported physical and social barriers, including inaccessible public facilities, discriminatory attitudes, and limited health services tailored to their needs. Informants expressed that disability-related policies were often implemented symbolically without effective monitoring or enforcement.

Housewives from low-income households described economic dependency and restricted decision-making power within the household. Many reported limited awareness of welfare programs and legal protection mechanisms, particularly in cases of domestic violence or economic neglect. Across all categories, informants expressed a perception that state protection remains uneven and insufficient.

Analysis of gubernatorial candidates' policy documents and public statements indicates differing levels of engagement with women's issues. The policy platform of Muhammad Bobby Afif Nasution and Surya explicitly acknowledges women's empowerment, particularly in relation to economic participation and family welfare. However, the proposed programs lack detailed implementation strategies, indicators, and monitoring mechanisms. Conversely, the policy agenda of Edy Rahmayadi and Hasan Basri Sagala provides limited attention to women-specific concerns, with gender-related issues largely absent from core development priorities.

From the results, this study identifies four principal findings:

First, patriarchal social structures continue to shape women's lived experiences and restrict their access to resources. Informants consistently reported that cultural expectations position women primarily within domestic roles, limiting opportunities for education, employment, and political participation. These norms contribute to women's economic dependency and reinforce unequal power relations within households and communities.¹²

Second, there is a significant gap between legal frameworks and practical implementation. Although Indonesia has enacted laws and policies aimed at promoting gender equality and social welfare, marginalized women experience limited protection in practice. Bureaucratic barriers, lack of information, and weak institutional coordination hinder effective policy

¹² L. M. Gandhi Lopian, 2012, *Disiplin Hukum yang Mewujudkan Kesetaraan dan Keadilan Gender*, Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, page 52.

delivery.¹³

Third, welfare and empowerment programs are often designed without adequate consideration of marginalized women's realities. Informants indicated that government programs frequently fail to address structural constraints, such as informal employment status, disability, and limited education. As a result, policy interventions tend to benefit women who are already relatively advantaged, while marginalized women remain excluded.¹⁴

Fourth, women's issues remain insufficiently institutionalized within local electoral politics. Despite women constituting a majority of voters, their specific needs are not systematically integrated into policy agendas. Gender issues are frequently framed as complementary or secondary, rather than as central components of regional development.¹⁵ This contributes to a cycle in which women's political significance is recognized symbolically but not substantively.

The findings of this study reinforce existing scholarship on women's empowerment and gender inequality, particularly in the context of local governance. Women's empowerment must be understood as a multidimensional process that encompasses access to economic resources, legal protection, education, and political participation.¹⁶ The persistent marginalization experienced by women in North Sumatra indicates that empowerment initiatives remain fragmented and insufficiently institutionalized.

The dominance of patriarchal norms highlights the importance of gender-sensitive policy frameworks that address structural inequalities rather than focusing solely on individual capacity-building. Without challenging social norms and institutional biases, empowerment programs risk reproducing existing power imbalances. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing that gender equality requires both legal reform and cultural transformation.¹⁷

The limited integration of women's issues into gubernatorial policy agendas reflects broader challenges in local electoral politics. Political actors often adopt gender-related narratives to attract female voters, yet fail to translate these commitments into concrete policy measures. This symbolic inclusion undermines the potential of democratic processes to serve as instruments of social transformation.¹⁸

Furthermore, the experiences of marginalized women underscore the need for inclusive and context-sensitive policy design. Skills development, access to micro-capital, and effective legal aid are essential components of empowerment strategies, particularly for women in informal and vulnerable sectors.¹⁹ These interventions must be accompanied by transparent governance mechanisms and clear accountability structures to ensure sustainability and effectiveness.

By centering the voices of marginalized women, this study contributes to the discourse on gender-responsive governance and local development. Integrating women's empowerment as a core development priority is not only a matter of social justice but also a prerequisite for inclusive and sustainable regional growth. Strengthening political commitment, institutional capacity, and participatory mechanisms is therefore essential to ensuring that women's rights and welfare are substantively realized in North Sumatra.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the welfare and protection of marginalized women in North Sumatra remain insufficiently addressed within local governance and electoral policy agendas. Despite constitutional and legal guarantees, structural barriers rooted in patriarchy, economic inequality, and institutional weaknesses continue to limit women's access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and legal protection. Although women constitute a majority of the electorate, their needs are often treated symbolically in political campaigns rather than translated into concrete and measurable policy commitments, perpetuating the marginalization of informal workers, women with disabilities, and low-income housewives. The study emphasizes that women's

¹³ Abdulkadir Muhammad, 2011, *Hukum Perdata Indonesia*, Bandung: Citra Aditya Bakti, page 197.

¹⁴ Agung Utama and Titin Hera Handayani, 2016, Women's Empowerment Models for Poor Communities, *Jurnal Penelitian Humaniora*, Vol 19 (2), page 160.

¹⁵ Gustiana A. Kambo, 2017, Strengthening Women's Identity in Local Elections, *The Politics: Journal of Political Science*, Vol 3 (1), page 5.

¹⁶ A. Suhardi, 2019, Empowerment of Marginalized Women Through Life Skills Education Programs, *An-Nisa*, Vol 10 (1), page 75.

¹⁷ Abdulkadir Muhammad, 2011, *Hukum Perdata Indonesia*, Bandung: Citra Aditya Bakti, page 203.

¹⁸ Muchtar A. H. Labetubun and Sabri Fataruba, 2016, Gender and Local Electoral Politics, *Jurnal Hukum dan Pembangunan*, Vol 22 (2), page 7.

¹⁹ Agung Utama and Titin Hera Handayani, 2016, Women's Empowerment Models for Poor Communities, *Jurnal Penelitian Humaniora*, Vol 19 (2), page 165.

empowerment must move beyond rhetoric toward inclusive, context-sensitive policies supported by clear implementation frameworks and accountability mechanisms. Strengthening political commitment, institutional capacity, and meaningful participation of marginalized women is therefore essential to achieving equitable and sustainable regional development in North Sumatra.

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