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## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/18716

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/18716>



### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### TIMORESE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE 2018-2023

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#### Manuscript Info

##### Manuscript History

Received: 15 March 2024

Final Accepted: 18 April 2024

Published: May 2024

##### Key words:-

Women's Participation, Politics, Gender Equality

#### Abstract

Women's participation in political life as an experience. In the two decades of self-determination, the era of national development is very important to raise Timorese potential women in the political field to contribute to national development. This research used several theories such as International Organization Theory, Feminism Theory, Gender Equality Theory, Participation Theory, Political Participation and Political Science Theory. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method, first and secondary sources of data and techniques of data collection are done through interviews of potential women from CNRT party, Fronte-Mudanca party, head of Bemori-Dili village, and the data is also collected from documents, books, websites, the internet, news and newspapers on Timorese women in politics. The findings of this research show that women's participation in political life in Timor-Leste has started based on their participation in village leadership, political party structures and members of the national parliament. Gender equality continues to be promoted by various entities to raise women's involvement in all aspects of life. This participation shows a positive act of democracy of Timorese women, however, they still lack opportunities, material conditions, including formal resources that can show the quality of women at national and international levels.

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#### Introduction:-

Timor-Leste, officially the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, is a small country located in Southeast Asia. It comprises the eastern half of the island of Timor, of which the western half is administered by Indonesia, the exclave of Oecusse on the island's north-western half, and the minor islands of Atauro and Jaco. Australia is the country's southern neighbor, separated by the Timor Sea. The country's size is 14,874 square kilometers (5,743 sq mi). Dili is its capital and largest city.

Timor-Leste is a member of the United Nations and also a member of other International organization. They all are working closely together towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. One of the goals to be achieved is the gender equality and support for the women's participation in political life. Therefore, women's participation in political life as part of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in the section 16 and 17 states that (1). All citizens are equal before the law, shall exercise the same rights and shall be subject to the same duties (2). No one shall be

discriminated against on grounds of colour, race, marital status, gender, ethnical origin, language, social or economic status, political or ideological convictions, religion, education and physical or mental condition.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In the section 7 of the Convention argues that States parties must take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the public life and policy of the country, and in particular to guarantee the same rights as men; (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

Women and men shall have the same rights and duties in all areas of family, political, economic, social and cultural life. The State parties must take all good measures to guarantee the women's rights in all matters equal to men without any form discrimination, women must be given the opportunity to represent their governments at the national and international levels<sup>2</sup>.

The objectives of this study are to promote the quality of potential women in political life, with the knowledge to make new findings for gender equality that should be established equally and as a way of investigation, evidence or testing to find out the accuracy of the scientific problems existing in the patriarchal system that affect women themselves.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Definition of Theory**

In general, theory is a conceptual system that shows that there is a relationship between concepts that help us understand a phenomenon. It is a well-substantiated explanation of some aspect of the natural world; an organized system of accepted knowledge that applies in a variety of circumstances to explain a specific set of phenomena. It can also be simply defined as a process of developing ideas that helps us explain how and why an event takes place.

Based on the definition of theory stated above, the researcher would like to present several theories used in the research in order to better describe women's participation in political activities in the country. Thus, the theory are international organization theory, feminism theory, the concept of gender and equality and theory of political participation.

### **International Organization Theory**

According to Clive Archer (2001) in his book entitled *International Organizations*, the role of international organizations is divided into three categories, namely:

- a) As a tools, an international organization applies the domestic or foreign policy instruments of member countries of the organization.
- b) As an arena (forum), as an international organization, the role of an arena is that an international organization can provide a forum where every member of the organization can gather and discuss problematic issues which then results in approval or rejection.
- c) As an actor means that every international organization is an entity or form of independent actor. The definition of independent here means that an international organization can carry out a series of policies and make decisions without being influenced by outside parties.<sup>3</sup>

### **Feminism Theory**

Feminism is a women's movement which demands emancipation or equal and fair rights with men. The definition of feminism itself according to Najmah and Sai'dah in the book entitled "Revision of Women's Politics" (2003. p. 34) "Feminism is a demanding movement full equality of rights between women and men".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Constitution of Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, 2002.

<sup>2</sup>International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. (CEDAW), part II (section 7) accessed on 9/09/2022.

<sup>3</sup>Clive Archer. 2001. "International Organization". Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane, London. p. 68

<sup>4</sup>Najmah and Sai'dah in his book entitled "Revision of Women's Politics" (2003. p. 34)

The definition of feminism can change due to the understanding or views of feminists which are based on historical and cultural realities, as well as the level of awareness, perception and behavior. Even among women of almost the same gender, there are differences of opinion and debate regarding feminist thought, some based on reasons (for example cultural roots) of patriarchy and male domination, and until the final resolution of women's struggle for environmental non-exploitation, class freedom, background, race, and gender.

It must be acknowledged that Timor-Leste is a culture that upholds patriarchal culture. The existence of patriarchal culture is a form of social construction in the life of Timorese society which then gives rise to the notion of gender discrimination against women, in this case gender inequality. Women are seen as weak subjects, low in dignity and have no the same right as men. The reality of the problem of gender inequality is very complex and developing across country. These problems include education, the economy, politics, careers, opportunities and all forms of issues related to gender discrimination. Generally, this all is formed in a patriarchal social and cultural system.

### **The Concept of Gender and Equality**

The theory, concept, and politics of gender equality can be understood as part of the long-term historical struggle for equality and democracy, but with a focus on equality between and democracy among women and men, and genders more generally. The reference to democracy is evident in the politics of equal political representation, though often seen in many societies and historical periods as applying only to adult males. Gender equality entails not only political representation and political leadership, for example, by parliamentary election, but also rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation, decision-making, valuation of behaviors, aspirations and needs of women, men, and further genders, and freedom from violence. Thus, the elaboration of gender equality is closely aligned with the development of gendered citizenship, seen as inclusive of political and economic entitlements, access, and belonging and encompassing rights and obligations. In the light of the historical exclusions and marginalization of women, full inclusion of women citizens requires addressing basic structures of gender inequality throughout societies, for example, questions of care, dependency, and interdependency in and across public and private spheres, and their interrelations.

### **Theory of Political Participation**

Participation comes from the Latin word "pars and capere" which means "take part" or a role in an activity or state political activities. In English, it also means take part or play a role in state political activities. Political participation is an important aspect of democracy. Political decisions are normally made and implemented by the government regarding and affects people's lives, then those people have the right to participate determine the content of political decisions.

Political participation is a characteristic of modernization political. There are political decisions made and implemented by government concerns and influences the lives of citizens, citizens have the right to participate in determining the content of decisions political. The political participation in general is possible defined as the activities of a person or group of people to participate actively in political activities. According to Samuel P. Huntington and Joan M. Nelson cited in Budiardjo (2007), political participation is the activity of citizens acting as individuals, intended to influence government decision making.<sup>5</sup>

This activity includes actions such as voting in elections, attend a general meeting, become a member of a party or group interests, establishing contact with officials government or members of parliament, and so on.

### **Research Methods:-**

The methods are the techniques used to gather necessary information in the field. Thus, the researcher used descriptive qualitative method in order to how the gender and equality can be promoted through women's participation in politics. The sources of data were taken from primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from conducting the research in the field through observation, interview and documentation. Meanwhile, the secondary data was taken from journal, articles books and other related literature.

<sup>5</sup>Budiardjo, M. (2007). Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Politik. Jakarta: PT. Gramedia Pustaka Utama

## Results And Discussion:-

In this session, the researcher would like to present and discuss over women's participation in political activities name through village election, political parties organization and parliamentary election.

### Women's Participation in Politics through the Village Election

Women's participation in politics is through various means one of which is through the village election as a fundamental right that cannot be denied by anyone because it has been guaranteed by the country's constitution and the Law Number 9 / 2016 of the village election. Women have the right to be elected and they also have the right to choose their village leaders as part of their political participation in country's democracy. **Rush and Althof(...)** state that political participation is an active participation in political life by means of choosing national and local leaders to make public decisions and policies.

In interviewing with some women (the village leaders) in Dili Municipality, they informed that women's participation in political activities through the village elections has shown a great participation that promotes a very high quality of the balanced democracy process in Timor-Leste because they (women) have the opportunity to compete against men in the village election every period.

In addition, women's participation in village elections as a means of participating in political activities to perform the democratic process that respects freedom and gender equality in accordance with the applicable laws and rules. Generally, the women's participation village election is not because of the rights as written in the law only, they however, are also willing to be leaders to lead their own villages like men. Some women were successfully elected as the head of villages due to several factors. Firstly, the support and encouragement of their family and society. Secondly, their own experiences and knowledge gained from many different trainings and empowerment programs provided by various entities such as academics, governmental and non governmental organizations, national and international agencies and the others that encouraged them to get involved and compete in the village election.

### Women's participation in politics through political party organizations

In general, it can be said that a political party is an organized group whose members share different orientations, values, and the same ideals. The goal of this group is to gain political power and seize political position with constitutional way to implement the program (Budiardjo, 2008, p. 403).

Women's participation in politics through political party organizations has also become the focus of increasing attention in efforts to achieve gender equality and better representation. It is one of the very common issues in Timor-Leste where the country adopted liberal democracy. The women's participation in political activities as good citizens of the country to manifest a good democratic values. Political participation can be an essential tool to protect the freedom of people, economic interest and ensure an effective government system. Political parties are a means of political recruitment. In this way, the parties can attract as many as members by spreading its visions to engage with different groups such as workers, farmers, youth, academics, women groups and others.

Based on the results of the interview, the women informed that they are interested in participating in the parties' structure because of the vision of parties they join. All the parties in the country may be different in terms of programs, however, they (parties) have something in common that is the vision to empower Timorese women in all sectors of life, including in politics. Therefore, many Timorese women now believe that political parties are the only way to make a social change. They also believe that being involved in the parties may change their own lives and the life of society. The other factors such as the relationship among political party administrators, families and women also play very important roles in pushing women interests in political parties structure. The support of family and parties toward women as a great effort in fighting for women's rights in order to build a positive image democracy that promotes gender and equality in all sectors of life including politics.

### Women's participation in the politics through the Parliamentary elections

In terms of community customs, generally a female is elected as a leader because he/she supported by political parties who win general elections such as national parliament elections, so women should be very closer to any political party which they join. Women's participation in the politics through the parliamentary elections continues increasing every period. For instance, in 2012 there were only 36% women participated in politics compared to today which now achieving 38%.

In addition, according to the STAE Report, there were 48% of women participating in the 2022 general elections as active voters in the political situation of Timor-Leste.

This number shows very positive women's participation in politics. The general elections in Timor-Leste are always participated by the women who could legally act both as voters and as members of the national parliament or government. According to the law of political parties, women should occupy the third list of all parties who compete in the general parliamentary elections and they could be the voters to participate in any elections as well.

Moreover, women elected as members of the national parliament from 2018 were 38% that filled 30% of the United Nations recommendation regarding women's participation in politics. However, Timor-Leste has been able to achieve the international convention goal although the country is still in the development process with sufficient human resources, but it shows to the international world that women's participation in politics has changed significantly compared to other developed and democratic countries.

The analysis and approach show that even if Timor-Leste as a young country in Southeast Asia but it has already fulfilled the international convention mainly CEDAW and the constitution RDTL to increase women's participation in political life to achieve the sustainable development goals.

### **Conclusion And Suggestions:-**

#### **Conclusion:-**

Timor-Leste, officially the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, is a small country located in Southeast Asia. It must be acknowledged that Timor-Leste is a culture that upholds patriarchal culture. The existence of patriarchal culture is a form of social construction in the life of Timorese society which then gives rise to the notion of gender discrimination against women, in this case gender inequality.

The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste in the section 16 and 17 states that (1). All citizens are equal before the law, shall exercise the same rights and shall be subject to the same duties (2). No one shall be discriminated against on grounds of colour, race, marital status, gender, ethnical origin, language, social or economic status, political or ideological convictions, religion, education and physical or mental condition. Women's participation in political activities marks a good and balanced democracy. In the two decades of self-determination, the era of national development is very important to raise Timorese potential women in the political field to contribute to national development.

#### **Suggestions:-**

Timor-Leste has had many conditions to promote social and political participation to achieve sustainable development goals for women's empowerment including in the law, legislation, international conventions that have been ratified by the country. However, the research findings showed that women's empowerment needs to continue to be supported by all entities because it sees many aspects of the quantity of participation but the reality of women elected is very low.

#### **References:-**

1. Constitution of Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, 2002
2. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. (CEDAW), part II (section 7) accessed on 9/09/2022.
3. Cliver Archer. 2001. "International Organization". Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane, London. p. 68
4. Najmah and Sai'dah in his book entitled "Revision of Women's Politics" (2003. p. 34).