



## MATERNALISM, THE HIJAB, AND CITIZENSHIP: A CRITIQUE OF GENDER POLITICS PRACTICES IN INDONESIA

## MATERNALISME, HIJAB, DAN KEWARGANEGARAAN: KRITIK TERHADAP PRAKTIK POLITIK GENDER DI INDONESIA

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### Abstract

This article examines political practices concerning gender issues in Indonesia by highlighting the roles of maternalism (ibuisme) and the hijab as symbolic political instruments. Maternalism positions women within the social construction of nurturing “mothers of the nation,” while the hijab functions as a symbol of religiosity and cultural identity used to strengthen electoral legitimacy. Although these symbols may provide women with access and acceptance in political spaces, they often limit the meaning of women’s participation by emphasizing symbolic representation rather than substantive capability and political ideas. This analysis employs a qualitative approach based on a literature review of academic studies on political representation, identity politics, patriarchy, and citizenship. The findings indicate that maternalism and the hijab reflect the persistent dominance of patriarchal culture in Indonesian politics, resulting in gender-biased forms of female citizenship. Therefore, critical awareness and deeper reflection are needed to ensure that women’s representation in politics does not remain merely symbolic but instead fosters substantive participation for a more inclusive democracy.

**Keywords :** Maternalism, Hijab, Patriarchy, Gender, Citizenship, Indonesian Politics.

### Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas praktik politik terkait isu gender di Indonesia dengan menyoroti peran ibuisme dan jilbab sebagai instrumen politik simbolik. Ibuisme menempatkan perempuan pada konstruksi sosial sebagai ibu bangsa yang penuh kasih dan mengayomi, sementara jilbab berfungsi sebagai simbol religiusitas dan identitas kultural yang digunakan untuk memperkuat legitimasi elektoral. Kedua simbol ini, meskipun memberikan akses bagi perempuan untuk diterima di ruang politik, seringkali membatasi makna keterlibatan mereka karena lebih menekankan aspek simbolis ketimbang kapabilitas dan gagasan substantif. Analisis ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dengan menelaah literatur akademik tentang representasi politik, politik identitas, patriarki, dan kewarganegaraan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa ibuisme dan jilbab merefleksikan kuatnya budaya patriarki yang masih mendominasi politik Indonesia, sehingga praktik kewarganegaraan perempuan cenderung bias gender. Oleh karena itu, perlu adanya kritik mendalam dan kesadaran kolektif agar representasi perempuan dalam politik tidak hanya berhenti pada tataran simbolik, melainkan mampu mewujudkan partisipasi substantif demi demokrasi yang lebih inklusif.



**Kata Kunci :** Ibuisme, Jilbab, Patriarki, Gender, Kewarganegaraan, Politik Indonesia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, Indonesian democracy has entered a promising phase of development in terms of gender representation and political equality. However, despite the existence of a legislative quota mandating a minimum of 30% female representation, the reality on the ground shows that women's participation often remains limited to symbolic and identity-based spaces rather than achieving full substantive equality.

The dominant patriarchal culture in Indonesian society shapes public perceptions of women's roles. Women are framed as moral guardians, children's educators, and "mothers of the nation," a position strongly articulated through the concept of ibuisme (motherism) and the use of religious symbols such as the hijab. Ibuisme has deep historical roots within state and societal political practices, where women's roles as wives and mothers are frequently used as political capital, while their identities and capacities as thinkers and policymakers are often marginalized. The case study "Neo-Ibuism in Indonesian Politics: Election Campaigns of Wives of Regional Heads in West Sumatra in 2019" demonstrates how the political visibility of wives of public officials is often derived from their husbands' positions and how ibuisme continues to be reproduced in political campaigns.

Meanwhile, the hijab as a religious symbol and identity marker has become embedded in public political discourse. Beyond its religious obligation, the hijab is strategically used in political contests such as regional elections, legislative elections, and public campaigns. The case study "The Politicization of the Hijab in Regional Election Contests" reveals that female candidates often use the hijab symbolically to appeal to Muslim voters, even when their substantive competencies or policy platforms receive less attention.

The intersection between ibuisme, the hijab, and the notion of citizenship is crucial to analyze. Ideally, citizenship should encompass equal rights, obligations, and political participation for all individuals. Yet in Indonesia, gendered and cultural/religious identity symbols often serve as socio-political filters — influencing who is deemed appropriate to appear in political spaces, what expectations are imposed on women, and how their identities (as mothers, as hijabi women) become both sources of legitimacy and limitations. Patriarchy significantly shapes this process by embedding gender-biased values into political norms.

Previous studies show that patriarchal culture and conservative religious interpretations restrict women's movement in the public sphere, both in formal and informal political participation. For example, "The Role of Women in Politics in Indonesia: Critical Review of Islamic Law" asserts that although Islamic norms theoretically allow space for women's participation, their implementation is strongly influenced by conservative interpretations, gender stigma, and unsupportive institutional structures.

Political practices based on ibuisme and the hijab are also closely linked to the concept of citizenship. In principle, all citizens should have equal political rights without being constrained by gender identity or symbolic expectations. In practice, however, women must



adhere to standards of “properness” defined by patriarchal norms. This raises critical questions about the real meaning of women’s political participation in Indonesia. Based on this narrative, this article seeks to examine how political practices grounded in ibuisme and the hijab reflect and shape women’s positions within the context of gender and citizenship in Indonesia.

### Theoretical Framework

Studies on the relationship between gender and politics in Indonesia have been widely explored by scholars, particularly from perspectives of representation and social construction. Women’s political representation must not only be understood quantitatively (descriptive representation)—merely their presence in political institutions—but also qualitatively (substantive representation), focusing on their active role in advancing women’s interests and gender-responsive policymaking. Despite the implementation of a 30% gender quota as an affirmative regulation, previous research shows that women’s political representation often remains symbolic and does not necessarily translate into stronger gender equality agendas.

Ibuisme serves as a crucial theoretical framework to understand women’s politics in Indonesia. Through the concept of state ibuism, scholars explain how the New Order regime constructed women’s social roles primarily as wives and mothers, serving as moral keepers of the nation. This construction functioned not only as a family ideology but also as a political instrument to maintain state stability. In contemporary politics, ibuisme continues to be reproduced in political campaigns, portraying female politicians as caring, nurturing, and maternal figures. Although this strategy may increase symbolic access to politics, it ultimately restricts meaningful participation by confining women to domestic and moral roles.

In addition to ibuisme, the hijab plays a significant role in Indonesian political contests. Beyond religious expression, the hijab symbolizes resistance, social and cultural identity. In current electoral politics, it has become part of identity politics used to obtain electoral legitimacy. Many female politicians adopt the hijab as a strategy to project religious credibility, morality, and alignment with the Muslim majority. However, this may reduce women’s political identities to mere religious symbols rather than emphasizing their competencies or substantive agendas.

These phenomena cannot be separated from the dominance of patriarchy in Indonesia. Patriarchy systematically places men in positions of authority in the public sphere while restricting women to domestic roles. It operates through institutional structures — state, family, religion, and cultural norms — that limit women’s access to political power. As a result, a gender-biased form of citizenship persists: although women formally possess the same political rights, they must conform to standards of appropriateness enforced by patriarchal society. This makes ibuisme and the hijab function as socio-political filters determining whether women are deemed suitable to enter politics.

From previous scholarship, it can be understood that research on women’s involvement in Indonesian politics has addressed formal representation, hijab-based identity politics, and ibuisme as a political construction. However, much of this research treats these aspects separately. There remains limited study critically connecting the three key issues—ibuisme,



the hijab, and citizenship—within a unified analytical framework. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by offering a critical analysis of how gendered symbols operate in Indonesian politics, and how the constructions of ibuisme and the hijab both reflect and reinforce patriarchal culture, resulting in citizenship practices that are not yet fully equal for women.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This article employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. Library research is chosen because the topic closely relates to theoretical discourse and conceptual studies on gender, politics, and citizenship (Nugraha, 2025). Through this method, the author is able to examine in depth the concepts of maternalism (ibuisme), the hijab, patriarchal culture, and their implications for citizenship practices in Indonesia. The type of data used is secondary data obtained from fundamental scholarly sources, including books and key journal articles discussing ibuisme and theories related to patriarchy within Indonesian politics, as well as academic publications focusing on gender, political representation, citizenship, and symbolic politics of the hijab, along with other supporting documents.

Data analysis is conducted through content analysis, namely by reviewing and interpreting texts, ideas, and findings from various relevant literature. The analysis process is carried out in three stages: (1) data reduction, which involves selecting literature relevant to the themes of ibuisme, the hijab, and citizenship; (2) data classification, grouping literature into major themes such as political representation, identity politics, motherism, the hijab, and patriarchy; and (3) data interpretation, analyzing the relationships between concepts and identifying critical patterns regarding how ibuisme and the hijab operate in political practice and how they shape women's citizenship in Indonesia.

Through this method, the article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis that not only describes the phenomena but also critically examines gendered political practices in Indonesia from an academic perspective.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### a. Ibuism as a Symbolic Political Strategy

Ibuism is one of the most influential social constructs shaping women's political image in Indonesia. Since the New Order era, women have been associated with the role of mothers of the nation, tasked with maintaining morals and supporting national stability. In contemporary political practice, this construction is still used, for example, through campaigns that highlight female politicians as caring, empathetic, and nurturing. This strategy has proven effective in attracting voter sympathy, as it aligns with the expectations of Indonesian society's patriarchal culture. However, at the same time, ibuism limits women's political space, as their roles are perceived more as domestic symbols than as political actors equal to men. Thus, ibuism presents a paradox: it paves the way for women's acceptance into the political sphere, but simultaneously limits the meaning of their participation.



From the perspective of the Qur'an, Q.S Al-Luqman (31:14), which explains respect for mothers because of their big role in giving birth and raising children. In Indonesian politics, this noble value is often used as a symbolic basis for the birth of motherism, where women are positioned as "mothers of the nation" who are full of love, sacrifice, and guardians of society's morals.

وَرَصَيْنَا الْأَسْلَانَ بِوَالدِّينِ حَمَلْتُهُ أُمَّةٌ وَهُنَّ وَفَصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنْ اشْكُنْ لِي وَلَوَالدِّيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيْرِ ①

Artinya : "Kami mewasiatkan kepada manusia (agar berbuat baik) kepada kedua orangtuanya. Ibunya telah mengandungnya dalam keadaan lemah yang bertambah-tambah dan menyapinya dalam dua tahun. (wasiat kami)" bersyukurlah kepada-Ku dan kepada orangtuamu" Hanya kepada-Ku (kamu) Kembali."

This verse emphasizes the noble position of a mother due to her struggles in conceiving, giving birth, and raising children. This spiritual value emphasizes the importance of respecting mothers in family life. However, in the context of Indonesian politics, the meaning of this respect is then drawn into the public sphere through the concept of ibuism, a construct that positions women as the loving and sacrificial mothers of the nation. Thus, ibuism uses the noble values of motherhood as reflected in the Quranic verses as symbolic legitimacy to place women in moral and domestic roles. However, this also limits women, because political participation is often seen as legitimate only insofar as it is based on this maternal image, rather than on the capacity for leadership and substantive ideas they possess.

### b. The Hijab and the Politicization of Identity

The hijab was initially understood as a religious expression and a form of personal piety. However, in post-New Order political developments, the hijab has transformed into a symbol of identity politics. Many female politicians use the hijab to construct a religious and moral image, with the aim of strengthening their legitimacy with the Muslim majority electorate. The hijab serves as a symbolic medium that can reconstruct women's identities in society. This politicization of the hijab provides electoral advantages for women by increasing public acceptance, but also narrows their representational space solely to the religious dimension. In other words, the hijab is more often seen as a moral attribute than as a representation of leadership capacity. This suggests that women's politics in Indonesia still often operate through cultural and religious symbols, rather than through substantive ideas.

From a Quranic perspective, the hijab is not merely a cultural attribute, but a religious commandment related to modesty and the identity of a Muslim woman. In Surah Al-Ahzab, verse 59:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَا زُوْجٌ وَبَنِّتٌ وَنِسَاءٌ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِيْنَ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَى أَنْ يُعْرَفُنَ فَلَا يُؤْدِيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَفُورًا رَّحِيْمًا ⑤٩

yâ ayyuhan-nabiyyu qul li'azwâjika wa banâtika wa nisâ'il-mu'minâ yudnâna 'alaihinna min jalâbîbihinn, dzâlika adnâ ay yu'rafna fa lâ yu'dzâin, wa kânallâhu ghafûrar rahîmâ

Wahai Nabi (Muhammad), katakanlah kepada istri-istrimu, anak-anak perempuanmu dan istri-istri orang mukmin supaya mereka mengulurkan jilbabnya ke seluruh tubuh mereka. Yang



demikian itu agar mereka lebih mudah untuk dikenali sehingga mereka tidak diganggu. Allah Maha Pengampun lagi Maha Penyayang.

Al-Ahzab 59 explains that the hijab is positioned as a distinguishing identity that protects women from social harassment, as well as a sign of honor in the public sphere. Thus, the hijab has a strong normative basis in Islamic sacred texts, although in socio-political practice its meaning often shifts. However, in the contemporary context, the issue of the hijab remains debated. In Indonesia itself, according to Ramadhini, cases of discrimination against women who wear the hijab still occur in the workplace and education. Even in the political world, the hijab is often used as a tool of identity politics, for example in the 2024 election when several female candidates wore the hijab to attract the sympathy of voters with a Muslim majority. At the global level, the policy of banning the hijab in France in 2024 again sparked controversy and international criticism because it was considered a violation of religious freedom. This condition shows that the meaning of the hijab is constantly negotiated between normative religious demands, identity politics, and evolving social realities.

### **c. Patriarchal Culture and the Reduction of Citizenship**

Neither *ibuism* nor the hijab are inseparable from the patriarchal cultural context that remains deeply rooted in Indonesia. Patriarchy defines women's roles within the domestic sphere, requiring their involvement in the public sphere to follow certain "paths of appropriateness." Patriarchy operates through state, family, and religious institutions, systematically limiting women's access to political power. This impacts the practice of citizenship, where women's political rights are formally recognized but substantively restricted. In this context, *ibuism* and the hijab function as social filters that determine which women are eligible for political participation and how they should present themselves.

### **d. Critique of Symbolic Political Practices**

The analysis of *ibuisme* and the hijab demonstrates that women's political involvement in Indonesia remains heavily influenced by gender symbolism. Women's representation is often valued more for cultural and religious identity rather than for their competencies or political ideas. This condition risks weakening democracy by shifting the essence of citizenship, which should guarantee equal participation for all citizens without gender-based discrimination. Therefore, symbolic political practices rooted in *ibuisme* and the hijab require critical scrutiny to ensure that women's political participation is not merely symbolic but truly substantive and oriented toward strengthening gender-inclusive democracy.

In recent developments, the issues surrounding the hijab and *ibuisme* continue to spark public debate in Indonesia. The hijab remains a controversial topic, as seen in the 2024 debate over the prohibition of hijabs for Paskibraka members—a policy that drew strong public criticism and was eventually revoked—and in the continued prevalence of discrimination against hijab-wearing women in schools and workplaces. This reflects that the hijab is not only seen as a religious obligation but has also become a contested arena between individual freedom, social norms, and identity politics.



At the same time, discourse on *ibuisme* has been questioned by feminist movements, such as those discussed within the Mahardika women's community, which highlights how *ibuisme* confines women to nurturing and maternal roles, while their capacities as substantive political actors are neglected. In contemporary political practice, *ibuisme* and the hijab are often combined as a symbolic strategy to attract voter sympathy—where female politicians are constructed as both the “mother of the nation” and a pious hijab-wearing Muslim woman. This illustrates that the symbolism of motherhood and religiosity continues to be a dominant instrument in shaping women's political representation in Indonesia. However, there is simultaneously a growing resistance—especially among younger generations—who demand that women's political participation be evaluated based on their substantive capabilities, not merely cultural or religious symbols.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that gendered political practices in Indonesia remain strongly influenced by symbolic constructions, particularly through *ibuisme* and the hijab. *Ibuisme* shapes the image of female politicians as compassionate, caring, and nurturing “mothers of the nation,” while the hijab serves as a symbol of religiosity and morality used to gain electoral legitimacy. Although these symbols may provide women access to political spaces, they often limit their participation to cultural and religious identities rather than recognizing their substantive competencies. This phenomenon shows how patriarchal culture continues to strongly shape women's citizenship in Indonesia. Formally, women hold equal political rights as men, yet substantively, they must still pass through a “propriety filter” shaped by patriarchal constructions. As a result, women's representation in politics remains vulnerable to being trapped in symbolic politics rather than achieving genuine and inclusive participation.

First, critical efforts are required from academics, activists, and women politicians themselves to dismantle gender-symbolic political narratives. Second, political parties and state institutions must commit not only to meeting descriptive quotas but also to strengthening women's substantive roles in political decision-making processes. Third, society needs to cultivate greater critical awareness in evaluating female politicians based not on identity symbols such as *ibuisme* and the hijab, but on the quality of their ideas, vision, and performance. By doing so, Indonesian democracy can move toward a more inclusive, equitable, and gender-just political system.

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