



AL-QUR'AN AS LEGITIMACY FOR THE REJECTION OF A FEMALE PRESIDENT IN THE CONTEXT OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This article explores the role of the Qur'an in perpetuating the rejection of female presidential candidates in the context of Presidential Elections in Indonesia from 2004 – 2024. To date, Indonesia has not had a female president directly elected by the people. In 2004, Megawati Soekarno Putri became the first woman to run for president. There was both support and rejection of Megawati's candidacy. The rejection response by some groups was based on the teachings of Islam. The rejection of women's leadership as president was based on the Qur'an surah An-Nisa verse 34. After the 2004 and 2009 presidential elections, there were no presidential candidates from among women. The use of the Qur'anic verse to reject a female president is a latent problem even though there are no female presidential candidates in the presidential elections in Indonesia. This means that the use of the Qur'an to reject a female president in Indonesia could still happen in the future. The method used is a literature study with qualitative analysis by utilising primary sources on presidential elections and female presidential candidates. In this article, three discussions will be discussed. First, the use of the Qur'an to reject women's leadership in the presidential election in Indonesia. Second, the rejection of the president with the legitimacy of the Qur'an is a latent problem of the future. Third, how does the alternative narrative of al-Qur'an support women's leadership in the realm of presidential elections?

Keywords: Presidential Election, Female President, Islamic Fundamentalism

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A. INTRODUCTION

Until now, in Muslim-majority Indonesia, there has never been a female president elected through a presidential election. Direct presidential elections by the people in Indonesia have been held at least four times, and the fifth time will be held in 2024. Of these, not a single woman has been elected through direct presidential elections by the people. In the 2004 and 2009 presidential elections, there was a female presidential candidate, Megawati Soekarnoputri. However, in the contestation, she failed to be elected president.¹ After Megawati's failed election, there were practically no female representatives who ran as presidential candidates.

Megawati's candidacy in 2004 and 2009 was marked by debates about women's leadership among Muslims. At least at that time, there were Islamic groups that allowed and rejected it. Both based their opinions on the Qur'an. The group that rejected Megawati's candidacy as a presidential candidate came from the traditionalist-revivalist group. For this group, women cannot be leaders because in the Qur'an there is a verse that prohibits, namely QS. An-Nisa: 34. However, the group that supports Megawati's candidacy is based on a contextual understanding of the Qur'an and other legal sources.² This means that women's leadership, especially in presidential elections, is still a debate until now for Muslims.

¹ Z P Irmalinda and L Magriasti, "Women Heads of State Leadership: A Comparative Study Between Indonesia and New Zealand," *Journal of Ecotrans & ...* (2022): 73.

² Bahrul Ulum, "Islam and National Leadership: The Controversy Around a" (2021): 14.



Studies on the debate about women's leadership in Islam or the presidential election contestation have been widely researched. Such as research conducted by Helma Winda, et al (2023) with the title "Perceptions of the Controversy over Women's Leadership in Majority Countries in Indonesia". The study sought to uncover perceptions that view the controversy over women's leadership in Indonesia. The research also seeks to explore the factors that cause women's leadership to be considered inappropriate to become leaders in the public sphere. Perceptions that view the controversy of women's leadership in this article are due to differences in understanding the verses of the Qur'an. Another factor is the labelling of the domestic burden of the household as the obligations and duties of a woman. In addition, women are considered not to have the ability both physically and spiritually to lead, especially to become president of Indonesia.³

Likewise, Nurlita Hapsari's research (2017) with the title "*Framing Women Politicians in Democratic Environment: a Study of Megawati Soekarnoputri and Hillary Clinton*". The research discusses the media *framing* of Megawati Soekarnoputri's candidacy as Indonesia's presidential candidate. According to this study, media framing in Indonesia towards Megawati's candidacy as a presidential candidate tends to link women leaders with religion. This means that the media tends to stereotype women's

³ Helma Winda, Mochamad Aris Yusuf, and Hoirul Anam, "CONTROVERSIAL PERCEPTIONS OF WOMAN LEADERSHIP IN MUSLIM MAYORITY STATES IN INDONESIA," *JUSMA: Journal of Islamic and Community Studies* 2, no. 1 (2023): 21–33.

presidential candidacy in terms of Islam. Media framing focuses more on the views of fundamentalist groups that tend to reject Megawati Soekarnoputri's candidacy. The study explained that the news tends to demean the position of women. This research explains if it implicitly forms public opinion if female leaders should not be elected because it is not in line with Islamic religious beliefs.⁴

The view of women's leadership in the study of the Qur'an is still a debate until now. The article by Mufarikhin and Siti Malaiha Dewi entitled "Muslim Women's Leadership in the Discourse of Contemporary Thought" explains if this issue is still a debate. This research shows the findings that the debate about women's leadership in the public sphere in Islam occurs because the Qur'an does not provide practical guidance on the issue. In addition to the Qur'an, this study also tries to present if there are hadith that are often used as a basis against women's leadership. However, in short, the research wants to illustrate that Islam provides flexibility for women's leadership in the public sphere including becoming president. Leadership is considered to have a good contribution in many aspects. These contributions include opening opportunities for other women to become public leaders, strengthening the

⁴ Nurlita Hapsari, "Framing Women Politician in Democratic Environment: A Study of Megawati Soekarno Putri and Hillary Clinton," *Rubikon: Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4, no. 1 (2017): 14.

position of women, and contributing to economic, social and cultural development.⁵

Reading the existing research, it can be concluded that women's leadership in the public sphere, especially in the context of the president in Indonesia, still raises debates, especially in Islamic circles. Moreover, Indonesia is a country with a majority Muslim population.⁶ In general, research on women presidents in Indonesia or women's leadership in the public sphere is generally only at the level of concept analysis. Most of them focus on analysing the interpretation of the Qur'an, hadith analysis or Islamic law. Other studies focus more on women and their representation in legislative elections.⁷ Not many studies have examined the use of the Qur'an as a legitimisation of the rejection of female presidential candidates in the presidential election in Indonesia. Therefore, this research was conducted to further explore the use of the Qur'an as a basis for legitimising the rejection of female presidential candidates in the context of the 2004 to 2024 presidential elections. In addition, this research also tries to explore the factors that influence the use of the Qur'an as a legitimisation of the rejection of female presidential candidates in Indonesia.

⁵ Siti Malaiha Dewi and Mufarikhin, "Muslim Women's Leadership in the Discourse of Contemporary Thought," *Journal of Islamic Political Thought* (2021): 55-70.

⁶ Ministry of Home Affairs, "86.88% of Indonesia's Population is Muslim," *Bisnis Indonesia Resources Centre* (2021).

⁷ Ella S. Prihatini, "Islam, Parties, and Women's Political Nomination in Indonesia," *Politics and Gender* (2020): 18-19.

B. Methodology

Library *research* is used in this research to achieve the research objectives.⁸ This literature study utilises research, or literature related to the use of the Qur'an as legitimisation of the rejection of female presidential candidates in Indonesia's presidential elections. All data obtained from various literature are then analysed and presented in four subtitles. First, the Qur'anic verse was legitimate to reject women presidents in the 2004 and 2009 presidential elections. Second, looking at the latent problems that arose after the 2004 presidential election regarding the female president. Third, Islamic fundamentalism and patriarchy over the rejection of a female president in Indonesia. Fourth, alternative Islamic feminist ideas on women presidents. In this research, the analysis is limited to these four points. As a qualitative research using literature studies, the results of this research will be presented with a descriptive-analytical model.

C. Discussion

1. The Qur'an and the Rejection of Women Presidential Candidates in the 2004 & 2009 Presidential Elections

After the collapse of the New Order, Indonesia only held direct popular elections in 2004. These elections were held to elect members of the legislature as well as the president and vice

⁸ Sonny Eli Zaluchu, "Qualitative and Quantitative Research Strategies in Religious Research," *Evangelical: Journal of Evangelical Theology and Congregational Formation* (2020): 28–38.



president. The president and vice president were for the first time directly elected by the people, after decades of election by the MPR.⁹ The Democratic Party won the legislative elections, ahead of 23 other parties.¹⁰ The winning president and vice president in the 2004 presidential election were Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Muhammad Jusuf Kalla.

At that time, the escalation of the political situation was quite tense *cum* heated ahead of the 2004 presidential and vice presidential elections. The heated political situation at that time was because there was a female presidential candidate, Megawati Soekarnoputri. The nomination of women in the context of presidential election contestation directly elected by the people was the first time in Indonesia. The advancement of Megawati as a presidential candidate had an impact on the political temperature. The heated political temperature was caused by the crossing of opinions and debates in the community, especially Islamic groups, about whether or not women can lead. The Islamic community was divided into two groups, those who allowed and those who opposed the nomination. The Islamic group that supports the nomination sees that the holy book of Al-Qur'an allows women to be leaders.

⁹ Umbu Rauta, "Initiating Democratic and Aspirational Presidential Elections," *Constitutional Journal* (2016): 600-616.

¹⁰ Agus Sutisna, "POLITICAL MARKETING PERSPECTIVE: THE FAILURE OF PDIP AND DEMOCRAT PARTY IN HOLDING THE POSITION AS THE WINNING PARTY OF THE 1999 AND 2009 ELECTIONS," *CosmoGov* (2017): 111-129.

However, those who oppose presidential candidates also take the Qur'an as a basis for rejecting female presidential candidates.¹¹

The debate on whether it is legal for a woman to be a leader in the public sphere was already raging when the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) won the 1999 elections. The PDI-P, chaired by Megawati, had a great opportunity to make its chairperson president. However, Megawati's move as chair of the PDI-P faltered when she lost to Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). Gus Dur was able to win from Megawati because there was support from the Central Axis Coalition, which did not want a female president. After all, it was still a debate among the ulama.¹² Then, after the issuance of Memorandum II, which led to the Special Session of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), Megawati Soekarnoputri was elected president to replace Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). The debate on whether or not a woman can become president has intensified in several spaces, such as mass media and television since Megawati took office as the head of state of Indonesia.¹³ The debate on the law in Islam regarding women becoming leaders continued to strengthen and become massive when Megawati ran for the presidency of Indonesia in the 2004 presidential election. Muslims were divided into two groups on the issue. The first is the rejectionist group, which is mostly traditionalists–revivalists or

¹¹ Ulum, "Islam and National Leadership: The Controversy Around Women Presidents," 14.

¹² Aning Sofyan Sadikin, "Women Presidents in Media Perspective," *Mediator: Journal of Communication* (2008): 365.

¹³ Bahtiar Efendi, *A New Theology of Islamic Politics: The Intersection of Religion, State and Democratisation* (Jakarta: Galang Press, 2013), 32.

fundamentalists. While the supporting group comes from modernist-liberalist or moderate Islam.¹⁴ Both use the Qur'an to support or reject a female president. However, what was widely highlighted by the media at the time was the view of those who rejected Megawati's candidacy.

Fundamentalist groups use Q. S. An-Nisa verse 34 as a legitimate basis for rejecting female presidential candidates. The meaning of Q.S. An-Nisa verse 34 is *"the men are the leaders of the women because Allah has given some of them (men) more of their wealth. Therefore, virtuous women are those who obey Allah and keep themselves when their husbands are not around because Allah has taken care of (them). And as for those women whom you fear may be unfaithful, admonish them, separate them from their beds, and beat them. Then if they obey you, do not seek to trouble them. Verily, Allah is Most High, Most Great."*¹⁵ It is this verse that is used as a basis for rejecting female presidential candidates by Islamic fundamentalist groups.

The rejection by Islamic fundamentalists in 2004 was also based on a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, written in the book of Sahih Bukhari, which reads: *"In the past when news reached the Prophet that the Persians had crowned the daughter of Kisra (Buran bint Dzi Yazan) as their queen, the Prophet said: 'Forever unhappy will be a*

¹⁴ Ulum, "Islam and National Leadership: The Controversy Around Women Presidents," 14.

¹⁵ Fahmi Ibnu Khoer, Syarifah Gustiwati, and Yono, "Women's Leadership in the Perspective of Islamic Law: An (2021): 38.

people who hand over the affairs of their government to women".¹⁶ From these two basic sources of Islamic law, fundamentalist groups openly rejected the nomination of female presidential candidates in the 2004 presidential election contest.

The phenomenon of rejection of women's presidential candidacy in the 2004 presidential election occurred in many places. In some places, Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 was widely used to legitimise the rejection of women presidential candidates in the 2004 presidential election by fundamental groups who interpreted it textually. Rejections occurred in various regions. In East Java, the rejection of women's presidential candidacy was carried out by the NU Kiai group. At least 24 kiai from Nahdlatul Ulama in East Java stated that the law of electing a female president is haram.¹⁷ In Yogyakarta, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) issued a fatwa prohibiting women from becoming key leaders such as president or governor.¹⁸ Rejection was also carried out by Islamic fundamentalist groups incorporated in the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), KISDI, Majelis Mujahidin, and Laskar Jihad by holding a demonstration to prohibit the nomination of a female president and a statement of attitude not to vote on 22 August 2004. For this group, since Megawati became President, they have rejected female leadership. For this group, the Qur'an in Surah An-Nisa verse 34 prohibits

¹⁶ Khamami Zada, *Radical Islam: The Struggle of Hardline Islamic Organisations in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2002), 139.

¹⁷ "Kiai NU East Java Reject Female President," *Liputan6*, last modified 2004, accessed November 23, 2023, <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/79480/kiai-nu-jatim-menolak-presiden-wanita>.

¹⁸ Hapsari, "Framing Women Politicians in Democratic Environment: A Study of Megawati Soekarno Putri and Hillary Clinton," 14.



women from leading. Therefore, they strongly reject a female president because it is against the teachings of Islam.¹⁹

Looking at the reality of 2004, Islam plays an important role in determining women's empowerment in the public sphere. The involvement of Islam is based on the understanding of the holy book, namely the Qur'an. Whether rejecting or supporting women's leadership, everything is based on the Qur'an. As a holy book, the Qur'an plays an important role in shaping the attitudes of its adherents, not least on the issue of Megawati's candidacy as a presidential candidate in the 2004 presidential election contestation. Opponents of women's presidential candidacy used the Qur'an to legitimise the presence of female leadership candidates. When viewed from the reality that existed in 2004, the Islamic fundamentalist groups that rejected the nomination of women presidents had reached the stage of forbidding, because it was contrary to the normative rules in the Qur'an so if it was still carried out it would invite doom or destruction to the nation or state of Indonesia.

In 2009, Megawati Soekarnoputri ran again as a presidential candidate. However, during her candidacy in 2009, there was not much movement or rejection from fundamentalist Islamic groups against women leaders. This was shown by the lack of news that highlighted the rejection of Megawati's candidacy for the second time in the presidential election contest in Indonesia. Even the FPI,

¹⁹ Zada, *Radical Islam: The Struggle of Hardline Islamic Organisations in Indonesia*, 138.

which is keen to reject a female president, did not take action against it as it did in 2001.²⁰ Nevertheless, in the 2009 presidential election contest, the Megawati-Prabowo pair lost badly to the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono-Boediono pair.²¹ This means that without the debate on Islamic law regarding a female president, Megawati would not been able to take over the presidency again. This condition is inseparable from the impact of the narrative of the massive rejection of women leaders in 2004 based on the Qur'an and Islamic law sources. Although the number of actions or discourses of rejection from Islamic groups against a female president in the 2009 presidential election was small, it was not necessarily balanced by the opening of opportunities for women to become president.

2. After the 2004 Presidential Election: The Qur'an, Latent Problems on the Issue of a Female President

The rejection of using the Qur'an as the basis of legitimacy to reject women's leadership in the public sphere has a serious impact on socio-political aspects. Women are increasingly marginalised. In the context of women's leadership in the public sphere, especially in political contestation or presidential elections, this impact is very real. Where there are no more representatives from women's groups who run in the presidential election contestation.

²⁰ Zada, *Radical Islam: The Struggle of Hardline Islamic Organisations in Indonesia*, 138.

²¹ Editorial, "A Comparison of the 2004, 2009, and 2014 Presidential Elections *Detik.Com*,

After the 2009 presidential election, there were no more female presidential candidates. Women no longer have a place to run for president. Constitutionally, the opportunity for women to run as presidential candidates is not prohibited. But, in the constellation of presidential elections in 2014, women did not get a place. In the 2014 presidential election, the names of potential presidential candidates were dominated by men. Finally, two presidential and vice presidential pairs were contesting the 2014 presidential election, namely Joko Widodo–Jusuf Kalla and Prabowo Subianto–Hatta Rajasa. If you look at the survey results at that time, this is not surprising. The majority of surveys showed that there were no women whose electability was in the top three. The majority of data from survey institutions recorded that there were no women's names in the top three in the presidential candidate market in 2014. Of the 13 survey institutions that conducted polls on the electability of presidential candidates, only four survey institutions placed Megawati's name in the top three figures with the highest electability. The three survey institutions are Pusat Data Bersatu, National Survey Media (Median), Vox Populi Survey Institute (VPS) and Indonesian Survey and Polling Institute (SPIN).²²

In the context of the 2014 presidential election, the absence of presidential and vice presidential candidates from women's groups resulted in a lack of attention to women's issues. The vision and

²² Martin Sihombing, "CAPRES 2014: This is the President Version of Survey Institute," *Bisnis.Com*, last modified 2014, accessed November 24, 2023, <https://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20140317/15/211221/capres-2014-inilah-presiden-versi-lembaga-survei>.

mission of women did not become a serious issue for the two pairs running in the 2014 presidential election. This can be seen in how women's issues did not become material in the presidential and vice presidential debates.²³ The involvement and voter base of women in the two presidential candidates is quite high in determining the president and vice president. However, the fact that must be recognised is that women are still placed as outsiders, vulnerable in the political sphere and not a priority in the development paradigm of the president and vice president elected in 2014. In a research conducted by Dewi Candraningrum, the reality that occurred in 2014 was inseparable from the role of religion. Religion is used as a tool of repression against women and tends to inhibit gender equality in politics.²⁴

The reality that occurred in 2014 was repeated in 2019. In the 2019 presidential election, the presidential candidates were the same as in 2014. Women had no place in the 2019 presidential competition.²⁵ There are no representatives of women running for president or vice president. This was exacerbated by the fact that women's issues also did not find a place in the vision, mission and programme of the presidential candidates, Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto. Women's issues were also not included in the

²³ Anita Dhewy, "Political Roles of Women in the Legislative and Presidential Elections," *Jurnal Perempuan* (2014): 227–232.

²⁴ Dewi Candraningrum, "Religion, 2014 General Election and Status of Women as Other," *Jurnal Perempuan* (2014): 240.

²⁵ Dewanto Samodro, "Presidential and Vice-Presidential Candidates Have Not touched Women's Issues," *Antaranews.Com*, last modified 2019, accessed November 30, 2023, <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/812759/pasangan-capres-cawapres-dinilai-belum-sentuh-isu-perempuan>.

presidential and vice presidential debates. This shows that each candidate has no sensitivity to women's issues and still makes them a vulnerable and marginalised group. In the 2019 presidential election, the strategy to mobilise the masses was to use identity politics. Both Jokowi and Prabowo used the identity politics of Islam to get the votes of the Indonesian people.²⁶

Looking at the presidential elections after 2014 and 2019, the absence of women's representation is a setback to democracy and the entrenched hegemony of society over the idea of prohibiting women leaders in society. When examined closely, the absence of women's representation and the marginalisation of women's issues are in line with the use of religion as a selling point in the presidential contestation in 2014 and 2019. This means that the social construction that existed after 2004 where a female president was considered contrary to Islamic religious values was maintained. This is in line with the use of religion (especially Islam) as a campaign commodity in mobilising voters' votes. Muslims who were targeted by identity politics in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections indirectly carried and perpetuated the value of the inappropriateness of women becoming leaders in the public sphere or president and vice president. Although it has been two decades after the use of the Qur'an and hadith to legitimise the rejection of female presidential candidates, this value is still maintained. The author considers that post-2004 the Qur'an or An-Nisa verse 34

²⁶ Mahpudin Mahpudin, "Democracy and the Rise of Identity Politics: Reflections on the Post-New Order Journey of Indonesian Democracy," *ijd-demos* (2020): 12.

raises latent problems in the presidential election contestation in Indonesia, especially for female presidential candidates.

This latent problem can be seen from the reality of society in Indonesia in the 2024 presidential election. Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) conducted a survey on public opinion about the Indonesian president from the background of gender identity between men and women. The results of the poll show that 51 per cent of the public requires the president of Indonesia to be male, as many as 1 per cent stated that the president of Indonesia must be a woman, 45 per cent of the public answered that a male or female president was not an important issue, while those who did not answer were 4 per cent.²⁷ From these data, it can be seen how the social construction that exists in Indonesian society in 2024 is not yet inclusive of women. The gap between the survey results of the president should be a man *vis a vis* the president should be a woman reached 50 per cent. The survey results show the patriarchal reality of Indonesian society which has an impact on the small chances of women running for president or vice president. This existing reality is influenced by religious books, especially the Qur'an. One of them is the use of the Qur'an to legitimise the rejection or prohibition of a female president, which raises latent problems in the 2024 presidential election and the future. It is almost impossible to imagine the emergence of presidential or vice presidential

²⁷ Editorial, "Gender and Religious Sentiments Are Still Strong in the Presidential Election," *Saifulmujani.Com*, last modified 2023, accessed November 30, 2023, <https://saifulmujani.com/sentimen-gender-dan-agama-masih-kuat-dalam-pemilihan-presiden/>.

candidates from representatives of women's groups if social reality shows exclusivism towards female presidential candidates. The latent problem in question is that there is the potential for a movement to reject female presidential candidates in the future that is legitimised using the Qur'an, especially An-Nisa verse 34, as happened in the 2004 presidential election.

This latent problem can be seen in the negative response when Puan Maharani was rumoured to be running as a 2024 presidential candidate. The rejection was carried out by Islamic fundamentalist groups who are members of the 212 Alumni Brotherhood (PA). At that time, there were two opinions from PA 212 figures, namely Damai Hari Lubis and Novel Bamukmin, on the proposal from PDI-P politician Effendi Simbolon, who proposed that Puan run for the 2024 presidential election accompanied by Anies Baswedan as a vice presidential candidate. Damai Hari Lubis said he agreed with the proposal on the condition that the order was reversed, Anies became the presidential candidate while Puan became the vice presidential candidate.²⁸ Meanwhile, PA 212 Secretary General Novel Bamukmin strongly rejected the proposal. He firmly rejected the narrative of Puan Maharani's candidacy paired with Anies Baswedan. According to him, in Islamic law, the majority of scholars argue that a country with a majority of Muslims forbids

²⁸ Elfany Kurniawan, "PA 212 Figure Agrees Puan-Anies in 2024 Presidential Election, But There Are Conditions," *Jpnn.Com*, last modified 2021, accessed November 30, 2023, <https://m.jpnn.com/news/tokoh-pa-212-setuju-puan-anies-di-pilpres-2024-tetapi-ada-syaratnya>.

women to become president.²⁹ From the responses made by PA 212 leaders, it is evident that although the use of the Qur'an as legitimisation for the rejection of women's presidential candidacy occurred in 2004, the residue is still felt today. The Qur'an is not only used as a basis for rejecting the presence of presidential candidates but also provides haram status in Islamic law. This means that the religious book (al-Qur'an) becomes a tool to discredit women in the public sphere such as in the context of leadership and politics.

3. The Qur'an and the Female President: The Violation of Patriarchy through Islamic Fundamentalism

Motives for Legitimising Patriarchy through Islamic Fundamentalism

The debate on women leaders or women presidents always refers to the holy book of the Qur'an. As a holy book, the Qur'an regulates many things, one of which is about leaders. In it, there is verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa which means that men are leaders for women, not vice versa. The occurrence of this rejection is due to the existence of rejection groups, the majority of which are Islamic fundamentalist groups. This means that the use of the Qur'an as a basis for legitimising the rejection of a female president is due to the strengthening of Islamic fundamentalism.

²⁹ Indah, "Novel Bamukmin Says Islam Forbids Women to Become President," *Terkini.Id*, last modified 2022, accessed 30 November, 2023, <https://makassar.terkini.id/novel-bamukmin-sebut-islam-mengharamkan-wanita-jadi-presiden/>.

Before entering the discussion of Islamic fundamentalism, it is necessary to first look at the definition of the Qur'an itself. In this article, the definition of the Qur'an reflects the opinion of one of the contemporary Islamic thinkers *cum* theologians, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. According to Abu Zayd, the term al-Qur'an is defined as a linguistic book, human text, historical text, and cultural product. The work entitled *Mafhūm an-Naṣ Dirāsah fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, explains if the Qur'an is essentially a holy book that comes from Arab cultural products at that time.³⁰ The texts in the Qur'an were formed from the social and cultural realities of Arab society at that time, especially in more than 22 years according to the duration of the Qur'an's revelation. That is, if you see and read the Qur'an that exists today is a representation of the social and cultural realities of Arab society at that time.

When reading from some literature about the reality of Arab society when the Qur'an was revealed, it will be found that the dominant culture at that time was patriarchy. Women in Arab society, especially pre-Islamic, were considered to be creatures that were more despicable than animals. Even the practice of burying baby girls in pre-Islamic Arab society was influenced by the hegemony of patriarchal culture at that time.³¹ Although the arrival of Islam tried to deconstruct the patriarchal reality, the changes did

³⁰ Mukhtar Mukhtar, Basri Mahmud, and Hamzah Hamzah, "CONTEMPORARY WISDOM OF THE AL-QUR'AN CONTROVERSY (A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE HERMENEUTIKA OF THE AL-QUR'AN OF NASR HAMID ABU ZAID)," *Zawiyah: Journal of Islamic Thought* (2022).

³¹ Elya Munfarida, "MARRIAGE ACCORDING TO THE PRA ISLAMIC ARAB," *inyang: Journal of Islamic Gender and Child Studies* 10, no. 2 (2015): 217.

not occur radically but slowly and by using language that was acceptable in the context of Arab society at that time. This has implications for some verses that if read literally will be understood as patriarchal verses, so that if a verse is not critically examined it will be seen as legitimate to discredit women.³² One such context is Q. S An-Nisa verse 34. If Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 is understood only, it will be considered legitimate to reject women's leadership in the public sphere such as the president.

Examining the rejection of women's presidential candidacy in the 2004 presidential election by using Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 as an argument, then it is an example of textual interpretation only. The rejection by Islamic fundamentalist groups from the traditionalist-revivalist segment was motivated by textual reading. A literal reading of the holy book, without considering the historical context of the Qur'anic verse is a characteristic of religious fundamentalism.³³

According to Yusak B. Setyawan, religious fundamentalism sees scripture as a reality that cannot be debated, sacred, and truly holy. This view leads to the assumption that the scriptures cannot be changed following time and space. Furthermore, fundamentalists position the Qur'an as a standard of living starting in the social to individual realms. With a literal reading, they try to impose a holy

³² Asep Saepullah, "FEMINITY AND DECONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN IN ISLAM: A CASE STUDY OF NASR HAMID ABU ZAYD'S THOUGHT," *TAJID: Journal of Ushuluddin Science* (2021): 81.

³³ Yusak Budi Setyawan, "Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism: A Biblical-Christian Perspective for Peacebuilding in Indonesia," *International Review of Mission* (2021): 6.

book written over centuries as a standard of human life in contemporary times. This is because fundamentalists have a paradigm that the Qur'an or holy book is not just an intermediary to the Holy One, but the holy book is the Holy One. Therefore, the fundamentalists are very protective of the originality of the holy book.³⁴ So it is not surprising that in the context of the 2004 presidential election, Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 was used to legitimise the rejection and even the prohibition of female presidential candidates.

Even in the context of the 2024 presidential election, the issue of Puan Maharani's candidacy as a presidential candidate was immediately responded to and rejected by Islamic fundamentalist groups such as PA 212. When analysed, the context of the rejection of women presidents in Indonesia occurs because the Qur'an as a cultural product has content that legitimises or strengthens patriarchal culture when read only gets strengthened by the existence of Islamic fundamentalist groups. Then, the patriarchal content in the Qur'an combined with religious fundamentalism in the Indonesian context, there were actions, even fatwas forbidding women from running for presidential candidates in Indonesia. This means that the motive for the rejection comes from the understanding of Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 by fundamentalists in a literal way which is considered to forbid women's leadership in the public sphere such as becoming president. Then, the

³⁴ Setyawan, "Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism: A Biblical-Christian Perspective for Peacebuilding in Indonesia," 6.

fundamentalists by adhering to the misogynist interpretation of Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 encourage the interpretation of Q. S An-Nisa verse 34. S An-Nisa verse 34 pushes its literal interpretation into an objective reality in society. When referring to the idea of Yusak B. Setyawan, this is because fundamentalists consider their reading to be an absolute truth sourced from the Almighty, so it needs to be applied in life. If a reality emerges that deviates from the beliefs of fundamentalists, then it is obligatory to fight against it so that the sanctity of religion sourced from the Qur'an is maintained. It can be seen how the Qur'an as legitimacy to reject women presidents from the 2004 presidential election to 2024 is a social construction of fundamentalists (which tends to strengthen) to legitimise patriarchal culture through a literal reading of the Muslim holy book, especially Q. It can be concluded that religion through its holy book is used to support the role of men and discredit women³⁵ which in this context is carried out by Islamic fundamentalist groups through the Qur'an.

How the Discriminatory Reality of Women Persists

Ahead of the 2024 presidential election, the rejection response to the nomination of a female president still occurs, the 2004 incident is repeated even though it is not as massive as before. The rejection of female presidential candidates in the presidential contestation may happen again in the future. This can happen

³⁵ Yusak B. Setyawan, "Questioning Patriarchal Models of God in Christianity: Toward Cultural Transformation from Patriarchal Culture to Egalitarian Relationship Between Women and Men," *Asia Journal of Theology* 30, no. 1 (2016): 56.



because the discriminatory reality against women persists. Moreover, the legitimacy of the Qur'an to reject women as president is still being treated and maintained which then becomes the objective reality of society in Indonesia.

In this section, we will explain the formation of social reality or the objective reality of Indonesian society tends to have the view that the president should be a man. This reality can be seen in the results of the Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) survey which shows that 51% of Indonesians think the president of Indonesia should be a man.³⁶ According to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, a social reality in society is created by individuals continuously.³⁷ In the end, the reality created will shape the individual himself. In the book "*The Social Construction of Reality*", it is stated that the formation of social reality occurs through three stages, namely externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation.³⁸

The attitude of rejection towards women presidents can be formed and persist because it is created by individuals who then turn it into social reality and continue to be maintained. The process of forming and maintaining this reality occurs through three stages as stated above. The first stage is externalisation. Externalisation is an action that begins with several actions taken

³⁶ Editorial, "Gender and Religious Sentiments Still Strong in Presidential Election."

³⁷ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (England: Penguin Books, 1991), 69.

³⁸ A. Octamaya Tenri Awaru, "The Social Construction of Parents' Sexual Education in Bugis-Makassar Families," *Society* (2020): 186.

by an individual or group of individuals on subjective reality.³⁹ In the context of rejecting the president, fundamentalist Muslims interpret Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 as the subjective reality that he understands the verse. They consider Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 as the basis of legitimacy to forbid the leadership of women in the public sphere.

After they externalise, the next stage is objectivation. Objectivation is the process of crystallisation of subjective reality by doing it repeatedly. The fundamentalist group then repeats these rejections repeatedly which then the subjective belief that forbids the female president to use Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 will be crystallised and turned into an objective reality of society in Indonesia. This repetition is not only done through rejection actions as carried out by FPI or Islamic religious leaders who reject female presidential candidates but also through offline and online da'wah pulpits. Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 is still often used by preachers, kiai, and preachers under men are leaders for women. Finally, the belief that women cannot lead in the public sphere is increasingly rooted in society. After objectivation, the next stage is internalisation.

Internalisation is the process of absorption of objective reality in society by individuals so that individuals are shaped by the objective reality of society in their area of residence.⁴⁰ In this context, each Muslim as a whole consciously or unconsciously absorbs the

³⁹ Awaru, "The Social Construction of Parents' Sexual Education in Bugis-Makassar Families," 185.

⁴⁰ Awaru, "The Social Construction of Parents' Sexual Education in Bugis-Makassar Families," 186.

objective reality that opposes the presence of female presidential candidates. Each individual will have a subjective reality following the objective reality that rejects a female president and requires a president to be a man. The internalisation process of this objective reality is done through socialisation. This socialisation process is assisted by the news from the media which also tends to be misogynistic towards female presidential candidates. From this process of reality formation, more than half of the Indonesian people may have the perception that the president must be a man. Although there were no female presidential candidates in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, the negative sentiment towards presidential candidates in society did not necessarily disappear but was nurtured and remained in the social reality of Indonesian society. As soon as there is an issue of a female presidential candidate, the public will react and reject it again.

4. Islamic Feminist Progressive Ideas on Women Presidents

Despite the reality in Indonesia that Qur'anic verses such as Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 are used by Muslims to reject the presence of a female president, there are progressive ideas from Islamic feminists that allow women to become presidents or leaders in the public sphere. Academics with inclusive views have a more friendly view of women's leadership in the public sphere such as becoming president. Islamic feminist thinkers have a reading that contradicts Islamic fundamentalist groups who read Q. S An-Nisa verse 34

laterally and formalistically. They interpret it critically by not only understanding the formalism but also reading the social context in which the verse was revealed. Examples of Islamic feminist thinkers include Musdah Mulia and Kiai Husein Muhammad.

These two figures are Islamic feminist academics who have many works and their thoughts are widely studied in Indonesia. These two figures have critical interpretations of Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 which is very often used as a basis for legitimacy to reject the idea of women leaders in the public sphere in general or specifically used to forbid a female president in 2004. For Husein Muhammad, the use of Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 to prohibit women from becoming leaders is not very appropriate. According to him, the cause of the revelation of the verse (*ahbabun nuzul*) or the social context behind the revelation of the verse is to answer the question of leadership in the domestic sphere, not about leaders in the public sphere.⁴¹ Departing from this, the leadership of women in the public sphere cannot be denied based on Q. For Kiai Husein Muhammad, leadership is not determined by gender, but refers to how the capacity, and capability of a person, whether female or male. Women can become president if it brings goodness. In contrast, a man should not be president if his leadership causes suffering and misery for the people he leads.⁴²

⁴¹ Ridwan, "Women's Political Leadership in Classical Islamic Literature," *Yinyang - Journal of Gender & Child Studies* (2008): 22.

⁴² Dewi and Mufarikhin, "Muslim Women's Leadership in the Discourse of Contemporary Thought," 64-65.



In line with the idea built by Kiai Hussein Muhammad, for Musdah Mulia, Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 was revealed in the context of its explanation of the position of women in the domestic sphere, not in the public sphere. For her, the message to be conveyed in the verse is not about leadership, but the issue of violence in the family sphere.⁴³ The use of the verse as an argument to reject women's leadership such as becoming president is a thinking error and does not make sense. At the end of her book entitled "Encyclopedia of Reformist Muslimah" she explains that there is no argument in the Qur'an denying women's involvement in politics, because in fact what limits it is men and patriarchy.

From these two thinkers, a counter-narrative to the mainstream Islamic discourse on leadership has begun to emerge in religious studies, unfortunately, this alternative narrative has not yet become a common perspective in Indonesian society. According to the author, there are several reasons why the views of Islamic feminist thinkers have not become a common discourse. *Firstly*, there is still strong religious fundamentalism in Indonesia. *Secondly*, there is a strong patriarchy in the social reality of Indonesian society. *Third*, political conditions, especially at the level of presidential election contestation in Indonesia, are not yet inclusive of women. *Fourth*, alternative narratives about the counter-discourse on the interpretation of Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 are still at the academic level and have not been conveyed to the grassroots

⁴³ Samsul Zakaria, "WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC LAW (COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN KH. HUSEIN MUHAMMAD AND PROF. SITI MUSDAH MULIA)," *Khazanah* (2013): 90.

level. *Lastly*, there are still strong stereotypes attached to women such as being weak, prioritising feelings, and being unable to make decisions.

From the existing reality, concrete actions need to be taken so that the counter-narrative to the reality of misogynistic views on women's leadership can be agreed upon by many people. Indeed, the main mission brought by Islam is to be merciful to all nature. In addition, the presence of Islam also aims to eliminate injustice on earth, but what happens in Indonesia is that the main source of Islamic law (the Qur'an) is used as a basis for continuing to maintain injustice in the aspect of leadership. It needs to be understood that, what is wrong is not the Qur'an, but the way of examining the text of the Qur'an. Referring to the opinion of Prof Musdah Mulia and Kiai Husein Muhammad, it is necessary to use the verse according to its proper context, and it is not enough to read it textually without being seen critically.

E. CONCLUSIONS

The Qur'an played an important role as a tool to reject and even ban female presidential candidates in the 2004 presidential election. The Qur'an is also still used to reinforce the patriarchal reality in Indonesia so that half of Indonesian society has the sentiment and perspective that a president must be male. The necessity for the president to be a man is still happening today. This idea has become a paradigm for Muslims in general. This formation cannot be separated from the textual interpretation of Islamic



fundamentalists. This reality continues to be nurtured and maintained by Islamic fundamentalists while strengthening the patriarchal domination that exists in Indonesian society. The formation of misogynistic reality in the context of leadership in the public sphere as a result of a textual understanding of Q. S An-Nisa verse 34 continues to be echoed and voiced repeatedly to close the possibility of women running in the contestation of presidential elections in Indonesia.

Indeed, more inclusive narratives about women's leadership in the public sphere have begun to be voiced. However, these alternative narratives have not been able to shift the mainstream narratives that tend to be misogynistic towards women's leadership in the public sphere. There are several reasons listed in this study, but the reasons why alternative narratives that are more friendly to women leaders in the public sphere have not been studied in depth. Departing from this, further research can raise the topic as an effort to complement and solve this reality.

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