

Fatima Mernissi's thought and women's leadership in twenty-first-century Indonesia: A qualitative content analysis

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Abstract:

Women's leadership in twenty-first-century Indonesia continues to face tensions among democratic recognition, affirmative action policies, and patriarchal religious interpretations. This study examines Fatima Mernissi's thoughts on women's leadership and its conceptual resonance with the dynamics of women's leadership in contemporary Indonesia. Employing library research, the study adopts a historical-interpretive approach and Krippendorff's qualitative content analysis. The data comprise Mernissi's works, academic literature, electoral regulations, and documents on women's political representation, all selected for their substantive relevance. The analysis involved coding, categorization, thematic interpretation, and source triangulation. The findings demonstrate that Mernissi legitimizes women's leadership through three foundations: normative equality, critical examination of hadith transmission chains and historical contexts, and historical legitimacy derived from the leadership of Bilqis and the political agency of Aisha. Women's representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives increased from 9.20% in the 1999–2004 term to 20.52% in 2019–2024. However, this increase has not resulted in substantive equality and reveals a persistent gap between affirmative action at the candidate-nomination stage and actual electoral outcomes. The study concludes that Mernissi's thought conceptually resonates with the development of women's leadership in Indonesia, although it does not constitute a direct causal influence. Theoretically, this study integrates Islamic feminism, hadith criticism, women's historical agency, and political representation. In practical terms, the findings underscore the importance of equitable political recruitment, women's leadership development, access to political resources, gender-responsive religious education, and the transformation of patriarchal culture.

Keywords:

Fatima Mernissi; Islamic Feminism; Women's Leadership; Indonesia.



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INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership in Islam continues to encounter restrictions arising from patriarchal religious interpretations that position men as the primary actors in public leadership. One textual basis frequently invoked to restrict women's leadership is a hadith recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, which states, "A people who entrust their affairs to a woman will never prosper" (Al-Bukhari, 1997, Hadith 4425). Mernissi critically examines the use of this hadith by emphasizing the importance of historical and cultural contexts in interpreting Islamic texts and questioning the relevance of its generalization to contemporary societies (Mernissi, 1994). Her argument is reinforced by the historical legitimacy of women's leadership, including the leadership of Bilqis and the political agency of Aisha (Munfarida, 2016; Syaekani, 2021). Mernissi affirms women's equal rights in public and political life while criticizing patriarchal religious interpretations that restrict their participation (Barlow & Akbarzadeh, 2006; Jamaluddin, 2009). From this perspective, gender should not serve as a basis for restricting leadership. Reinterpreting Islamic teachings is therefore necessary to foster a religious understanding that supports gender equality (Aulassyahied, 2016; Muhammad, 2021).

Previous studies on women's leadership can be classified into three major areas. The first comprises research on democracy and women's political representation (Aspinall et al., 2021; Dewi, 2017; Nuraeni, 2019). The second focuses on the implementation of affirmative action through the 30% quota for women (Hillman, 2017; Perdana & Hillman, 2020; Aspinall et al., 2021). The third examines Mernissi's Islamic feminism, particularly her reinterpretation of religious texts and critique of patriarchal constructions (Barlow & Akbarzadeh, 2006; de Oliveira, 2021; Ennaji, 2022). Despite their important contributions, these three areas have generally been examined separately. Consequently, the relationship among religious legitimacy, candidate-nomination policies, and women's actual representation within political structures has rarely been analyzed through an integrated framework. This study addresses this gap by examining the conceptual resonance between Mernissi's ideas of normative equality, the deconstruction of restrictions on women's leadership, and the historical legitimacy of women, on the one hand, and Indonesia's political dynamics, on the other. This conceptual resonance is not presented as evidence of direct causal influence but as an analytical framework for explaining the gap between descriptive representation and substantive equality within electoral structures and a patriarchal culture.

Against this background, this study aims to analyze Fatima Mernissi's thought on women's leadership and its conceptual relevance to contemporary Indonesia, particularly regarding religious interpretation, affirmative action, and political representation. It addresses three research questions. First, how does Mernissi's critique of patriarchal religious interpretations legitimize women's leadership? Second, how are affirmative action policies in Indonesia translated into women's actual representation within political institutions? Third, to what extent does descriptive representation contribute to substantive gender equality in leadership? Theoretically, this study advances the analysis of Islamic feminism by applying Mernissi's critique of religious and historical narratives to investigate the structural and cultural barriers to women's leadership in a Muslim-majority society. Practically, it demonstrates that affirmative action alone is insufficient to achieve substantive equality. Such policies must be supported by equitable political recruitment, women's capacity development, gender-responsive religious education, and the transformation of patriarchal political culture to strengthen women's substantive participation in public decision-making.

To address these questions, this study employs Krippendorff's qualitative content analysis to examine Mernissi's works, Qur'anic verses, hadith criticism, female figures in Islamic history, electoral regulations, data on women's representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives, women's leadership practices, and contemporary religious discourse. The analysis seeks to identify the conceptual correspondence between Mernissi's principle of normative equality and the dynamics of women's political representation in Indonesia. The study contributes by integrating Islamic feminism, religious legitimacy, affirmative action, and political representation into a single analytical framework that distinguishes descriptive representation from substantive equality. This framework enables the study to explain how electoral structures, patriarchal religious interpretations, and the distribution of power simultaneously shape opportunities for and impose constraints on women's leadership in Indonesia.

METODE

Research Approach

This study examines the conceptual relevance of Fatima Mernissi's thought on women's leadership to the development of women's leadership in Indonesia. It employs library research using a historical-interpretive approach ([Dabengwa et al., 2020](#)). This approach is used to examine Mernissi's ideas concerning gender equality, religious authority, critiques of patriarchal interpretation, and the political legitimacy of women, as well as to relate these ideas to the development of women's representation in Indonesian politics and government. The historical approach situates Mernissi's thought within the social, political, and intellectual contexts that shaped the development of her ideas ([Smith, 2001](#)). Meanwhile, the interpretive approach identifies conceptual resonances between Mernissi's thought and the realities of women's leadership in Indonesia by emphasizing meaning, context, and relationships among ideas without presupposing a direct causal relationship ([Bevir & Rhodes, 2005](#); [Finlayson, 2007](#)).

Data Sources

The study draws on both primary and secondary sources. The primary conceptual sources comprise Fatima Mernissi's works on women, religion, authority, and leadership, particularly *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991), *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993), and *Women and Islam* (1991), as well as religious sources concerning women's leadership. The primary institutional sources include electoral regulations concerning women's representation, data on women's representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives, and public documents and religious discourses addressing women's leadership in Indonesia. The secondary sources consist of books, journal articles, and previous studies on Islamic feminism, Mernissi's thought, women's leadership, political representation, and Indonesia's sociopolitical context. Sources were selected according to their substantive relevance to the research focus, academic or institutional credibility, and contribution to the construction of the units of analysis. Relevance was determined by each source's direct connection to Mernissi's thought, the legitimacy of women's leadership, affirmative action policies, or women's political representation in Indonesia.

Data Collection

Data were collected through documentation, involving the identification, selection, close reading, and systematic recording of documents relevant to the research focus. The data collection process identified texts that addressed equality between women and men, restrictions on women's leadership, critiques of hadith and religious authority, women's

political agency in Islamic history, affirmative action policies, and women's representation in Indonesian politics. The documents examined included Mernissi's works, religious texts, electoral regulations, statistical data on women's representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives, government documents, religious sermons, and relevant academic literature. The collected data were subsequently recorded and classified by source type and information content, enabling each document to be systematically linked to the relevant unit of analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify, code, categorize, and interpret the meanings contained in the research sources (Graneheim et al., 2017; Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, units of analysis were determined by identifying texts or information directly related to women's leadership. Second, each document was closely examined to identify meaning units relevant to the research focus. Third, these meaning units were assigned codes according to their substantive content. Fourth, codes sharing similar meanings were grouped into analytical categories and themes. Fifth, the relationships among the codes, categories, and themes were interpreted through contextual inference by considering the historical, religious, political, and institutional backgrounds of each source.

The analysis focused on six principal categories: normative equality, critiques of hadith used to restrict women's leadership, women's historical agency, patriarchal authority, affirmative action policies, and political representation. These categories were subsequently contextualized in relation to the development of women's leadership in Indonesia. The analytical process generated three overarching themes: institutional recognition of women's leadership, the gap between affirmative action policies and actual representation, and the religious and historical legitimacy of women's leadership. The interpretation of these themes sought to explain the correspondences, tensions, and conceptual resonances between Mernissi's thought and the dynamics of women's political representation in Indonesia.

Data Trustworthiness

Data trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation by comparing Mernissi's works, religious sources, legal documents, institutional data, and academic literature to corroborate claims and minimize interpretive bias (Carter et al., 2014). Analytical consistency was assessed by examining the logical connections among units of analysis, codes, categories, themes, and inferences (Elo et al., 2014). The relationship between Mernissi's thought and women's leadership in Indonesia was interpreted in a contextual manner, distinguishing direct influence from conceptual resonance without claiming causality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Biography and intellectual background of Fatima Mernissi

Fatima Mernissi was a Moroccan sociologist and Muslim feminist thinker, born in Fez in 1940 and died on 30 November 2015. She grew up in a middle-class family shaped by harem culture, which exposed her from an early age to the spatial restrictions and social limitations imposed on women. After attending a Qur'anic school, a national school, and a school specifically established for girls, Mernissi came of age amid the rise of Moroccan nationalism, an environment that fostered her critical awareness of colonialism and the struggle for independence (Rhouni, 2020).

Mernissi studied Sociology and Political Science at Mohammed V University in Rabat and earned her Ph.D. in Sociology from Brandeis University in 1973. She subsequently taught at Mohammed V University, served as a visiting professor at Harvard University and the University of California, conducted research for UNESCO and the ILO, and worked as a senior researcher at IURS from 1981 to 1995. Her intellectual contributions gained international recognition when she received the Prince of Asturias Award in 2003 (Munfarida, 2016). Her personal experiences, sociological education, and academic career shaped her sustained engagement with gender, religious authority, Islamic history, democracy, and modernity. These concerns were articulated in her major works, including *Beyond the Veil* (1975), *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1987), *Women in Islam* (1991), *Islam and Democracy* (1992), *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993), and *Dreams of Trespass* (1994).

These works were examined using Krippendorff's qualitative content analysis, which involved identifying meaning units, coding, category development, and contextual inference. The analysis focused on restrictions imposed on women, patriarchal authority, religious interpretation, women's historical agency, and democratic participation, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Constructing Fatima Mernissi's Thought Through Krippendorff's Qualitative Content Analysis

Thematic Unit of Analysis	Code	Analytical Category	Core Inference	Mernissi's Work
Women's experiences within the harem	Harem; spatial segregation; restriction; lived experience	Gendered social boundaries	The harem represents both a physical space and a social mechanism that restricts women's mobility, freedom, and participation	<i>Dreams of Trespass</i> (1994)
Male–female relations in Muslim societies	Gender relations; male dominance; subordination	Patriarchal social structure	Gender inequality is not biologically determined but socially constructed through patriarchal relations and gendered distributions of power	<i>Beyond the Veil</i> (1975)
Male dominance in religious authority and the interpretation of women's position in Islam	Male elite; religious authority; history; theology; patriarchal interpretation	Critical reinterpretation of Islam	Women's subordination should not automatically be regarded as a normative Islamic principle because it may result from historically patriarchal interpretations	<i>The Veil and the Male Elite</i> (1987); <i>Women in Islam</i> (1991)
Women's leadership in Islamic history	Muslim queens; political authority; leadership; historical exclusion	Women's historical and political agency	Muslim women's historical experiences demonstrate that women possess both the capacity and historical legitimacy to exercise political leadership	<i>The Forgotten Queens of Islam</i> (1993)
The relationship between Islam,	Islam; democracy; authoritarianism;	Gender and socio-political	Women's freedom and public participation are	<i>Islam and Democracy</i> (1992)

democracy, power, and modernity	freedom; modernity	transformation	connected to broader struggles against authoritarianism and resistance to democratic change	
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Source: Processed by the researchers (2023).

Table 1 demonstrates that Mernissi's thought centres on a critique of patriarchal structures, gender-based restrictions, male dominance over religious authority, and the marginalisation of women within Islamic historical narratives. Drawing on her lived experiences, sociological analysis, religious reinterpretation, and historical inquiry, Mernissi argues that women's subordination is not an immutable principle of Islam but rather a social and interpretive construction. Her works restore women's agency by positioning them as social, religious, historical, and political subjects while linking gender equality to freedom and democracy. Taken together, these ideas reflect a critical Islamic feminist orientation that seeks to reconstruct gender relations on a more equitable basis.

Fatima Mernissi's thoughts on women's leadership

Fatima Mernissi's thought on women's leadership was examined using Krippendorff's qualitative content analysis. The units of analysis were defined based on religious arguments, critiques of hadith, and historical evidence directly related to women's leadership. Each unit was coded, grouped into analytical categories, and interpreted within the context of Mernissi's thought. The analysis generated three overarching themes: normative equality in leadership, the deconstruction of prohibitions against women's leadership, and the historical legitimization of women's leadership.

Table 2

Fatima Mernissi's Thought on Women's Leadership

Unit of Analysis	Codes	Theme	Analytical Inference	References
The intellectual and spiritual equality of women and men and the Qur'an's egalitarian message	Equality; leadership rights; non-discrimination	Normative equality in leadership	Biological differences do not determine leadership capacity. Women and men have equal leadership rights based on their intellectual and spiritual capacities	Qur'an, Al-Ahzab: 35; Jourdy (2019)
Mernissi's criticism of the chain of transmission, Abu Bakrah's integrity, and the political context of the hadith used to prohibit women's leadership	Chain-of-transmission criticism; narrator credibility; hadith context; politics of transmission	Deconstruction of the prohibition against women's leadership	The hadith used to reject women's leadership cannot be understood solely through a textual reading; its narrator's credibility and historical context of transmission must also be critically examined	Mernissi, <i>The Veil and the Male Elite</i> ; Rusydi (2012)
The leadership of Queen Bilqis, Aisha's scholarly and political authority, and the presence of women rulers in the history of	Deliberation; wisdom; authority; political agency; women rulers	Historical legitimacy of women's leadership	Queen Bilqis, Aisha, and other women rulers demonstrate that women possess the capacity and historical legitimacy to exercise leadership in a participatory, rational, and responsible manner	Qur'an, An-Naml: 32–33, 44; Mernissi, <i>The Veil and the Male Elite</i> and <i>The Forgotten Queens of Islam</i> ; Muthi'ah (2014)

Islamic governance				
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Source: Processed by the researchers (2023).

Table 2 demonstrates that Mernissi's thoughts on women's leadership rest on three foundations. First, the Qur'an's egalitarian message affirms the intellectual and spiritual equality of women and men. Second, Mernissi deconstructs the hadith used to reject women's leadership by examining the credibility of its transmitters and the historical context of its transmission. Third, the accounts of Queen Bilqis, Aisha, and several female rulers in Islamic history demonstrate women's leadership capacity and its historical legitimacy. Accordingly, Mernissi argues that leadership ability is determined not by gender but by competence, integrity, and responsibility.

Fatima Mernissi's thought on women's leadership in contemporary Indonesia

Fatima Mernissi's thought is conceptually relevant to the development of women's leadership in twenty-first-century Indonesia, as reflected in the increasing representation of women in legislative institutions and their expanding access to strategic government positions. Megawati Soekarnoputri's presidency constituted a symbolic and institutional milestone, while the leadership of Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Mari Elka Pangestu, Armida Alisjahbana, Puan Maharani, Ida Fauziyah, Khofifah Indar Parawansa, and Tri Rismaharini further reinforced the recognition that leadership capacity is determined by competence, integrity, experience, and public responsibility rather than gender. A similar development can be observed in the Indonesian House of Representatives, where the number of women increased from 46 out of 500 members during the 1999–2004 term to 61 out of 550 members during the 2004–2009 term and continued to grow in subsequent periods. Although these developments indicate women's expanding access to formal leadership, they do not demonstrate that substantive equality has been achieved or that structural barriers and patriarchal cultural constraints have been eliminated.

Table 3

Women's Representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives

Period	Women	Men	Total
1999–2004	46 (9.20%)	454 (90.80%)	500
2004–2009	61 (11.09%)	489 (88.91%)	550
2009–2014	101 (18.04%)	459 (81.96%)	560
2014–2019	97 (17.32%)	463 (82.68%)	560
2019–2024	118 (20.52%)	457 (79.48%)	575

Source: Compiled by the researchers from KPU RI (2019) and Puskapol FISIP UI (2014).

Table 3 shows that women's representation in the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) increased from 9.20% in the 1999–2004 period to 20.52% in 2019–2024. Although it temporarily declined from 18.04% in 2009–2014 to 17.32% in 2014–2019, the overall trend indicates that women have gained greater access to legislative institutions. During the 2004–2009 period, the DPR comprised 61 women (11.09%) and 489 men (88.91%) out of a total of 550 members. This increase reflects progress in descriptive representation; however, it does not necessarily translate into substantive representation in decision-making, leadership positions within parliamentary bodies, legislative agenda-setting, or the formulation of gender-responsive policies. Thus, numerical progress continues to be constrained by structural and electoral barriers as well as an exclusionary political culture.

The 30% threshold stipulated in Indonesia's electoral legislation does not guarantee that women will secure 30% of parliamentary seats. Article 65(1) of Law No. 12 of 2003 requires political parties to consider a minimum of 30% women's representation when nominating candidates for the DPR and Regional Houses of Representatives (DPRD). This provision was reinforced by Article 53 of Law No. 10 of 2008, Article 55 of Law No. 8 of 2012, and Articles 245–246 of Law No. 7 of 2017, including the requirement that at least one woman be included among every three candidates. Accordingly, the 30% threshold constitutes an affirmative-action measure at the nomination stage rather than a reserved-seat or electoral-outcome quota. The gap between nomination requirements and the number of women ultimately elected indicates that affirmative-action policies must be supported by equitable party recruitment, capacity-building for women candidates, access to political resources, voter support, and a non-discriminatory political culture.

These developments are conceptually consistent with Fatima Mernissi's thought on women and political authority. Through her critique of the hadith commonly invoked to reject women's leadership, Mernissi demonstrates that such restrictions cannot be separated from the historical context of transmission, political interests, the authority of narrators, and religious interpretations embedded in patriarchal social structures. Her critique not only challenges the use of hadith as a basis for prohibiting women's leadership but also exposes the relationship between religious knowledge and political power. Within this framework, women possess the legitimacy to participate in public life and exercise leadership based on competence, justice, and responsibility rather than gender.

Mernissi also draws on Aisha's experience to demonstrate women's political agency in Islamic history. In addition to possessing scholarly and religious authority, Aisha emerged as a political actor capable of mobilizing support within a male-dominated sphere. Citing Sa'id al-Afghani, Mernissi states that the Battle of the Camel resulted in approximately 15,000 deaths. Nevertheless, this event is not presented as a normative justification for conflict. Its analytical relevance lies in the magnitude of Aisha's political authority and influence, which enabled her to mobilize supporters and lead an army. Her experience, therefore, provides historical evidence of Muslim women's political agency rather than a justification for the conflict itself.

Women's participation in government is also reflected in a sermon delivered by Mufidah and published on 12 April 2023:

"Women, in addition to fulfilling their roles within the family, may also participate in government so that the available 30% quota for women's representation can be achieved. Thus, it is not only men who should participate; women should do so as well" (Mufidah, 2023).

This statement reflects the emergence of contemporary religious discourse that recognizes women's right to participate in government. However, its emphasis on women's familial roles warrants critical scrutiny, as it may subject women to simultaneous domestic and public burdens. Women's political participation must therefore be accompanied by an equitable distribution of family responsibilities. Moreover, the 30% threshold mentioned in the sermon refers to an affirmative-action policy at the nomination stage, not a guarantee that women will obtain 30% of parliamentary seats. The sermon constitutes one example of growing awareness of women's political participation, but it is insufficient to represent the acceptance of women's leadership across Indonesian society as a whole.

Data on women's representation, electoral legislation, Fatima Mernissi's thought, Aisha's historical experience, and Mufidah's sermon were examined using Krippendorff's qualitative content analysis. The analysis involved identifying meaning units related to

women's leadership, assigning codes, organizing them into analytical categories, and drawing inferences informed by Indonesia's social, political, legal, and religious contexts. The units of analysis comprised data on women's representation in the DPR RI, affirmative-action provisions in electoral legislation, Mernissi's critique of hadith and political authority, Aisha's political agency, and Mufidah's statements concerning women's participation in government. This process generated three principal themes: institutional recognition of women's leadership, the gap between affirmative-action policies and actual representation, and the religious and historical legitimacy of women's leadership.

Table 4

Content-Analysis Matrix of Mernissi's Thought and Women's Leadership in Indonesia

Units of Analysis	Key Codes	Analytical Theme	Contextual Inference	Evidence
Megawati Soekarnoputri's presidency; women in strategic government positions; increase in women's parliamentary representation from 9.20% to 20.52%	Political visibility; institutional access; descriptive representation	Institutional recognition of women's leadership	Women's growing presence in executive and legislative institutions demonstrates expanded access to formal leadership, although substantive equality has not yet been achieved.	Indonesian women leaders; parliamentary data, 1999–2024
The 30% female-candidacy requirement and the lower proportion of women elected	Affirmative action; electoral outcomes; representation gap	Gap between affirmative policy and actual representation	Affirmative regulation at the nomination stage does not automatically produce proportional representation because structural and electoral barriers remain.	Indonesian electoral laws
Mernissi's hadith criticism; Aisha's scholarly and political agency; Mufidah's statement on women's participation in government	Religious authority; patriarchal interpretation; historical agency; public participation	Religious and historical legitimacy of women's leadership	Mernissi's critique, Aisha's political involvement, and Mufidah's contemporary discourse provide religious and historical grounds for women's public leadership while revealing continuing patriarchal constraints.	Mernissi, <i>The Veil and the Male Elite</i> ; Sa'id al-Afghani; Mufidah's lecture, 12 April 2023

Source: Authors' qualitative content analysis based on the research data.

Table 4 presents three principal findings. First, the increasing representation of women in the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) and their growing presence in strategic public offices indicate broader access to and institutional recognition of women's leadership. Nevertheless, this descriptive representation has not yet been fully accompanied by substantive equality in decision-making and the allocation of political power. Second, the discrepancy between the minimum requirement of 30% women candidates and the percentage of women ultimately elected demonstrates a continuing gap between affirmative-action policies and election results. Legal recognition is an essential prerequisite, but it is still insufficient to overcome structural barriers and ensure women's proportional representation. Third, Mernissi's critique of religious interpretations that restrict women's roles, together with her reading of Aisha's political agency, provides a conceptual foundation for legitimizing Muslim women's leadership. This perspective demonstrates that restrictions

on women derive not only from religious texts but also from the construction of knowledge, political interests, and patriarchal power relations. Mufidah's sermon further articulates women's political participation within contemporary Indonesian religious discourse.

The relationship between Mernissi's thought and women's leadership in Indonesia does not show a direct causal influence, as there is no evidence that Indonesian women leaders have specifically adopted her ideas. Instead, this relationship is more appropriately understood as one of conceptual resonance. Mernissi's thought provides a key framework for explaining the tension between normative recognition and political reality: although the legal system has established affirmative-action mechanisms and expanded women's access to public office, their representation remains below 30% and has yet to ensure an equitable distribution of power. Mernissi's perspective is therefore used to analyze how religious authority, political regulation, institutional representation, and male-dominated structures simultaneously create opportunities for and enforce constraints on women's leadership in Indonesia.

Discussion

This study finds that Fatima Mernissi's thought consistently challenges patriarchy, male domination of religious authority, and the marginalization of women's agency in Islamic history. The content analysis reveals that the legitimacy of women's leadership is constructed on three foundations: normative equality within Islamic sources; criticism of the use of hadith to restrict women's leadership through analyses of chains of transmission and historical contexts; and historical legitimacy as exemplified by Queen Bilqis and Aisha. In Indonesia, women's representation in the House of Representatives (DPR RI) increased from 9.20% in the 1999–2004 period to 20.52% in 2019–2024, although it remained below the 30% affirmative-action threshold. These findings demonstrate a gap between the normative and institutional recognition of women's leadership and the realities of electoral representation. The relationship between Mernissi's thought and the development of women's leadership in Indonesia constitutes a conceptual resonance rather than a causal relationship, providing a critical framework for understanding the structural, electoral, and patriarchal cultural barriers to women's substantive representation.

Fatima Mernissi's thought is relevant to contemporary debates concerning women's political representation in Indonesia. Article 65(1) of Law No. 12 of 2003 provided the initial legal foundation for an affirmative-action policy encouraging political parties to nominate at least 30% women as legislative candidates, a provision subsequently reinforced by later electoral legislation. Nevertheless, during the 2019–2024 period, women secured only 118 of the 575 seats in the DPR RI, equivalent to 20.52%, and thus remained below the 30% affirmative-action threshold ([Rahmanto et al., 2021](#); [Sweinstani, 2021](#)). This disparity demonstrates that affirmative measures at the nomination stage do not automatically produce proportional representation, as structural barriers and patriarchal attitudes continue to constrain women's political representation ([Aspinall et al., 2021](#)). Mernissi's thought challenges patriarchal religious interpretations from within the Islamic tradition and positions gender equality as a central objective of reinterpretation. Her sociohistorical approach asserts that patriarchy is not inherent in Islam but is sustained through social institutions and contextually embedded interpretations ([Ennaji, 2022](#)). This perspective connects women's leadership with interpretive authority, political access, and the distribution of power.

Theoretically, Mernissi offers a critical reading of religious texts and authorities that have been employed to restrict women's leadership. The content analysis demonstrates that

her critique operates through an examination of the narrator's credibility, the chain of transmission, and the historical and political context of Abu Bakrah's hadith, "*lā yufliḥu qawmun wallaw amrahum imra'ah*" (Bøe, 2020; Faiz et al., 2023). Within Mernissi's intellectual framework, the use of this hadith as a basis for restricting women's leadership cannot be separated from the social and historical contexts or the power relations that shaped the transmission and interpretation of religious knowledge (Mukaromah, 2018; Purnama, 2021). These findings reinforce the three foundations of her thought identified through Krippendorff's content analysis: normative equality, the deconstruction of religious restrictions, and the historical legitimacy of women's leadership (Ben-Nun Bloom, 2016). Qur'an 33:35 reinforces the principle of spiritual equality, while the experiences of Queen Bilqis and Aisha demonstrate the historical legitimacy of women's participation in public and political life. Thus, within Mernissi's framework, leadership legitimacy is determined primarily by competence, integrity, and responsibility rather than gender.

The principal lesson derived from Mernissi's thought is the importance of intellectual courage in reassessing established interpretations of religious texts through critical, historical, and contextual readings without abandoning Islam as an epistemological and normative framework (Mufid et al., 2023; Musfiroh & Izza, 2020). Critiquing the hadith used to restrict women's leadership does not entail rejecting the authority of hadith as a whole. Instead, it necessitates an examination of the chain of transmission, textual content, narrator credibility, and the socio-political contexts surrounding the hadith's transmission and application (Ahlan, 2022; Bahar, 2009). The findings demonstrate that Mernissi's approach situates religious texts within the historical contexts and social relations that shape their interpretation and use. In studies of women's leadership, this approach affirms that religious legitimacy can be investigated through critical engagement with the Islamic intellectual tradition while remaining in dialogue with contemporary gender perspectives (Bahar, 2009; Shofan, 2021). Theoretically, Mernissi's perspective creates space for the development of a contextual and justice-oriented Islamic feminist epistemology by bringing normative Islamic sources, women's historical experiences, and social transformation into dialogue without constructing a dichotomy between Islamic tradition and modern thought.

The findings of this study are consistent with Mukaromah (2018) and Musfiroh and Izza (2020), who highlight Mernissi's critique of the hadith used to restrict women. They also align with Ismail (2015) and Susetiyo and Ni'mah (2022), who demonstrate that Mernissi establishes the legitimacy of women's leadership through an egalitarian reading of the Qur'an that positions women and men as equal moral and spiritual subjects; accordingly, leadership capacity cannot be determined solely by gender. These findings further support Muthi'ah's (2014) argument regarding the importance of critically examining hadith concerning women while complementing Munfarida's (2016) portrayal of Mernissi as a thinker who advances gender-sensitive religious reinterpretation. Unlike these previous studies, the present research integrates normative equality, criticism of hadith, the historical legitimacy of women's leadership, and the development of women's political representation in Indonesia. Its contribution, therefore, lies in employing Mernissi's thought as a critical framework for explaining the gap between normative legitimacy, affirmative-action policies, and women's actual political representation, without claiming that Mernissi's ideas have directly influenced Indonesian women leaders.

The findings demonstrate that the affirmative-action requirement of at least 30% women among legislative candidates has not resulted in proportional representation in the DPR RI, where women held only 20.52% of seats during the 2019–2024 period. This condition underscores the need for strategies that not only guarantee access to candidacy

but also strengthen women's electability and substantive influence in political decision-making. Political parties should improve the recruitment and development of women cadres, expand their access to political resources, and provide them with competitive opportunities for nomination. Higher education institutions can incorporate Fatima Mernissi's thought into gender, political, and Islamic studies to strengthen critical literacy concerning the relationship between religion, gender, and power. Religious institutions and civil society organizations should promote historical and contextual interpretations of religious sources, while the media should avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes. The General Elections Commission (KPU), the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu), and civil society organizations should also strengthen the monitoring of affirmative-action policy implementation to narrow the gaps between candidacy, electoral success, and the distribution of political power.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that Fatima Mernissi's thought establishes the legitimacy of women's leadership through three principal foundations: normative equality in Islamic sources, the deconstruction of hadith-based restrictions on women's leadership, and historical legitimacy as exemplified by Queen Bilqis and Aisha. Through critical, historical, and contextual readings, Mernissi demonstrates that women's subordination cannot be automatically regarded as a normative principle of Islam; rather, it must be understood in relation to social constructions, religious interpretations, and power relations. In Indonesia, the increase in women's representation in the House of Representatives (DPR RI), from 9.20% in the 1999–2004 period to 20.52% in 2019–2024, indicates expanding institutional access. Nevertheless, this proportion remained below the 30% affirmative-action threshold applied at the candidate-nomination stage. These findings show a gap between normative legitimacy, institutional support, and women's actual political representation, arising from structural, electoral, religious, and cultural barriers.

Theoretically, this study advances the field of Islamic feminism by integrating normative equality, hadith criticism, women's historical agency, and contemporary political representation into a unified analytical system. Mernissi's thought is employed not to claim that it directly influenced the development of women's leadership in Indonesia, but as an important framework and source of conceptual resonance for explaining the relationship among religious authority, patriarchal power relations, affirmative-action policies, and the allocation of political power. Practically, the findings show that affirmative-action measures at the candidate-nomination stage must be accompanied by stronger recruitment and leadership development for women, greater access to political resources, competitive nomination opportunities, and effective monitoring of electoral processes. Higher education and religious institutions can also strengthen gender studies and promote historical and contextual interpretations of Islam, while the media and civil society can help reduce gender stereotypes and encourage increased acceptance of women's leadership.

This study is limited by its reliance on content analysis of Fatima Mernissi's thought and secondary data concerning women's representation in the DPR RI. Consequently, it does not directly capture the experiences of candidates, legislators, party officials, voters, or religious leaders in Indonesia. Furthermore, the study does not test a causal relationship between Mernissi's thought and the development of women's leadership in Indonesia; rather, it identifies a conceptual resonance between the two. Future research ought to employ in-depth interviews, fieldwork, policy analysis, surveys, or mixed-methods designs to investigate empirically the factors influencing women's nomination, electoral success, and substantive political influence. Comparative studies across political parties, regions, levels of

government, and Muslim-majority countries are also needed to examine how electoral systems, political cultures, religious authority, and institutional support shape opportunities for women's leadership.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Mujtahid: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Writing Original Draft; Visualization; Writing Original Draft. **Dini Sadiyah:** Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Validation; Visualization; Writing Original Draft. **Ali Hasan Assidiqi:** Formal Analysis; Validation; Visualization; Writing Original Draft.

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