



**Al-Ihkam:** Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata Sosial, 21 (1), 2026: 29-56  
ISSN: 1907-591X, E-ISSN: 2442-3084  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-ihkam.v21i1.20065>

## **The Nexus of Religion, Ethnicity, and Money: Understanding Political Violence Against Women in Eastern Indonesia**

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Article history: Received: June 08, 2025, Accepted: December 08, 2025,  
Published: June 30, 2026

### **Abstract:**

The 2024 General Elections in Indonesia were marked by significant cases of Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP), including in Eastern Indonesia. This study aims to present the Islamic Law and Christian Perspective as the dominant faiths in Eastern Indonesia, on women's involvement in politics. It also

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explores how, in the context of the 2024 elections, religious identity, ethnicity, money, and non-indigenous sentiment have been weaponized to perpetuate VAWP in Eastern Indonesia. This is qualitative research, based on in-depth interviews with female politicians in Eastern Indonesia, particularly in East Nusa Tenggara and West Papua. This study reveals that both Islamic Law and Christian perspectives allow women to participate in politics in the region. However, female candidates in East Nusa Tenggara encountered psychological violence (where their religious affiliations and ethnic backgrounds were frequently weaponized against them) and economic violence (manifested through voters' high demands for material inducements in exchange for electoral support). More interestingly, Muslim women candidates in predominantly Christian regions in West Papua were subjected to psychological violence linked to their religious identity and perceptions of being non-indigenous women. This study concludes that VAWP in Eastern Indonesia is highly complex, as the interplay of religious diversity, ethnic identities, money and issues concerning non-indigenous sentiment intensifies its manifestations. These dynamics leave women politicians particularly vulnerable, especially in the absence of sufficient protective mechanisms. This study suggests the need for comprehensive legislation to address violence against women in politics (VAWP) at both national and local levels.

**Keywords:**

Violence against women; Politics; Religion; Ethnicity;  
Eastern Indonesia.

**Introduction**

An important issue that marked Indonesia's 2024 General Elections was the prevalence of Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP). Various prominent Indonesian women NGOs reported high levels of violence against female candidates.<sup>1</sup> This problem is not just

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<sup>1</sup> Faqihah Muharroroh Itsnaini and Hilda B Alexander, "Evaluasi Pemilu 2024, Diskriminasi dan Kekerasan pada Perempuan Meningkat," *Kompas.Com*, July 3, 2024, <https://lestari.kompas.com/read/2024/07/03/070000686/evaluasi-pemilu-2024-diskriminasi-dan-kekerasan-pada-perempuan-meningkat>; Ammar Rizqianto, "Koalisi Perempuan Ungkap Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Saat Pemilu," *Detik News*, June 24, 2024, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-7406533/koalisi-perempuan-ungkap-kekerasan-berbasis-gender-saat-pemilu>.

in Indonesia; it is a global issue. A United Nations report on VAWP in South Asia highlighted that women politicians often face harassment and threats, especially during elections.<sup>2</sup> The widespread VAWP in Asia is due to deep-rooted male-dominated norms and gender inequality.<sup>3</sup> Those studies show that VAWP happens worldwide, including in Asia, in which Indonesia is part of this trend.

This paper seeks to contribute to discussions on VAWP by observing cases of Indonesian women politicians who experienced gender-based violence over the course of the 2024 elections in Indonesia. Other studies have focused on gender norms and political activities in the 2024 General Elections,<sup>4</sup> empirical data on public perceptions of the leadership of female presidential candidates,<sup>5</sup> and the gender quotas.<sup>6</sup> Given the lack of empirical research on violence against women in Indonesia's 2024 General Elections, this paper seeks to fill this gap.

This paper focuses on women politicians in Eastern Indonesia, namely, in the provinces of East Nusa Tenggara (*Nusa Tenggara Timur*) and West Papua (*Papua Barat*). East Nusa Tenggara was chosen due to worrying facts related to women's situation, such as: many cases of

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<sup>2</sup> Ranjana Kumari et al., *Violence against Women in Politics (A Study Conducted in India, Nepal and Pakistan)* (New Delhi: UN Women Multi Country Office, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Violence Against Women in Politics: Expert Group Meeting Report and Recommendations* (New York: UN Women & UNHR Publishing Office, 2018); United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), *Invisible Violence, Visible Harms, Violence Against Women in Politics in Nepal: The Experience of Locally Elected Representatives* (Kathmandu: Nepal Country Office, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> By Diahadi Setyonaluri et al., *Indonesia: Women's Political Engagement and Gender Norms* (New York: Align Report, 2024), 1-46.

<sup>5</sup> Andri Rosta et al., "Do Voters Vote For Female Leaders in the General Election in 2024?," *KnE Social Sciences* 9, no. 23 (2024): 351-366, <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v9i23.16745>.

<sup>6</sup> Mast Irham, "Even with a 30% Quota in Place, Indonesian Women Face an Uphill Battle Running for Office," *The Conversation*, February 8, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/even-with-a-30-quota-in-place-indonesian-women-face-an-uphill-battle-running-for-office-222387>.

women trafficking<sup>7</sup> and high incidence of domestic violence.<sup>8</sup> West Papua, meanwhile, was chosen due to the fact that compared to other provinces, the Indonesian military has a large amount of control over the Papua area (especially during the Indonesian Military Operation 1963-2004).<sup>9</sup> Due to armed conflict, Papuan women are also vulnerable to various forms of domestic violence perpetrated by partners, family, or state officials.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the two regions are predominantly Christian,<sup>11</sup> yet ethnically diverse.<sup>12</sup> East Nusa Tenggara is overwhelmingly Christian, led by Catholics (53.74%) and Protestants (36.82%), and shows high ethnic fractionalization (Ethnic Fractionalization Index-EFI 0.90), suggesting significant diversity, yet only moderate segmentation (Ethnic Polarization Index-EPOI 0.35). Similarly, West Papua is majority Protestants (56.62%), with high ethnic heterogeneity (EFI 0.95) and a significant non-indigenous population (14.76% Javanese). When coupled with a strong patriarchal culture, the region's religious and ethnic diversity can heighten the risk of violence against women in politics.

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<sup>7</sup> Maria Agustina Kleden and Astri Atti, "Analysis of the Causes of Human Trafficking in East Nusa," *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2019): 313-19, <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1991.02.02.72>; Sitti Maesurah et al., "Social Interaction and Religious Harmony: A Cultural Communication Study in Malaka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 9, no. 3 (2025): 1838-62, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v9.i3.27167>.

<sup>8</sup> Ratih Lestarini Pranoto et al., "The Co-Existence of Laws Regarding Domestic Violence Case Settlement: Rote Island, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia," *Journal of International Women's Studies Volume* 20, no. 7 (2019): 165-79, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol20/iss7/11>.

<sup>9</sup> Kumari et al., *Violence against Women in Politics (A Study Conducted in India, Nepal and Pakistan)*.

<sup>10</sup> Joyomenggolo, "Perempuan Papua Melawan Kekerasan Yang Dilanggengkan Negara," *Infid*, August 30, 2024, <https://infid.org/perempuan-papua-melawan-kekerasan-yang-dilanggengkan-negara/>.

<sup>11</sup> Statistics of Nusa Tenggara Timur Province, *Nusa Tenggara Timur Province in Figures 2023* (Kupang: Statistics of Nusa Tenggara Timur Province, 2023); Statistics of Papua Barat Province, *Papua Barat Province in Figures 2023* (Manokwari: Statistics of Papua Barat Province, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Aris Ananta et al., *Demography of Indonesia's Ethnicity* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2015); Evi Nurvidya Arifin et al., "Quantifying Indonesia's Ethnic Diversity," *Asian Population Studies* 11, no. 3 (2015): 233-56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730.2015.1090692>.

To examine how religion, gender, and ethnicity influence violence against women in politics (VAWP) in Eastern Indonesia, this paper guided by the concept of 'intersectionality' introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black feminist scholar in the late 1980s. She described 'intersectionality' as a crossroads where different types of discrimination meet, especially affecting women of color.<sup>13</sup> Intersectionality helps us see how gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality can mix to create specific challenges. In addition to that, to determine the prevailing forms of VAWP in Eastern Indonesia, this study utilizes Krook and Sanín's five typologies of violence against women in politics: (1) physical violence, (2) psychological violence, (3) sexual violence, (4) economic violence, and (5) semiotic violence.<sup>14</sup>

Having understood the above background, this paper would like to examine: (1) how Islamic Law, and Christianity which are the dominant faiths in East Nusa Tenggara and West Papua—perceive women's involvement in politics; (2) how, in the context of the 2024 elections, religious identity, ethnicity, money and non-indigenous sentiments have been weaponized against women in Eastern Indonesia especially in case of East Nusa Tenggara and West Papua.

## **Methods**

The unit of analysis is individual women politicians, which refers to the United Nations definition of women in politics: "includes all women involved in political activities, those elected at the national or local levels, members and candidates of political parties, government and State officials at the local, national and international levels, civil servants, ministers, ambassadors and other positions in the

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<sup>13</sup> Nina Lykke, *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (2014): 1241–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.

<sup>14</sup> Mona Lena Krook, *Violence Against Women in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Mona Lena Krook and Juliana Restrepo Sanín, "The Cost of Doing Politics? Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians," *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 3 (2019): 740–55, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719001397>.

diplomatic corps".<sup>15</sup> In this study, the politicians observed and interviewed were legislative candidates in the 2024 General Elections or held political positions in local political institutions, such as the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP, *Majelis Rakyat Papua*). We also interviewed women/men NGO activists and Catholic priests in the region. A total of 12 respondents (7 female, 5 male) in East Nusa Tenggara and 13 respondents (8 female, 5 male) in West Papua were interviewed during observations from June to July 2023. Follow-up phone interviews were conducted in September and December 2024, as well as April 2025, to update the post-election situation.<sup>16</sup>

Semi-structured interviews were used because they allowed new questions to emerge from the participants' answers, which in turn enabled deeper conversations. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and stored in a secure device that only the authors could access. To safeguard privacy, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper.

## Results and Discussion

### Women in Political Sphere: Islamic Law and Christian Perspective

Our field research reveals that both Islamic Law and Christian perspective—particularly Catholicism, which are the predominant religions in Eastern Indonesia—play an active role in promoting and supporting women's involvement in politics.

Islam views men and women as equal partners in politics. In Prophet Muhammad's time, Muslim women were important in social and political areas. They helped build the early Islamic society in Medina.<sup>17</sup> Women were not passive or isolated. They helped with military campaigns and sometimes even fought in battles. Muslim women have played important political roles in history.<sup>18</sup> They spoke

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<sup>15</sup> Julie Ballington and Gabriella Borovsky, *A Normative Foundation for Ending Violence Against Women in Politics* (New York: Gender and Violence against Political Actors, 2023), 191.

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<sup>17</sup> Moh Fauzi, "Women's Political Rights in Islamic Law Perspective," *Sawwa* 10, no. 1 (2014): 21-32, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v10i1.627>; Nur Chanifah et al., "Investigation Legality and Certification Process of Halal Product Guarantee: South Korea Muslim Federation as a Muslim Minority Country," *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 25, no. 2 (2025): 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.30631/alrisalah.v25i2.1620>.

<sup>18</sup> Fauzi, "Women's Political Rights in Islamic Law Perspective."

out against leaders who did not follow Islamic justice. For example, they criticized Caliphs Umar and Ali. This shows the significant political influence of Muslim women in Islamic history. Scholar such as Nisa<sup>19</sup> highlights that many interpretations of the Qur'an support gender equality and challenge patriarchal norms, advocating for women's greater participation and leadership in political and social spheres.

In addition to the general Islamic perspective on women's political roles, it is also essential to consider how these views are reflected in practice within the two major streams of Indonesian Islam—NU, often associated with Islamic traditionalism, and Muhammadiyah, known as a reformist Islamic movement.

NU has issued various legal opinions or *fatwas* (Islamic legal opinion) that are often used by its members as guidance in addressing social and religious matters. These *fatwas* are formulated through forums known as *Bahs al-masā'il*, which are held regularly at all levels within NU, from local to national. Based on Kobayashi Yasuko's<sup>20</sup> observation of the compilation of *Bahs al-masā'il* rulings from 1926 to 2004, there were 84 decisions addressing *masā'il wāqī'iyyah* (contemporary issues) related to women, covering areas such as family law—including marriage, divorce, inheritance, and gender matters.

One important example is Fatwa No. 281 issued in 1957, which permitted women to become members of parliament by obtaining permission from their husband or father if unmarried. In 1997,<sup>21</sup> NU further addressed the topic of women's political leadership. During a national *Bahs al-masā'il al-mauḍū'iyyah* meeting of NU scholars in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, the organization issued a fatwa titled "Thoughts of Alim Ulama on a Female President" (Fatwa No. 004/MN-

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<sup>19</sup> Eva F Nisa, "Women and Islamic Movements," in *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 151–75; Muflikhatul Khoiroh and Abd Syakur, "The Flexibility of Islamic Law in the Ganjur Tradition in Lamongan, Indonesia," *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan* 23, no. 2 (2023): 139–59, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v23i2.139-159>.

<sup>20</sup> Yasuko Kobayashi, "Ulama's Changing Perspectives on Women's Social Status: Nahdlatul Ulama's Legal Opinion," in *Islam in Contention: Rethinking Islam and State in Indonesia*, ed. Ota Atsushi, Okamoto Ota, and Ahmad Suaedy (Jakarta: CSEAS, CAPAS, 2010), 279–312.

<sup>21</sup> Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, *Indonesian Women and Local Politics: Islam, Gender and Networks in Post-Suharto Indonesia* (Singapore: National University Singapore Press & Kyoto University Singapore, 2015).

NU/11/1997).<sup>22</sup> This fatwa, referencing to verse 71 of Surah At-Taubah, expressed support for women participating in public leadership roles, as long as they demonstrated the necessary competence, integrity, and public acceptance, without neglected their nature (*kodrat*).<sup>23</sup> In discussions about women's roles and leadership in politics, NU members frequently cite the 1997 fatwa issued during the *Bahs al-masā'il* in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, as an important reference supporting women's political participation, including their eligibility to run as legislative candidates.<sup>24</sup>

Muhammadiyah's stance on women's roles and leadership is reflected in the writings and publications issued by its Central Board, the Majelis Tarjih, and 'Aisyiyah. The Majelis Tarjih serves as a division within Muhammadiyah that holds the authority to conduct *ijtihad* – independent reasoning grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith. Muhammadiyah did not begin addressing the issue of female leadership until the 1970s. The discourse gained prominence with the publication of *Adabul Mar'ah Fil Islam* (Women's Manners in Islam) in 1977 by Muhammadiyah's Majelis Tarjih, which outlines nine key areas including women's involvement in politics.<sup>25</sup>

In the section on Muslim women in politics, *Adabul Mar'ah Fil Islam* emphasizes that their involvement is supported by the verse 71 of Surah At-Taubah; this verse highlights that believing men and women are allies who promote justice, prevent wrongdoing, uphold prayers, give charity, and obey God and the Prophet. Therefore, both men and women are expected to contribute to *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (promoting good and preventing evil), including within political and governmental spheres. According to the book, women's political participation can take two forms: direct roles, such as serving

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<sup>22</sup> Dewi, 60.

<sup>23</sup> Dewi, *Indonesian Women and Local Politics: Islam, Gender and Networks in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Dewi; Shofiatul Jannah and Dwi Hidayatul Firdaus, "Reformulation of the Concept of Iddah in The Compilation of Islamic Law Perspective of Negotiative Hermeneutics," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum dan Syar'iah* 15, no. 2 (2023): 286-300, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v15i1.21065> Available.

<sup>25</sup> Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, *Indonesian Women and Local Politics: Islam, Gender and Networks in Post-Suharto Indonesia* (Singapore: National University Singapore Press & Kyoto University Singapore, 2015), 56; Ridwan, "Gender Equality in Islamic Inheritance Law: Rereading Muhammad Shahrur's Thought," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 16, no. 2 (2022): 181-92, <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v16i2.6916>.

in legislative bodies like parliament, and indirect roles, such as engagement in organizations or public forums.<sup>26</sup> At present, when Muhammadiyah members engage in discussions about women's political roles or candidacies, they typically refer to the book as their primary doctrinal reference, which affirms and supports women's participation in politics—whether as legislative candidates or contenders for local government leadership.<sup>27</sup>

This is evident in Muslim female name Sur (45 years old), a Muslim female politician candidate of the Regional Representative Council of Manokwari District in the 2024 General Elections. Regarding gender issues, Sur mentioned that she faced no resistance to her candidacy as a woman.<sup>28</sup> Her association with the Islamic organization Muhammadiyah, in which its publication of *Adabul Mar'ah Fil Islam* strongly supports women's participation and leadership in politics, further reinforces this acceptance. With this strong Islamic foundation, Sur entered the political arena with confidence.

For Christians in East Nusa Tenggara, political engagement is generally associated with a prophetic mandate, that is, the proclamation of justice for the community. Within Catholic tradition, the Second Vatican Council established a robust foundation for laypersons (i.e., women and men who are not members of the clergy) to actively participate in the political sphere. The Church encouraged the incorporation of faith into every dimension of daily existence, encompassing family life, and public affairs. Laypersons are esteemed as *Christifideles laici* (the faithful laity of Christ), commissioned to act as apostles in secular contexts. Their active participation in political processes serves as an invitation to infuse the core of public life with ethical, moral and spiritual values.<sup>29</sup> The Code of Canon Law reinforces

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<sup>26</sup> Dewi, *Indonesian Women and Local Politics: Islam, Gender and Networks in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, 2015, 57; Asliah Zainal et al., "The Indonesian Journal of the Social Sciences Navigating Politics : How Non-Elite Women in Eastern Indonesia Counteract Dynastic Power," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 2 (2025): 781-812, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v13i2.2088>.

<sup>27</sup> Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, "Perspective versus Practice: Women's Leadership in Muhammadiyah," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 23, no. 2 (2008): 161-185, <https://doi.org/OI:10.1355/sj23>.

<sup>28</sup> Sur, a Muslim female politician candidate of the Regional Representative Council of Manokwari District in the 2024 General Elections, *Interview*, July 28, 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Massaro, "The Role of Conscience in Catholic Participation in Politics since Vatican II," in *The Church in the Modern World: Fifty Years after Gaudium et Spes*, ed.

this perspective by asserting, “it belongs to the Church always and everywhere to announce moral principles, even about the social order, and to render judgment concerning any human affairs insofar as the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls requires it”.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, within the Catholic community, political involvement is not regarded as unethical; on the contrary, it is seen as a tangible means through which Christians can and should work to transform society for the better.<sup>31</sup>

In the predominantly Christian provinces of East Nusa Tenggara, theological stance to promote women’s role in politics is translated into active institutional mobilization. In East Nusa Tenggara, the Church’s supportive posture is evident in the custom of holding special Eucharistic celebrations or services to pray for all legislative candidates during election periods. Candidates receive blessings from pastoral leaders, underscoring the view of politics as a unique spiritual calling for Christians.

For instance, in East Nusa Tenggara, the Catholic Church openly encourages its congregation, including women, to engage in politics, framing their involvement as part of the prophetic mandate to work for social justice and societal improvement. This perspective is clearly stated by Reverend Luca, a Catholic priest in East Nusa Tenggara, who confirmed the institutional commitment:

“We strongly encourage our congregation to engage in politics...The Church even typically implements a program for the training of lay leaders, in which both

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Erin Brigham (London: Lexington Books, 2014); Asrizal Saiin et al., “Walking Together: Dynamics of Muslim Wives’ Dual Role in Rural Areas Pursuing Career and Household Responsibilities,” *El-Mashlahah* 14, no. 1 (2024): 127–48, <https://doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v14i1.7827>.

<sup>30</sup> Canon Law Society of America, *Code of Canon Law (Latin-English Edition)* (Washington DC: CLSA, 1983); Saiful Risky, Sholahuddin Al-Fatih, and Mabarroh Azizah, “Political Configuration of Electoral System Law in Indonesia from State Administration Perspective,” *Volkgeist: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum dan Konstitusi* 6, no. 1 (2023): 119–30, <https://doi.org/10.24090/volkgeist.v6i1.7940>.

<sup>31</sup> Michał Gierycz, “A New Dimension of the Catholic Church’s Influence on the World: On the Novelty of the Social Teaching of St. John Paul II,” *Religions* 13, no. 1212 (2022): 1217, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121217>; Nita Triana et al., “Application of the Precautionary Principle in Judge’s Legal Considerations for Pollution Cases in Islamic Law Perspectives,” *Al-’Adalah* 20, no. 1 (2023): 61–89, <https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v20i1.16660>.

women and men are specifically prepared to participate in politics for the betterment of society.”<sup>32</sup>

This support is heavily channeled through affiliated organizations. For instance, it is reflected in the three female legislative candidates observed in this paper in East Nusa Tenggara, namely: i) Ida, a candidate of the PKB for the Regional People's Representative Council of East Nusa Tenggara, ii) Ika, a candidate of Golkar for the Regional People's Representative Council of East Nusa Tenggara, and iii) Eni, a candidate of the Nasdem Party for the Regional Peoples Representative Council of East Flores District (Kabupaten Flores Timur). All of them are actively involved in Catholic religious organizations, such as *Wanita Katolik Republik Indonesia* (WKRI). The WKRI of East Nusa Tenggara collaborates with the Church through the Board of Trustees of Parish Branches, encouraging WKRI members to pursue political careers including as legislative candidates. The Church acknowledges that women possess the same rights as men to be heard, meaning that they also have the right to occupy leadership positions traditionally held by men.

A similar proactive stance is evident in West Papua in which the Catholic Church also encourages its community – including women – to engage actively in the political arena. For example, according to Maya, a female Catholic activist in Papua, the Church offers a variety of grassroots programs designed to strengthen women's leadership capacities and entrust women with leadership roles in the Papua People's Assembly (MRP), thereby establishing a solid foundation for their involvement in public leadership. This intentional approach establishes a firm basis for their public involvement. This robust institutional backing, often channeled through affiliated religious women's groups like the *Wanita Katolik Republik Indonesia* (WKRI).

This is illustrated by our research findings, particularly through our encounter with Von, a 52-year-old Indigenous Papuan woman from Manokwari, West Papua. Von is an indigenous Papuan from the Arui Sai tribe of Serui, while her husband is from the Mpur tribe of Tambrau. Her husband is a bureaucrat in the Manokwari District deand, as such, Von comes from an elite background. Von was a

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<sup>32</sup> Reverand Luca, a Catholic priest in East Nusa Tenggara, *Interview*, April 25, 2025.

member of the West Papua People's Assembly (*Majelis Rakyat Papua Barat*, MRPB) for the 2000–2022 period, representing Christian constituencies through the Papuan Chapter of the Council of Indonesian Churches (*Gereja Kristen Indonesia - GKI*).

It is important to highlight the role of the Catholic Church in West Papua and in Papua generally, which encourages its community, including women, to actively engage in the political arena.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Von's active involvement in the Church paved her way to politics via local women's groups such as the Arfak Women's Association, Papuan Women's Solidarity Network (*Ikatan Solidaritas Perempuan Papua*), and Papuan Women's Partnership (*Mitra Perempuan Papua*). She is active in local social services and gained support from the Church, where she helped many victims of domestic violence and thus gained a lot of support. Here, though the case of Von, we can see supportive perspectives of Christianity especially Catholicism in encourages women's role to actively engage in the political arena.

In conclusion, this sub-section shows that the normative and institutional foundations provided by both Islam Law (in this paper especially refers to the case of Muhammadiyah's Adabul Mar'ah Fil Islam) and Christianity (via the Catholic Churches in East Nusa Tenggara and West Papua) unequivocally support women's participation in politics. These religious frameworks offer an essential institutional foundation for women leaders in the region. Such institutional backing is crucial, as it helps challenge and neutralize entrenched patriarchal narratives that typically limit women's presence in the public sphere. By advocating for women's political engagement, religious institutions reframe this participation as a moral responsibility and an expression of faith, rather than a deviation from social norms.

This finding is critical because it suggests that the root causes of Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) in Eastern Indonesia do not lie in theological prohibition, but rather in the complex politicization of religious and ethnic identities, combined with potent

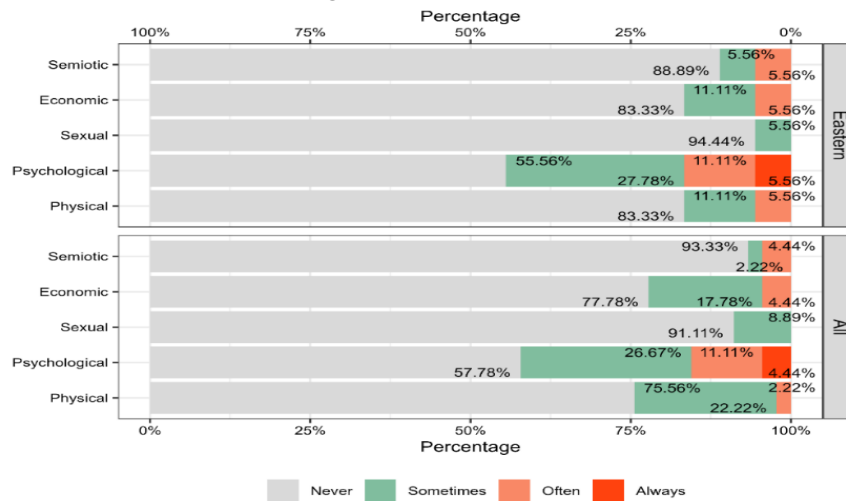
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<sup>33</sup> Muridan S. Widjojo, "Perempuan Papua dan Peluang Politik di Era Otsus Papua," *Masyarakat Indonesia* 38, no. 2 (2013): 297–327, <https://doi.org/10.14203/jmi.v38i2.649>; Nahid Ferdousi, "Protection of Wife's Right to Maintenance in Bangladesh: An Overview," *MJSL: Malaysian HJournal of Syariah dan Law* 9, no. 1 (2021): 173–80, <https://doi.org/10.33102/mjssl.vol9no2.246>.

economic factors and non-indigenous sentiment, which will be the central focus of the intersectional analysis in the following sub-section.

### **Intersection of Religion, Ethnicity, Money and Non-Indigenous Sentiment: Features of VAWP in Eastern Indonesia**

This qualitative study found that psychological and economic violence are the two most common forms of violence against women in politics (VAWP) in Eastern Indonesia. The fieldwork was informed deeply by the preceding online survey conducted in June 2023, involving women politicians and members of women’s NGOs from 30 provinces.<sup>34</sup> The preceding survey, which collected national data on VAWP prevalence according to five typologies of violence against women in politics developed by Krook and Sanín,<sup>35</sup> provided the critical context and justification for the in-depth, qualitative inquiry. The survey revealed that psychological and economic violence are the two most common forms of violence against women in politics (VAWP), as illustrated in Figure 1.



<sup>34</sup> Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi et al., “Non-Electoral Political Participation among Members of Indonesian Women’s NGOs: The Role of Gender Training, Social Bases, and Political Efficacy,” *Asian Women* 41, no. 2 (2025): 43–74, <https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2025.6.41.2.43>; Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, “Pilkada dan Ancaman Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan dalam Politik,” *Kumparan*, October 30, 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Mona Lena Krook and Juliana Restrepo Sanín, “The Cost of Doing Politics? Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians,” *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 3 (2020): 740–755, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719001397>.

**Figure 1.** Experiences of Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) among members of Indonesian women's NGOs with experience in electoral contestation.

As shown in Figure 1, psychological and economic violence are two of the most frequently experienced forms of VAWP, which closely align with interview accounts. In Eastern Indonesia, psychological violence has the highest reported frequency, while economic and physical violence are also significant concerns. This quantitative pattern complements the findings of this paper captured through in-depth interviews. Beyond Indonesia, it aligns with global patterns. A 2016 study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data from 55 women parliamentarians across 39 countries, showed that psychological violence emerged as the most common form, reported by 81.8 percent of respondents worldwide, followed by economic violence at 32.7 percent.<sup>36</sup>

Overall, the preceding survey provided the critical context and justification for the fieldwork in Eastern Indonesia. As we have this important data gained from the preceding online survey of VAWP ahead before the fieldwork, then the research team conducted the qualitative study to observe more deeply, based on in-depth interview on how is the feature of VAWP, especially in Eastern Indonesia (East Nusa Tenggara and West Papua).

Our analysis, based on the fieldwork, reveals that in Eastern Indonesia, VAWP is further facilitated through the instrumentalization of religious identity interlaced with ethnic background, functioning as a mechanism for the enactment of psychological violence against female legislative candidates. Moreover, economic violence emerged as a significant factor, predominantly through the pervasive use of money politics. A comprehensive summary of the findings is presented in Table 1.

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<sup>36</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Sexism , Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians* (New York: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016).

**Table 1.** Features of VAWP among Female Legislative Candidates in the 2024 General Elections, in East Nusa Tenggara and West Papua

| Name  | Types of Violence                               | Intersecting Features of Violence  |
|---|---|--|
| Ida, candidate for the Regional People's Representative Council of East Nusa Tenggara Province (recently won) | Psychological violence                          | Ida received verbal attacks not to vote for her because she represented PKB, a party considered Islamist while her electoral districts are predominantly Christian; Verbal violence related to her husband's ethnicity.                          |
| Ika, for the Regional People's Representative Council of East Nusa Tenggara province (defeated)               | Psychological violence<br><br>Economic violence | She was often bullied for being "in a man's world" sacrificing her husband and children.<br><br>Ika faced derogation and bullying. Ika admitted feeling uncomfortable with the community's expectations of monetary handouts during the campaign |
| Eni, candidate for the Regional Peoples Representative Council of East Flores District (defeated)             | Economic Violence                               | Voters' expectation to distribute " <i>angpau pemilu</i> "   |
| Sur, candidate for the Regional Representative Council of Manokwari District, West Papua (recently won)       | Psychological violence                          | Verbal physiological violence stemmed from sentiments against non-indigenous Papuans   |

As presented in Table 1, our observations reveal the interesting features of VAWP among the four female legislative candidates in Eastern Indonesia, as follows: First, psychological violence intersects elements of religion and ethnicity, as well as non-indigenous sentiment in case of West Papua.

The intersection of religion and ethnic identity in the feature of VAWP is seen, for example, in the case of Ida (58 years old). Ida recounted incidents from both elections, a significant portion of which focused on religious aspects:

"Don't vote for her because PKB is an Islamic party."  
"She won't win because she doesn't have money".<sup>37</sup>

As explained earlier, PKB is generally associated with Islamic parties. As such, Ida's political opponents easily exploited religious issues. Krook highlighted that psychological violence harms an individual's mental health and emotional well-being, undermines and disempowers targets by demeaning, demoralizing, or shaming them, often through tactics designed to instill fear, create stress, or damage their reputation.

In addition to the issue of being associated with an Islamic party in a majority-Christian region, Ida also faced verbal violence related to her husband's ethnicity, as her husband is from Manggarai (not from East Flores). This harassment began during the 2019 Election and continued into the 2024 Election.

A similar story of psychological violence with intersecting religion and ethnicity is also experienced by Ika (42 years old), who hails from a distinguished family. At the time of our interviews, Ika was the Deputy Secretary of the Golkar Party in East Nusa Tenggara Province. In the 2024 Legislative Election, Ika ran as a candidate for electoral districts including Manggarai, West Manggarai, and East Manggarai on the Island of Flores, which is some distance from Ika's current home base. However, Ika's father hailed from the area, which she believed would positively affect her final vote count.

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<sup>37</sup> Ida, *Interview, candidate for the Regional People's Representative Council of East Nusa Tenggara Province (recently won)*, September 25, 2024.

Ika experienced psychological violence from close relatives or friends who bullied her with remarks. This includes, but is not limited to statement like: women are not suited to the world of politics, women who are involved in politics will sacrifice their household, politics will only ruin the children's lives, or accusations of "sacrificing her husband and children".

Additionally, because Ika was nominated from three districts on Flores Island while living and working on Timor Island, she believed that she was unfit to represent the electoral districts in Flores and did not understand the area's situation. Even more interesting, during the nomination stage as a legislative candidate, she received negative comments from extended family members, friends, and the community, as she said:

"In East Nusa Tenggara, the patriarchal culture is still very prominent. Women are still considered second class, so our presence in the legislative contest is doubted, and even looked down on...."<sup>38</sup>

Ika's experience reflects what White et al. termed "political patriarchy", referring to attitudes holding that politics should be a male domain, and that women are less suited to, and capable of, holding political office than men."<sup>39</sup>

Female legislative candidates in Manokwari District, an area well known for its ethnic diversity in West Papua,<sup>40</sup> also experienced forms of psychological violence. There is a case of Sur, (45 years old), a Muslim female politician candidate of the Regional Representative Council of Manokwari District in the 2024 General Elections from Golkar. Sur is an immigrant whose family roots lie in South Sulawesi Province (Buginese). She served as a member of the Regional Representative Council of Manokwari District (2019-2024) and was re-elected in the 2024 General Elections for another term. Her husband is

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<sup>38</sup> Ika, a candidate of Golkar for the Regional People's Representative Council of East Nusa Tenggara, *Interview*, June 14, 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Sally White et al., "Voting against Women: Political Patriarchy, Islam, and Representation in Indonesia," *Politics & Gender* 20, no. 2 (2024): 391-421, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X23000648>.

<sup>40</sup> Zah, a women activist of Islamist Aisyiyah Manokwari, *Interview*, July 25, 2023.

also from South Sulawesi, a businessman running a popular IT store in Manokwari. Sur has been active in various organizations, including 'Aisyiyah - the women's wing of Muhammadiyah (an Islamic reform movement established in 1912). Joining 'Aisyiyah enabled Sur to gain knowledge of Islam and business as well as learn how to connect with the wider Manokwari community. As a businesswoman who was also active in West Papua's branch of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sur became the treasurer of 'Aisyiyah West Papua, deputy chairwoman, and chairwoman of Aisyiyah in West Papua (2010-2023).

Sur joined the political realm in 2018, after weighing up personal and strategic considerations and Golkar's inclusive image:

"Even though I wear a veil (*berkerudung*) I was accepted. The first time I entered the Papua region, people had caution, as they definitely preferred to choose indigenous Papuans, right?... But as soon as they knew [my political party] was Golkar, as Golkar has a good name, it eased my entry to remote areas on the outskirts of the coast...."<sup>41</sup>

Running as a candidate from Golkar rather than an Islamic-based political party in Manokwari provided her with an advantage, as the public generally holds a favorable perception of Golkar as an inclusive party that represents all segments of society. In the 2024 General Election, Sur's winning strategy involved focusing on women voters by leveraging her connections within 'Aisyiyah and Muhammadiyah, engaging with local Christian communities, offering economic support to Indigenous Papuans—particularly Papuan women running small stalls (*lapak-lapak*) selling local goods like areca nuts, and appealing to millennial voters.

Although Sur won in the 2024 General Elections, Sur experienced verbal physiological violence through local TV media. While Sur did not encounter any rejection of being a female candidate, interestingly, she noted that the resistance she faced stemmed from sentiments against non-indigenous Papuans (*Orang Asli Papua, OAP*), as she is considered an immigrant. According to her confession, an

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<sup>41</sup> Sur, a Muslim female politician candidate of the Regional Representative Council of Manokwari District in the 2024 General Elections, *Interview*, July 28, 2023.

Indigenous Papuan deliberately published accusations on local television and Facebook, alleging that she misused regional government funds for her political campaign and targeting her identity as a non-indigenous or immigrant woman.

Sur's experiences are not surprising considering the unique features of West Papua, especially Manokwari, as the influx of Muslim migrants has created ethnoreligious and class cleavages and tension, especially among indigenous Papuan Christians against Muslim migrants, in which indigenous Papuans fear the domination of non-Papuans.<sup>42</sup> Sur described the psychological impact of the act of violence as "very, very impactful". She reported the perpetrator to the police with backup from indigenous Papuan women members of her campaign team.

This resonates with what Crenshaw introduced as the idea of "structural intersectionality" to highlight how women of color experience the overlapping effects of race and gender, resulting in distinct experiences of domestic violence, sexual assault, and recovery that differ from those of white women.<sup>43</sup> Applying this concept, Sur's position as a Muslim woman in a context dominated by Christian, indigenous Papuan women means her encounters with political violence are shaped by a unique set of intersecting identities. Her experience is more complex and layered, as she navigates political violence not only as a woman but also as a Muslim and a non-indigenous woman.

Secondly, economic violence. Beyond the findings on psychological violence that intersect with religious and ethnic identity, this paper also underlined similarities in the women's experience of

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<sup>42</sup> Cahyo Pamungkas and Devi Tri Indriasari, "Preventing Religious Conflict in Papua Land: Adopting Cultural Traditions of Peacebuilding," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 9, no. 2 (2021): 331-56, <https://doi.org/10.18588/202108.00a119>; Mumtazinur and Yenny Sri Wahyuni, "Keamanan Individu (Personal Security) dan Qanun Hukum Keluarga: Tinjauan Konsep Keamanan Manusia (Human Security)," *El-Ussrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 4, no. 1 (2021): 76-89, <https://doi.org/10.22373/ujhk.v4i1.8504>.

<sup>43</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-1299, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>; Izzy Al Kautsar, "Future Competition Law in Indonesia : Analysis of the Phenomenon of Disruptive Innovation," *SYARIAH: Jurnal Hukum dan Pemikiran* 21, no. 2 (2021): 138-50, <https://doi.org/10.18592/sjhp.v21i2.4448>.

economic violence in the form of entrenched and rampant money politics to meet voters' expectations.

For example, Ika admitted feeling uncomfortable with the community's expectations of monetary handouts during the campaign. Thus, politics was perceived as detrimental to the household economy. Similarly, Eni (56 years old), a candidate in East Flores-7 electoral district, expressed her disappointment in the practice of money politics. Unlike many of her competitors and even fellow party members, Eni chose to focus on presenting ideas and concepts while refusing to distribute "*angpau pemilu*" or election gifts in the district where such gifts widespread.

Eni further explained that three months before the campaign period (September–November 2023), some legislative candidates distributed colorful goody bags matching the party's colors containing rice, sugar, oil, and instant noodles, followed by the placement of flags in front of their houses. However, the decisive factor for voters was cash handouts distributed three days before the election day on February 14, 2024. Eni's decision not to distribute '*angpau*' gifts to voters was supported by her politically experienced husband, who accompanied her throughout the campaign. The gifts are also against her Party's Nasdem official policy. Nevertheless, she personally calculated the expenses for her campaign – costs that were not covered by party policy – such as: an estimated IDR300 million was needed to target just 2,000 voters (@ IDR100,000 per vote), plus campaign team expenses of approximately IDR100 million. As Eni did not have money, she developed a campaign strategy focused on women's groups across 14 villages in her subdistrict, the same strategy as Indonesian female legislative candidates in the 2019 elections.

A similar case is shown by Ida. In the 2019 election, she and her husband used their personal savings of IDR 121 million for their campaign. However, her campaign expenses for the 2024 election have increased to approximately IDR 300 million.

Indonesia's elections were commonly colored by vote buying practices.<sup>44</sup> However, the intensity of vote buying in the 2024 General Elections was more brutal than in previous years, and it was described

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<sup>44</sup> Burhanuddin Muhtadi, *Vote Buying in Indonesia: the Mechanics of Electoral Bribery* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 4.

as ‘incredibly reckless’ (*luar biasa ugal-ugalan*).<sup>45</sup> Muhtadi highlighted findings from an exit poll conducted by Indikator Politik on February 14, 2024, General Elections, involving 2,975 voters, which revealed that 46.9% regarded money politics as “normal”.<sup>46</sup>

In fact, in 2023, ahead of the 2024 General Election, the Indonesian Bishops' Conference highlighted the prevalence of money politics and called for a firm rejection of money politics.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, from the perspective of Islamic law, including hadith, vote buying is unequivocally deemed impermissible.<sup>48</sup> However, in practice, such as in Madura during the 2024 legislative elections, money politics persist, driven by the growing pragmatism and economically driven decision-making of Muslim voters.<sup>49</sup>

Dalton's study on VAWP in Japan introduced the term “hyohara” to describe harassment by constituents.<sup>50</sup> Drawing from the cases in Eastern Indonesia, this paper proposes a broader interpretation of 'economic violence,' originally defined by Krook.<sup>51</sup> Based on the experiences of women politicians in the region, this paper suggests an expanded definition of ‘economic violence’ that also encompasses the inability to meet voters’ expectations for financial incentives within a highly transactional political culture—an experience identified as a form of economic harassment.

In conclusion, this sub-section demonstrates that the occurrence of violence against women in politics (VAWP) among female legislative candidates in East Nusa Tenggara and Manokwari, West Papua, was

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<sup>45</sup> Kurniawan Fadilah, “AHY: Fenomena Vote Buying di Pemilu 2024 Luar Biasa Ugal-Ugalan,” *Detik News*, March 23, 2024, <https://news.detik.com/pemilu/d-7258148/ahy-fenomena-vote-buying-di-pemilu-2024-luar-biasa-ugal-ugalan>.

<sup>46</sup> Burhanuddin Muhtadi, “A Kidney for Your Vote: Money Politics in Indonesia's 2024 Elections,” *FULCRUM*, March 2024.

<sup>47</sup> Komsos KWI, “Pesan Sidang KWI 2023: Berjalan Bersama Menuju Indonesia Damai,” *Mirifika*, November 21, 2023, <https://www.mirifika.net/pesan-sidang-kwi-2023-berjalan-bersama-menuju-indonesia-damai/>.

<sup>48</sup> I Made Yunita, Anak Agung Putu Sugiantiningsih, and Mohammad Hidayaturrehman, “Vote Buying among Madurese Muslim; Islamic Law Standpoint I Made Yunita Anak Agung Putu Sugiantiningsih Mohammad Hidayaturrehman,” *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 19, no. 2 (2024): 444–69, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v19i2.13025> Vote.

<sup>49</sup> Yunita, Sugiantiningsih, and Hidayaturrehman.

<sup>50</sup> Yunita, Sugiantiningsih, and Hidayaturrehman.

<sup>51</sup> Krook and San'ın, “The Cost of Doing Politics? Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians.”

facilitated through the instrumentalization of religious identity intersecting with ethnic affiliations. In the specific context of Manokwari, this dynamic was further compounded by sentiments of non-Indigenous exclusion, which collectively functioned as a mechanism for the reproduction of psychological violence targeting female political contenders. More notably, and of significant concern, economic violence emerged as a salient structural barrier faced by women candidates. This form of violence was predominantly manifested through the entrenched and normalized practice of money politics, primarily driven by the widespread practice and normalization of money politics as an expected exchange for voter support.

### **Conclusion**

This study finds that both Islamic law and Christianity perspective—particularly Catholicism, which is the dominant faith in East Nusa Tenggara and West Papua—do not oppose women's involvement in politics yet actively foster and support women's participation in politics, thereby providing a crucial institutional foundation for female politicians in the region. And yet, the study further reveals that female legislative candidates in Eastern Indonesia, especially in East Nusa Tenggara and West Papua, experienced psychological violence, where their religious affiliations and ethnic identities were often exploited as tools of attack, as well as economic violence, expressed through voters' heavy demands for material incentives in return for political support. Notably, Muslim women candidates in predominantly Christian West Papua were particularly vulnerable to psychological violence, stemming from the perception of being non-indigenous women. This study concludes that VAWP in Eastern Indonesia is highly complex, as the interplay of religious diversity, ethnic identities, money, and issues concerning non-indigenous sentiment intensifies its manifestations. This study contributes to offering a nuanced intersectional analysis of VAWP in Eastern Indonesia, highlighting how religion, ethnicity, and economic factors shape women's political experiences. However, its scope is limited as it does not cover other regions with distinct sociological characteristics, such as South Sulawesi and West Nusa Tenggara. Hence, future research is recommended in these areas to provide a more comprehensive understanding of VAWP across Eastern

Indonesia. Furthermore, the study suggests for the adoption of comprehensive legislation at both national and local levels to address VAWP, reforms to electoral and political party laws, the establishment of women-friendly campaign and financing regulations, and the implementation of public education initiatives to increase awareness and foster preventive measures against VAWP.

### **Acknowledgment**

We would like to thank the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities (IPSH) (BRIN), Indonesia, for the 2023 Grant of the Rumah Program (Grant No. 8/III.7/HK/2023-1.1. SosHum.6), as well as all Indonesian female politicians in Eastern Indonesia who shared their stories in this study. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to all female politicians in East Nusa Tenggara, and Manokwari in West Papua, who generously shared their time and experiences for this research. We sincerely thank Wahyu Prasetyawan (UIN Jakarta) for his thoughts and comments in the initial stages of writing this article. We also appreciate the reviewers for their feedback and comments. We extend our sincere thanks to Worry Mambusy Manoby for his assistance with the research in Manokwari, as well as to the reviewers for their valuable and constructive feedback.

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