

REPRESENTATION, GENDER, AND PUBLIC POLICY: CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Studies on gender and state politics demonstrate that public policy is never gender-neutral but is shaped by power relations and social representations that normalize particular gender norms. In Indonesia, despite post-reform democratic consolidation and expanded political participation, gender inequality remains embedded in both the processes and substance of public policymaking. Existing scholarship has largely focused on formal political representation and affirmative policies, while the discursive and symbolic dimensions of policy formation have received limited attention. This article examines how gender is constructed and represented in Indonesian public policy through contemporary practices of social representation. Drawing on critical feminist policy analysis and an intersectional perspective, the study conceptualizes public policy as a site of meaning-making and power negotiation. The analysis reveals that public policies not only regulate resource distribution but also normalize specific gender roles and identities, often overlooking the diverse experiences of women across social locations. This article contributes to debates on gender and state politics by highlighting the importance of discourse and social representation in understanding and advancing gender-just and inclusive public policymaking in Indonesia.

Keywords: Gender, Intersectionality, Public Policy, Social representation, State Politics.

ABSTRAK

Kajian mengenai gender dan politik negara menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan publik tidak pernah bersifat netral, melainkan dibentuk melalui relasi kuasa dan praktik representasi sosial yang mereproduksi norma tertentu tentang gender. Di Indonesia, meskipun demokratisasi pasca-reformasi membuka ruang partisipasi politik yang lebih luas, ketimpangan gender masih bertahan dalam proses dan substansi kebijakan publik. Sebagian besar penelitian sebelumnya cenderung berfokus pada representasi politik formal dan kebijakan afirmatif, sementara dimensi diskursif dan simbolik dari pembentukan kebijakan relatif kurang mendapat perhatian. Artikel ini bertujuan mengkaji bagaimana gender dikonstruksi dan direpresentasikan dalam pembentukan kebijakan publik Indonesia melalui praktik representasi sosial kontemporer. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis kebijakan feminis kritis dan perspektif interseksional, artikel ini menempatkan kebijakan publik sebagai arena produksi makna dan relasi kuasa negara. Artikel ini menempatkan kebijakan publik sebagai arena produksi makna dan relasi kuasa negara. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan publik tidak hanya mengatur distribusi sumber daya, tetapi juga menormalisasi peran dan identitas gender tertentu, sering kali dengan mengabaikan kompleksitas pengalaman perempuan dari kelompok sosial yang beragam. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kajian gender dan politik negara dengan menegaskan pentingnya analisis representasi sosial dan diskursus kebijakan dalam upaya mewujudkan kebijakan publik yang lebih inklusif dan berkeadilan gender di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Gender, Interseksionalitas,, Kebijakan Public, Representasi Sosial, Politik Negara.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between gender and state politics constitutes a central issue in contemporary public policy studies. Recent scholarship demonstrates that the state is never neutral in relation to gender, but operates through institutional structures and discursive practices that frequently reproduce specific social hierarchies. (Cumings, 2025) In the Indonesian post-reform context, the strengthening of democratic institutions and the expansion of political participation have not been accompanied by a substantive transformation in how public policies construct and represent gender. Gender inequality persists not only in formal political representation but also in policy language, problem definitions, and the frameworks of solutions institutionalized by the state. (Studies & Bilgiler, 2025) Feminist policy scholarship over the past five years emphasizes that public policy cannot be understood merely as a technocratic instrument, but must be approached as an arena of meaning-making and power relations. policies are always grounded in particular representations of “problems,” which implicitly contain normative assumptions about the is recognized as a legitimate policy subject, which social experiences are validated, and what forms of agency are enabled or constrained. (Kupiainen et al., 2023) Recent studies further indicate that public policies tend to stabilize dominant gender norms, particularly in the domains of family, welfare, and public morality. (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021)

Despite this growing body of literature, studies on gender and public policy in Indonesia remain largely focused on formal political representation, such as women’s descriptive representation, affirmative action policies, and gender mainstreaming mechanisms. While important, these approaches often overlook the symbolic and discursive dimensions of public policy as mechanisms of power. (Mitri, 2022) Moreover, systematic applications of interpretive policy analysis that integrate social representation theory with an intersectional perspective are still scarce in the Indonesian context. Underscores, gender justice encompasses not only redistribution and representation but also recognition of diverse social experiences. Without examining how gender is represented and meaningfully constructed in policy, equality risks being reduced to procedural compliance rather than structural transformation. (Priola & Chaudhry, 2021)

These analytical gaps become particularly salient when situated within Indonesia’s political context during the 2019–2024 period. This timeframe represents a phase of democratic consolidation following the 2019 presidential election, characterized by the intensification of moral politics, populism, and the growing prominence of discourses on family, religion, and social order in the public sphere. During this period, public policies exhibit an ambivalent orientation: on the one hand, they reaffirm commitments to gender equality in national development planning documents; on the other hand, they reproduce dominant gender norms through policy problematizations, target populations, and regulatory language. Yet, these dynamics have rarely been examined through policy analyses that foreground meaning, representation, and power relations.

Within this context, this study conceptualizes public policy as a political text that both reflects and shapes social representations of gender. Empirically, the analysis focuses on key state policy documents, including the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024, selected Regional Medium-Term Development Plans (RPJMD), and various Presidential Regulations and Ministerial Regulations related to family, social welfare, women’s protection, and human development. These documents are treated not merely as administrative outputs but as sites for the institutionalization of meaning that define the position of gender within the state’s policy framework. Through an interpretive policy analysis informed by social representation theory and an intersectional perspective, this study seeks to reveal how gender is positioned, negotiated, and constrained within contemporary Indonesian public policy. (Aspinall et al., 2021) Conceptually, it proposes the notion of “negotiated inclusion” to capture the pattern of state gender relations, whereby gender inclusion is neither fully rejected nor radically transformed, but instead incorporated in a limited and conditional manner within the boundaries of dominant moral norms and political interests. In doing so, this study contributes to gender and public policy scholarship in Indonesia by shifting the analytical focus from formal political representation toward an

understanding of policy as a discursive practice that shapes the boundaries of recognition, agency, and gender justice. This section examines how gender is represented, positioned, and negotiated within key state policy documents in Indonesia during the 2019–2024 period. Rather than treating policies as neutral administrative instruments, the analysis approaches them as political texts that institutionalize particular meanings of gender and delineate the boundaries of legitimate inclusion. The mapping of policy documents below serves as an analytical entry point to identify recurring patterns in how gender is framed across different regulatory domains.

Table 1: Mapping of Gender Representations in Key State Policy Documents (2019–2024)

Policy Document Type	Regulation	Year	Key Articles/Provisions	Analytical Reading of Gender Representation
National Development Plan	Presidential Regulation No. 18/2020 on the RPJMN 2020–2024	2020	Chapter IV on Human Development	Gender is framed instrumentally as a means to enhance welfare and family resilience, rather than as a site of power relations or rights-based transformation.
Presidential Regulation	Presidential Regulation No. 59/2017 on the SDGs (in force during period)	2019–2024	Goal : Gender Equality	Gender equality is articulated as a normative commitment aligned with global agendas, yet weakly connected to enforceable mechanisms within domestic policy frameworks.
Law	Law No. 52/2009 on Population Development and Family Development	In force	Articles 1 and 4	Women are predominantly represented through familial and reproductive roles, reinforcing gendered divisions of responsibility within policy discourse.
Ministerial Regulation	Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation No. 6/2022	2022	Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines	Gender is operationalized through administrative procedures and reporting requirements, emphasizing compliance over substantive transformation.
Presidential Regulation	Presidential Regulation No. 62/2020 on the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection	2020	Mandates and Functions	Gender governance is positioned as a sectoral responsibility, limiting its cross-cutting influence across broader state policy domains.

The table illustrates a consistent and layered pattern across policy domains, revealing how gender is incorporated into state policy through differentiated yet convergent representational logics. In the RPJMN

2020–2024, gender is embedded within the broader agenda of human development and family resilience. While the document formally acknowledges gender equality as part of development objectives, its representational framing positions gender primarily as an instrumental variable for achieving welfare outcomes rather than as a dimension of structural power relations. Gender equality is thus articulated in technocratic and developmental terms, which tends to depoliticize gendered inequalities by translating them into issues of capacity, productivity, and social resilience. (Syukri, 2023) A similar logic can be observed in Indonesia's adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals through Presidential Regulation No. 59/2017.

Although Goal 5 explicitly commits the state to gender equality, this commitment largely operates at the level of normative alignment with global development discourse. Within domestic policy translation, gender equality is rarely accompanied by robust enforcement mechanisms or redistributive interventions that challenge existing hierarchies. As a result, gender appears as a symbolic commitment that enhances policy legitimacy without necessarily reconfiguring institutional power relations. The representational constraints become more explicit in Law No. 52/2009 on Population Development and Family Development. Here, women are predominantly constructed through familial, reproductive, and demographic roles. This framing reinforces a gendered division of responsibility in which women are positioned as central to family stability and population management, while broader questions of autonomy, labor, and political agency remain marginal. (Zhang et al., 2025) Such representations naturalize women's caregiving roles and embed gender inequality within seemingly neutral legal definitions.

Ministerial Regulation No. 6/2022 on Gender Mainstreaming further illustrates how gender is operationalized through administrative rationalities. Gender equality is translated into procedural requirements, indicators, and reporting mechanisms that emphasize bureaucratic compliance. While these instruments signal institutional recognition of gender issues, they simultaneously narrow the scope of gender politics by prioritizing managerial effectiveness over substantive transformation. In this context, gender becomes a technical category to be managed rather than a political relation to be contested.

Finally, Presidential Regulation No. 62/2020 on the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection situates gender governance within a specific sectoral mandate. This institutional positioning limits the cross-cutting influence of gender across broader policy domains, reinforcing the perception that gender is a specialized issue rather than a foundational dimension of state governance. Consequently, responsibility for gender equality is concentrated within a single ministry, while other policy sectors remain largely insulated from gendered accountability. Taken together, these representational patterns demonstrate that gender inclusion in Indonesian public policy during the 2019–2024 period is neither absent nor transformative.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative interpretive policy research design to examine how gendered social representations are constructed within the formation of public policy in contemporary Indonesia. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study focuses on meaning-making processes embedded in policy discourse, rather than on causal measurement or policy evaluation. (Lim, 2025) The research is grounded in interpretive policy analysis, which understands public policy as a socially constructed outcome shaped by political context, institutional norms, and power relations. Within this framework, policy documents are treated as interpretive texts that reveal how the state defines social problems and legitimizes particular policy responses. To foreground the gender dimension, the study integrates social representation theory, enabling analysis of how shared meanings about gender circulate between state institutions and the public sphere.

The primary data consisted of official public policy documents issued at the national level between 2019 and 2024, including laws, government regulations, ministerial policy statements, and strategic policy documents related to governance and social policy. These documents were selected because they represent

authoritative expressions of state reasoning. Secondary data were drawn from parliamentary debates, political speeches, and national media coverage, providing contextual insight into how policies were framed and publicly justified.

Data sources were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: relevance to gender and governance, production by key state actors involved in policy formulation, and significance within public or political debate. This strategy emphasizes analytical relevance rather than representativeness, consistent with interpretive policy research. Data collection was conducted through systematic document analysis, involving close reading, coding, and thematic categorization of policy texts and political narratives. Documents were organized thematically to identify dominant policy frames and recurring patterns of gender representation across policy domains. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis framework informed by Braun and Clarke, integrated with interpretive policy analysis. The analytical process included data familiarization, initial coding, identification of policy frames, theme development, theme refinement, and interpretive synthesis. Analytical attention was directed toward how gender is constructed through policy language, problem definitions, and normative assumptions, as well as how these constructions reflect broader state power relations.

To enhance analytical rigor, the study employed source triangulation and maintained reflexivity throughout the research process. Peer discussions with scholars in public policy and political sociology were conducted to strengthen thematic coherence and minimize interpretive bias. (Wood & Sebar, 2020) The findings are context-specific to contemporary Indonesia and do not seek statistical generalization. Instead, the study offers conceptual insights into how gendered social representations shape public policy formation, contributing to scholarly debates on gender, governance, and interpretive approaches to policy analysis.

DISCUSSION

Gendered Social Representations In The Formation Of Indonesian Public Policy

This study examines how gendered social representations are constructed and mobilized within the formation of public policy in contemporary Indonesia through an interpretive policy analysis framework. The findings demonstrate that public policy operates not merely as a regulatory instrument, but as a discursive arena in which the state produces and legitimizes particular meanings of gender. Across national-level policy documents, parliamentary debates, political speeches, and media narratives issued between 2019 and 2024, gender is predominantly articulated as a social and moral construct rather than as a political category of power, rights, and institutional authority.

Policy discourse consistently frames gender through moral and normative language, especially in relation to women's roles in maintaining social harmony and ethical order. References to women's participation in governance are commonly justified in terms of moral responsibility, care, and social sensitivity. While this framing enables the symbolic inclusion of women within public policy narratives, it simultaneously constrains their political agency. Gender equality is articulated as a moral aspiration rather than a political claim, thereby limiting its potential to challenge existing power relations embedded in state institutions. (Tadros & Shutt, 2024) From an interpretive perspective, this representation reflects how policy discourse legitimizes gender inclusion while preserving established political hierarchies. (Padavic et al., 2020) In social welfare and governance-related policy documents, gender is further constructed through familial frames that position women as central actors in sustaining family resilience and social stability. Social issues such as poverty alleviation, health promotion, and education are frequently addressed through expectations placed on households, with women implicitly assigned primary responsibility. This framing shifts accountability for structural social problems away from the state and toward the private sphere, reinforcing gendered divisions of labor. As a result, gender inequality is reframed as a social condition to be managed through family-based interventions rather than a political issue requiring institutional or structural reform. (Hennessy, 2023)

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The institutional level, gender appears prominently within public policy frameworks through formal gender mainstreaming mechanisms. However, analysis of policy texts reveals that gender is largely treated as an administrative category embedded in indicators, reporting procedures, and compliance requirements. While this technocratic framing signals formal recognition of gender concerns, it also narrows the scope of gender analysis by detaching it from questions of power, representation, and political contestation. Gender thus becomes a manageable policy variable rather than a critical lens for interrogating how governance structures reproduce inequality.

Public and political discourse surrounding gender-related policies further reinforces these representations by framing gender equality as a culturally sensitive issue. Political actors frequently invoke social harmony, local values, and national cohesion when articulating positions on gender policy. Such discourse functions as a boundary-setting mechanism that constrains rights-based or transformative gender claims by positioning them as potentially disruptive. Through this cultural legitimation, the state is able to acknowledge gender concerns rhetorically while limiting the scope of substantive policy change. (Bush, 2021).

Taken together, these findings reveal that gendered social representations in Indonesian public policy operate through a logic of negotiated inclusion. Gender is made visible across policy texts and political narratives, yet its political significance is systematically constrained through moral, familial, cultural, and technocratic framings. Within the interpretive policy framework, these representations function as governing narratives that stabilize existing institutional arrangements rather than facilitate transformative change. This study contributes to debates on gender and governance by demonstrating how public policy functions as a site of meaning production through which the state defines both social problems and acceptable solutions. By foregrounding gendered social representations, the analysis shows that gender equality in Indonesian public policy is discursively acknowledged while substantively circumscribed. Understanding this representational dynamic is crucial for rethinking gender in public policy not merely as a matter of social inclusion or administrative compliance, but as a political project concerned with power relations and institutional transformation. (Heinzel et al., 2025)

Table 2: Dominant Gendered Social Representations in Indonesian Public Policy (2019–2024).

Policy Arena	Dominant Social Representation of Gender	Interpretive Policy Frame	Governance Implication
Parliamentary debates	Women as moral and ethical actors	Moral responsibility and social harmony	Symbolic inclusion without decision-making authority
Social welfare and governance policies	Women as family caregivers	Family resilience and social stability	Privatization of social responsibility
Gender mainstreaming frameworks (PUG)	Gender as administrative category	Technocratic compliance	Depoliticization of gender inequality
Political speeches and media discourse	Gender equality as cultural issue	Cultural sensitivity and national cohesion	Limitation of rights-based policy claims

As shown in Table 2, policy discourse consistently frames gender through moral and normative language, particularly in parliamentary debates and political speeches. Women’s participation in governance is commonly justified by references to moral responsibility, care, and social sensitivity. While this framing legitimizes women’s visibility within public policy narratives, it simultaneously constrains their political agency by positioning gender equality as a moral aspiration rather than a political claim. From an interpretive standpoint, this representation enables inclusion without challenging existing

institutional hierarchies or redistributing power. In social welfare and governance-related policy documents, gender is predominantly constructed through familial frames that assign women a central role in sustaining family resilience and social stability.

As reflected in Table 1, social problems such as poverty, health, and education are implicitly relocated to the household sphere, with women positioned as key actors responsible for policy success. This framing shifts accountability for structural inequalities away from the state and reinforces gendered divisions of labor, reframing inequality as a social condition to be managed rather than a political issue requiring institutional reform. At the institutional level, gender mainstreaming mechanisms appear prominently within policy frameworks, signaling formal recognition of gender concerns. However, analysis reveals that gender is largely treated as an administrative category embedded in indicators, reporting requirements, and procedural compliance. As indicated in Table 1, this technocratic framing narrows the scope of gender analysis and depoliticizes gender by detaching it from broader questions of power and representation. Gender equality thus becomes a matter of policy management rather than political contestation.

Public and political discourse further reinforces these representations by framing gender equality as a culturally sensitive issue. Political actors frequently invoke social harmony, cultural values, and national cohesion when articulating gender-related policy positions. This discourse functions as a boundary-setting mechanism that legitimizes cautious or symbolic policy responses while constraining rights-based or transformative gender agendas. Cultural legitimation, as shown in Table 1, allows the state to acknowledge gender issues rhetorically while limiting substantive policy change.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that gendered social representations in Indonesian public policy operate through a logic of negotiated inclusion. Gender is made visible across policy texts and political narratives, yet its political significance is systematically constrained through moral, familial, cultural, and technocratic framings. Within the interpretive policy framework, these representations function as governing narratives that stabilize existing institutional arrangements rather than facilitate transformative change. (Belo, 2025).

This study contributes to debates on gender and governance by showing how public policy functions not only as a regulatory mechanism but also as a discursive space through which the state produces and normalizes particular understandings of gender. By integrating thematic analysis with social representation theory, the findings highlight how gender equality is discursively acknowledged while substantively circumscribed. Understanding these representational dynamics is essential for rethinking gender in public policy as a political project concerned with power relations and institutional transformation, rather than solely as social inclusion or administrative compliance. (Meldianto et al., 2024)

Gender, State Power, and the Political Logic of Policy Formation

This section extends the analysis by examining how gendered social representations identified in the previous findings operate within the political logic of the state and shape the process of public policy formation. The analysis reveals that gender representations do not function merely as discursive expressions, but as governing mechanisms through which the state negotiates legitimacy, authority, and social order in contemporary Indonesia.

Across policy texts and political narratives, gender operates as a mediating category that enables the state to address social demands while maintaining institutional stability. Gender-related policy language frequently appears in moments of political negotiation, particularly when the state seeks to demonstrate responsiveness to public concerns without committing to structural reform. In this context, gender representation functions as a symbolic resource that allows the state to appear inclusive while retaining control over the scope and direction of policy change.

The findings indicate that gendered representations are strategically mobilized to align policy agendas with dominant cultural and political norms. Rather than confronting unequal power relations directly, policy discourse integrates gender into broader narratives of national development, social cohesion, and

moral governance. Through this process, gender equality is reframed as compatible with existing political arrangements, reducing its potential to challenge institutional authority. This reflects an interpretive policy logic in which inclusion is managed through discursive accommodation rather than political transformation. (Kuhar et al., 2025) Institutional analysis further shows that state actors play a central role in stabilizing these representations. Policy formulation processes privilege interpretations of gender that are administratively manageable and politically non-confrontational. Gender claims that align with bureaucratic routines and development-oriented objectives are more likely to be incorporated into policy texts, while claims that foreground power redistribution or political contestation are marginalised. (Gupta et al., 2023) This selective incorporation illustrates how state power shapes not only policy outcomes but also the boundaries of legitimate gender discourse.

The interaction between state institutions and the public sphere further reinforces this dynamic. Media narratives and political statements frequently echo official policy frames, contributing to the circulation and normalization of state-sanctioned representations of gender. Through this feedback loop, gendered meanings produced within policy institutions are reproduced in public discourse, strengthening their legitimacy and limiting alternative interpretations. Gender thus becomes embedded in a shared common-sense understanding that aligns with state priorities. (Yumarni, 2025).

From a governance perspective, these findings suggest that gender functions as a tool of political management within policy formation. By framing gender issues in moral, cultural, and developmental terms, the state is able to address social expectations while minimizing political risk. This strategy enables the state to balance competing demands between calls for gender equality and pressures to preserve social order without fundamentally altering existing power structures. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that gendered social representations in Indonesian public policy do not merely describe social roles, but actively structure how gender is governed within state institutions. To fully understand their significance, it is therefore necessary to examine how these representations are mobilized within the political logic of the state and shape the processes of public policy formation.

Table 3: Political Functions of Gendered Social Representations in Policy Formation

Policy Context	Dominant Gender Representation	Political Function	Effect on Policy Formation
Legislative deliberations	Gender as moral legitimacy	Enhancing symbolic inclusiveness	Gender inclusion without redistribution of power
Executive policy formulation	Gender as governance support	Aligning policy with social norms	Preference for non-confrontational policy frames
Gender mainstreaming mechanisms (PUG)	Gender as administrative instrument	Managing policy compliance	Institutionalization without transformation
State-public communication (media, speeches)	Gender equality as cultural concern	Controlling public expectations	Limiting scope of policy change

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that gendered social representations in Indonesian public policy do not merely describe social roles, but actively structure how gender is governed within state institutions. To fully understand their significance, it is therefore necessary to examine how these representations are mobilized within the political logic of the state and shape the processes of public policy formation.

As shown in Table 2, gendered social representations serve distinct political functions across different stages of policy formation. In legislative deliberations, gender is frequently mobilized as a source of moral

legitimacy. References to gender equality and women's inclusion are used to signal responsiveness to social demands, yet these references rarely translate into substantive influence over policy priorities. This pattern indicates that gender operates as a symbolic resource that enhances political legitimacy without altering decision-making authority.

Within executive policy formulation, gender representations are selectively incorporated to support governance objectives while maintaining institutional stability. Policies that frame gender in ways compatible with dominant social norms such as family resilience and social harmony are more readily adopted than those emphasizing structural inequality or power redistribution. (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020) As reflected in Table 2, this selective incorporation shapes policy trajectories by favoring consensus-oriented approaches over transformative agendas.

At the institutional level, gender mainstreaming mechanisms institutionalize gender through administrative procedures and reporting requirements. While this formalization signals commitment to gender inclusion, it also narrows the political meaning of gender by translating it into compliance-oriented practices. Gender becomes embedded in policy routines as a technical instrument rather than a site of political contestation, reinforcing bureaucratic governance norms. (Kataeva et al., 2024) In the public sphere, state-led communication further stabilizes these representations by framing gender equality as a culturally sensitive issue. Political speeches and media narratives emphasize balance, moderation, and national cohesion, thereby managing public expectations regarding the scope of gender-related reforms. (Al-wahaibi, 2025).

This discursive strategy allows the state to acknowledge gender concerns while limiting the political risks associated with more transformative policy change. Overall, the findings demonstrate that gendered social representations function as a form of political governance within public policy formation. As summarized in Table 2, gender operates as a flexible political resource enhancing legitimacy, facilitating administrative control, and regulating public discourse rather than as a catalyst for structural transformation. This reinforces the argument that gender inclusion in Indonesian public policy is characterized by controlled and negotiated incorporation within existing state power structures.

Limits of Gendered Representation in Public Policy

The preceding analyses have shown that gendered social representations in Indonesian public policy operate as structured discursive frames and political instruments within state governance. This section extends the analysis by examining moments of contestation and negotiation surrounding these representations, highlighting both the possibilities and limits of gender-related change within the policy-making process. (Bergman-rosamond & True, 2020).

Analysis of parliamentary debates, policy drafts, and public political narratives reveals that challenges to dominant gender representations do emerge, particularly during legislative deliberations and periods of heightened public attention. In these moments, alternative representations such as gender as a matter of structural inequality or rights-based justice are articulated by certain political actors and civil society voices. (Fielding-miller et al., 2020) However, these representations tend to occupy marginal positions within policy discourse and are frequently reframed to align with dominant state logics. One prominent pattern of negotiation involves the absorption of critical gender claims into culturally acceptable narratives. For instance, calls for gender equality are often rearticulated in terms of family resilience, social harmony, or national development. While this translation allows gender issues to enter formal policy discourse, it simultaneously dilutes their critical edge.

As a result, gender claims are rendered less confrontational and more compatible with existing institutional norms. These findings suggest that contestation within policy discourse functions less as an oppositional force and more as a regulatory mechanism. Rather than disrupting dominant representations, contesting voices are selectively incorporated in ways that stabilize governance. Gender thus becomes a managed category of debate, where disagreement is permitted only insofar as it does not challenge core

assumptions about power, authority, and social order.

The limits of gendered representation are further evident in the temporal and procedural dimensions of policy formation. Critical gender narratives tend to surface during agenda-setting stages but gradually disappear during policy finalization and implementation. (Ferrín et al., 2020) This pattern indicates that while discursive openness may exist at early stages, institutional processes ultimately filter representations through bureaucratic and political constraints, narrowing the scope of policy outcomes. Taken together, the findings of this section demonstrate that the politics of gender representation in Indonesian public policy are characterized by controlled negotiation rather than transformative conflict. Gender-related discourse is not excluded from policy formation; instead, it is continuously reshaped to fit within prevailing state rationalities. This reinforces the argument that gender representation operates within defined political boundaries, where inclusion is possible without fundamentally altering power relations.

Table 4: Forms of Gendered Contestation and Their Political Outcomes in Indonesian Public Policy

Arena of Contestation	Alternative Gender Representation	Discursive Strategy	State Response	Policy Outcome
Parliamentary debates	Gender as structural inequality	Rights-based claims	Reframing into cultural values	Limited policy adjustment
Civil society advocacy	Gender as political justice	Normative critique	Selective incorporation	Symbolic recognition
Draft policy negotiations	Gender as power relation	Institutional challenge	Procedural absorption	Dilution of transformative content
Media and public discourse	Gender as social rights	Public pressure	Narrative management	Agenda visibility without structural change

Taken together, the findings of this section demonstrate that the politics of gender representation in Indonesian public policy are characterized by controlled negotiation rather than transformative conflict. Gender-related discourse is not excluded from policy formation; instead, it is continuously reshaped to fit within prevailing state rationalities. This reinforces the argument that gender representation operates within defined political boundaries, where inclusion is possible without fundamentally altering power relations. (Tildesley & Verge, 2022).

As illustrated in Table 3, contestation surrounding gendered representations rarely produces direct confrontation with dominant policy frames. Instead, alternative gender narratives are managed through discursive strategies that neutralize their political potential. In parliamentary debates, rights-based claims are frequently translated into culturally resonant language, allowing policymakers to acknowledge gender concerns while avoiding fundamental challenges to institutional authority.

Similarly, civil society advocacy introduces more critical representations of gender; however, these claims are often incorporated selectively. The state responds by recognizing gender issues symbolically through statements, commitments, or procedural references without substantively altering policy priorities. This pattern underscores how inclusion operates as a regulatory mechanism rather than a transformative force. Within policy drafting processes, contestation is further constrained by bureaucratic procedures. As Table 3 indicates, representations of gender as power relations are absorbed into technical language and compliance frameworks. This proceduralization narrows the scope of political debate and shifts attention away from structural inequalities toward administrative feasibility.

In the public sphere, media coverage amplifies gender-related discourse but also contributes to its containment. While public attention may elevate gender issues temporarily, state narratives often redirect discussions toward moderation and national cohesion. (Nahdliyah & Robot, 2024) As a result, policy

outcomes reflect visibility without substantive redistribution of power. Taken together, Table 3 reinforces the argument that gendered contestation in Indonesian public policy operates within clearly defined limits. While alternative representations surface at various stages of policy formation, their political impact is moderated through discursive negotiation and institutional filtering. This finding complements the previous sections by demonstrating that gender representation is not only constructed and mobilized but also actively managed to preserve existing state rationalities. (Aran, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the formation of public policy in contemporary Indonesia through the lens of gendered social representations, situating policy discourse within broader structures of state power and governance. By employing an interpretive policy research design and integrating social representation theory, the analysis demonstrates that public policy does not merely reflect social realities of gender but actively constructs and regulates them through discursive and institutional practices.

The findings reveal that dominant gendered representations such as gender as family caretaker, inclusive symbol, human capital, and technical category are systematically embedded across policy domains. As shown in the first stage of analysis, these representations shape how policy problems are defined and delimit the range of acceptable policy responses. Gender thus enters policy discourse in ways that are culturally resonant and administratively manageable, while more critical understandings of gender as a site of structural inequality remain marginal.

Building on this, the second stage of analysis demonstrates that these representations perform specific political functions within the logic of the state. Gendered meanings operate as instruments of moral legitimation, symbolic governance, managerial rationality, and administrative control. Rather than serving as vehicles for transformative change, gender representations are mobilized to stabilize governance, maintain institutional authority, and manage public expectations within the policy-making process.

The third stage of analysis highlights the limits of gendered representation by examining moments of contestation and negotiation. While alternative gender narratives do emerge in parliamentary debates, civil society advocacy, and public discourse, their political impact is constrained by discursive reframing and bureaucratic filtering. Contestation is not excluded from policy processes but is selectively incorporated in ways that preserve prevailing state rationalities and power relations.

Taken together, these findings contribute to scholarly debates on gender and governance by demonstrating that gender inclusion in public policy is best understood as a negotiated and regulated process rather than a linear progression toward equality. The study advances interpretive policy analysis by illustrating how social representations of gender function simultaneously as meaning-making devices and instruments of political power. Methodologically, this research underscores the value of qualitative interpretive approaches for analyzing policy discourse in non-Western and democratically complex contexts.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study also carries practical implications for policy-making and gender advocacy. For policy designers, the findings suggest the importance of moving beyond the treatment of gender as a purely administrative or technical category and instead recognizing it as a relational and power-laden dimension of governance. Integrating gender perspectives at earlier stages of policy formulation particularly during problem definition and agenda setting and ensuring the substantive participation of women's organizations and marginalized groups may help prevent the depoliticization of gender equality through bureaucratic routines. At the same time, the analysis indicates that civil society strategies focused solely on formal inclusion within policy frameworks may be insufficient in contexts characterized by discursive domestication. More effective forms of advocacy may involve challenging dominant representational logics, engaging critically with policy language, and building cross-sectoral alliances to contest the moralized and family-centric framings through which gender claims are selectively incorporated. In doing so, both state and non-state actors can better navigate and potentially disrupt the

dynamics of negotiated inclusion that shape gendered policy outcomes in contemporary Indonesia.

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