

The Contestation between Conservative Islamic and Liberal Islamic About Women's Leadership in Indonesia

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Abstract. This study aims to describe the contestation of conservative Islam and liberal Islam in its views on women's leadership in Indonesia. The data in this study were taken from documents through a review of literature studies with a phenomenological approach. The document is in the form of books, journals, and data on women's leadership. Data is processed through three stages; reviewing the content of the document, describing systematically and objectively, and narrating the comparisons found. This study found that there aspects are different views between conservative Islam and liberal Islam regarding women's leadership in Indonesia, namely aspects of legality, capacity, and nature of the association. There is no absolute justification for the two groups, as both have strong arguments about their respective views on women's leadership in Islam.

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Introduction

Conservative Islamic and Liberal Islamic arguments in Indonesia regarding the ability of women to become leaders are still being tested today. This happened because of the development of Islamic thought which showed the existence of different variants. The differences in variants of Islamic thought are included in several aspects such as the frame of mind, methodology, and orientation. Each different Islamic thought ends up creating a special pattern of thought and movement that distinguishes it from other thoughts (Nugroho, 2018). This condition must be addressed as the reality of the plurality of Islam which *rahmatan lil 'alamiin* to manage properly so that there is no friction between groups, these differences are a form of expression and perspective as an effort to harmonize and synergize from these diverse (Jubba, 2019). The variety of Islamic thought occurs in the contestation of two major groups, namely conservative Islam, and liberal Islam. These two groups have different perspectives on the interpretation of legal sources, thus providing different religious implementations. Of the several issues currently contested, gender equality is an interesting topic to be studied in the discourse of Islamic studies by these two groups.

Gender is still a contestation between conservative and liberal Islamist groups, it occurs because of differences in the interpretation of sacred texts that put the center of women's lives on men (Dewi, 2016). The gender discourse in the liberal Islamic view was raised because it discriminated against women for their rights as human beings. The interpretation of sacred texts that are too tendentious and discriminatory by conservative groups brings causation to the placement of weak and marginalized women, therefore liberal Islamic groups want to realize the justice of women's rights in gender, the embodiment movement is often known as the feminist Islamic movement (Suhada, 2019). Gender contestation in practice pervades several sectors that have a major contribution to the country, including the health, education, economic, and political empowerment sectors (Balkis, 2020). This paper will explore gender contestation in the political empowerment sector, particularly regarding women's leadership in the contestation of conservative and liberal Islamic perspectives.

The phenomenon of leadership linkages with women is still ongoing today. In Islamic law, in the view of many clerics explicitly forbid women to be leaders in public affairs. This is one of the reasons conservatives have voiced their idealism about their attitudes toward women's leadership. Likewise, views of some other scholars argue about the ability of women to become leaders, with a record of having the qualifications and ability to become a leader. This is also one of the footholds for liberal groups to fight for gender equality in public spaces (Rohmatullah, 2017). The reference of the two groups through the views of scholars is only one of the footholds in voicing their thoughts in the context of women's leadership. Deep exploration of the legality, capacity, and nature aspects of women will be an additional frame of mind. In addition, the prospect of women's leadership in Indonesia and in several countries will complete this paper.

Leadership is defined as autocratic, democratic, and *laissez-faire*. The leader of the autocracy makes decisions on their own, democracy makes decisions by communicating with subordinates and *laissez-faire* does not take any decisions that only play the role of leader (Baroudi & Hojeij, 2021). Women's involvement in executive or political leadership is often determined by societal attitudes that portray women as merely housewives and caregivers (Farhan, 2022). In Islam, the meaning of the scripture text shows a complementary relationship between men and women, to increase diversity and avoid discrimination or inequality (Koburtay et al., 2022). Women's leadership is a long series of traits of early Muslim societies that are significant for the role of women to continue to evolve and change (Koburtay et al., 2022).

The understanding of women's nature is a polemic that is still prolonged by all circles. This nature is often used as an excuse to reduce the role of women in the family or society. This is because nature is already considered the gift of the Creator God, so the question is whether it has become an absolute provision of God or the opinion of society, especially men who feel stronger and more likely to add rivals. (Ibrahim, 2018). In Islamic law sources, one of the verses that explain leadership is

Surah An-nissa verse 34 whose understanding by some groups explains that leadership is limited only by men; therefore women's leadership is not seen in the explanation of the verse. In addition to the Qur'an, there is also in the hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW the history of Abu Hurairah which is used as an argument about the prohibition of women as leaders, due to the understanding of the text of the hadith translation. One of the fragments of the hadith reads which means "*It will be unfortunate for a people to hand over their (government) affairs to a Woman*". So one group generalizes that it is illegal for women to occupy as heads of government (Wahyudi, 2018).

The meaning of the legal source text has its perspective by two major groups, namely Conservative Islam and Liberal Islam. Religious Conservatism became a central issue and influenced global discourse, including in this case Conservative Islam. One of the most dominant characteristics shown by conservatives is to believe in the doctrine of religious truth excessively, thus causing the growth of monopoly and absolute truth (Wakhid Udin, 2018). Conservative Islam has grown massively, it is because of their use of religion as a vehicle, including in expressing their political movements (Pribadi, 2021). The conservative Islamic identity in Indonesia is due to the strong influence of the Middle East, such as the countries of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Graduates from Middle Eastern universities in the country, sponsor the translation of fundamentalist texts for Islamic movements in various countries including Indonesia (Budi et al., 2018).

In response to conservative Islamist groups, progressive Islamic movements known as liberal Islam emerged as a form of proposed religious renewal. The presence of Liberal Islam is present so that Islam can be relevant to the living conditions of mankind, so it must be reinterpreted (A. I. Ismail, 2019). Liberals want a free society, which is characterized by freedom of thought for everyone, rejecting forms of restriction and restraint in action. Especially if it is done by the government or religious institutions (Wakhid Udin, 2018). The emergence of liberal Islam was due to at least three factors, firstly due to the state of Muslims who are increasingly educated with the novelty of science (especially the social sciences and humanities). Second, the factor of changing social behavior so that a new way of understanding it is needed either by re-studying the scriptures or the phenomenon of changes that occur. Third, due to external factors outside of Muslims as is the case with Christians because they have been forward-thinking and contextual in their interpretation of scripture (Dewi, 2016).

Contestation can be interpreted as a fight by two or more groups on the same topic that occurs due to the presence of interests both in the subject and material of those groups (Qodir, 2019). Contestation related to religious ideology, including in this case Islam will be easily understood by the wider community because of the use of internet media that is easy and cheap to access (Khisbiyah et al., 2018). Contestation can also be interpreted as competence between groups to get recognition, confirmation of identity, and equality, so that later it can lead to

separation or segregation, and can also be in the form of integration or reconciliation (Sapriillah et al., 2020).

Group contestation is characterized by resistance using strategies, approaches, or means used by both individuals and groups to dominate over conditions to challenge something forced. Resistance is defined as the response of communities or religious groups as a response to a phenomenon that is occurring due to differences from the mainstream, understanding in a socio-religious context (Jubba et al., 2022). The resistance between groups occurs due to unbalanced relationships either in class, ethnicity, religion, belief, or gender (N. Ismail, 2015). Group contestation is dynamic over a series of debates over religious thought over different interpretations of religious epistemology or ideology (Sapriillah et al., 2020).

Method

The topic of women's leadership is taken for several reasons. First, gender equality is one of the movements of liberal Islamic thought to realize the equality of men and women. Second, a different study between liberal and conservative Islam on the meaning of the scriptural text on male leadership over women. Third, the division of women's positions and roles in the domestic or public sphere is still being debated. The data in this article were obtained from documents through a review of literature studies. The document is in the form of books, journals, and data related to the topic of women's leadership in the understanding of the two conservative and liberal Islamic groups.

The available data are then presented through a review of the content study to be described objectively and systematically and contextualized with a comparative narrative to find the points of difference between the two groups. So that researchers can provide comprehensive critical interpretations to understand the phenomenon under study. The data that has been presented is then analyzed using a phenomenological approach mediated by three important concepts including women's leadership, contestation, and conservative and liberal Islamic group thinking. Through this phenomenological approach, it can be known about important aspects of the legality, capacity, and nature of women by the two groups.

Results and Discussion

Results

The discourse about women is interesting because, in the span of history, there are many tragic narratives about the position of women in various nations of the world. The phenomenon of inequality, injustice, and arbitrariness of men towards women became a neglected phenomenon of dehumanization of women in the realities of the world history stage that aligned the position of women as half-human beings (Suhada, 2019). This alarming condition occurs because of the layman's understanding that women are only capable in the domestic sector so many women do not even receive higher education and find it difficult to take part in other fields such as politics. However, over time, there has been a change in

understanding that women can play a role in public spaces, have been given the freedom in receiving higher education, and participated in politics a lot. (Da Meisa & Anzari, 2021).

One form of contestation between the two groups refers to the issue of women's responsibility. Conservative Muslims view women's position as limited to the domestic sphere, limited in activities only in the scope of the household, and do not support the existence of women becoming leaders. This happened because of the influence of interpretation on religious teachings which stated that one of the requirements to become a caliph or leader must come from men (Masthuriyah Sa'dan, 2017). Meanwhile, from the perspective of liberals, they have an understanding that a woman's responsibility is not only limited to the household, but women's work in the public world is no longer a rare sight. In various sectors, including those generally dominated by men, there is also a lot of female involvement such as education, economy, society, and politics. This is a factor that plays a very important role in increasing the number of women taking part in the public domain. Interestingly, the success of women in carrying out their duties is not inferior to the success of men. Of course, this becomes proof that success in the public sphere is not related to gender criteria (Ibrahim, 2013)

In addition, the next form of contestation between conservative and liberal Islam is that there is a difference in understanding of the text (Nash) in Q.S An-Nisa/4: 34. In the interpretation of the above verse according to conservative Islamists, it is used as a reference to affirm the position of men who must take precedence over women. The construction of understanding that develops in society even expressly states the superiority of men over women by mentioning the various advantages of the first over the second; men are more intelligent, more respectable, more steadfast in their stance, stronger in religion than women, also view that women are weak people. Therefore, it was from the men that the clergy, high priests, warriors, and so on emerged. Likewise, some provisions of Sharia are reserved for men such as jihad, adhan, sermon, Friday prayer, testimony, marriage guardian, and others (Napitupulu, 2018).

The interpretation is also based on the words of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. when receiving the news that the Persian people chose the daughter of Kisra to be their leader then the Prophet said which means " *From Abu Hurairah R.A, From the Prophet, SAW. He said that they would not achieve the happiness of a people if they left their affairs to women*". (H.R. Bukhari). This hadith was then understood as an authentic message that women should not be leaders in government and political affairs, and the scholars suggested that women should not become heads of state because they violated their nature. (Napitupulu, 2018).

In contrast to the conservative Islamic understanding, liberal Islamists gave an interpretation of the Surah An-Nisa verse 34, based on the context of the times that existed at that time. Scholars such as Ibn Katsir, Al-Qurthubi, Ath-Thabari, Musthafa Al-Maraghi, and Muhammad Hasbi gave an interpretation that the interpretation of the verse was based on the conditions of the time, namely the lack of women who

had a leadership role and specialized in male leadership in the family context. Quraish Shihab, Nasaruddin Umar, Husein Muhammad, Asghar Ali, and several other contemporary Scholars gave a broader interpretation of the verse, which is adapted to the conditions faced and the context of the era in which women can be made leaders when worthy and qualified both in the domestic sphere and the public sphere, it is affirmed that it does not become a violation in religion or statehood. (Nasicha et al., 2017).

Similarly, the contestation of the two groups against women's leadership is also influenced by the social culture of the community. In rural areas until now there are still many social cultures that tend to conservative Islamic ideas that do not support women becoming leaders while in the urban sphere relatively form a culture of society that is more open and able to accept women entering the political level of leadership.

Furthermore, in terms of aspects of women's capacity and nature, conservatives view that women only play a role in the domestic area of the household because they are considered unforgiving, weak, not independent, and the degree is below that of men so they are not given space to explore themselves in public spaces, especially being a leader. Meanwhile, liberal Muslims view that the position of women is equal to that of men, and whether or not they are worthy to be leaders is based on their respective capacities (Shofawi & Wiyani, 2021). As in Q.S Al-Mujadilah verse 11 it can be interpreted that women's leadership can be encouraged as long as the woman is more reasonable, more entitled, and more qualified to lead in some conditions of being a leader than a man. The high and low degree of a person is seen from the high knowledge that a person has, not based on gender (Sulaiman & Padang, 2021). This is evidenced by data on the ranks of women who can occupy positions at the leadership level as below.

Table 1. Number of Ministers and Regional Heads in Indonesia

No	Position	Period 2019-2024
1	Minister	6 people
2	Governor	2 people
3	Deputy Governor	4 people

Source: Biro Pers, Media dan Informasi Sekretariat Presiden-Kementerian Sekretariat Negara

Table 2. The Proportion of Women's Involvement in Parliament

No	Year	Percentage
1	2017	17,32
2	2018	17,32
3	2019	20,52
4	2020	21,09
5	2021	21.89

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022

Based on the two tables above, the existence of women as leaders can still be counted and can lead, seeing that many women fill important posts in the public

domain and leadership politics in the country. So, it is not impossible that in the future there will be more and more women acting as leaders, both heads of state, heads of provinces/regencies/cities, and other fields. In addition, in the current era, the phenomenon of women's leadership in the world has occurred, including in Pakistan and Bangladesh. A Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto served for two terms (1988-1990; 1993-1996), Bangladeshi head of state Khaleda Zia (1991-1996), and Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001; 2009-present). In addition, there is also Gloriyal Macapagal as President of the Philippines (2001-2010) and Queen Elizabeth (1926 – 2022). Also if we look at a more specific scope in Indonesia, the existence of women in public spaces has been recognized and there are no more restrictions on the gender realm, for example, Megawati Soekarno Putri as President of Indonesia (2001-2004) (Rohmatullah, 2017).

The contestation between conservative Islam and liberal Islam related to the position of women at the leadership level allows for some of the impacts that will be caused, namely the distrust that is imprinted in the minds of the public about the ability of women to be leaders. This is shown by the lack of proportion of women occupying parliamentary seats with an average proportion of only 20% which does not even step on the 30% mark compared to men. In addition, it is proven by the number of women who became ministers in the last two terms less than 10 people with the number of ministries as many as 30, and from 38 provinces there are only 2 female positions occupying regional head positions.

Referring to some of the phenomena and contestations between the two groups above, efforts should be made to empower women to meet the proportion of women in parliament to achieve equality. Moreover, there is no perspective to blame because each has such a strong argument foundation that when people who are inclined to conservative Islam who disagree with women's leadership do not elect female leaders. Meanwhile, for people who tend to liberal Islam and support women as a form of equal rights and opportunities, it is not a problem to choose women leaders. So that the two groups do not impose on each other understands and return to the principle of democracy.

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