

TRADITIONAL HOUSES AND DEMOCRACY: HOW DO TRADITIONAL TORAJA VALUES ENCOURAGE WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDONESIA?

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the role of Toraja customs in encouraging women's participation in the 2024 legislative elections in Toraja, Indonesia, with a focus on the political legitimacy provided by customs and the church and the role of women as agents of political change. A qualitative approach was used in this study with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with eight key informants, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, and female politicians. Data analysis was conducted using grounded theory techniques, applying thematic analysis to identify patterns and categories in the data. This study found that Toraja customs serve as a source of political legitimacy for women, with customary approval strengthening women's involvement in politics. The principle of *tallu bakaa* (wise, intelligent, brave, economically stable) is the main guideline in selecting leaders, and this applies equally in the customary and formal political spheres. The Toraja church also provides significant support for women's involvement in politics, despite initially limiting their roles. Toraja women, with the support of customs and the church, have strong social capital to engage in formal politics. This study concludes that Toraja customs and the Toraja church play an important role in encouraging women's participation in Toraja politics, which is based on the principles of gender equality and customary deliberation. Customs and the church provide social and cultural legitimacy, while education and cultural values such as *tallu bakaa* give women the confidence to engage in formal political contests.

Keywords: Toraja Customs, Women's Political Participation, Toraja Church, Tallu Bakaa

1 Introduction

Women's political participation has become a global focus in contemporary democracy studies. In Indonesia, despite affirmative policies such as a minimum quota of 30% for women's representation in politics, in reality, women's participation still faces various structural, cultural, and political barriers. These challenges are rooted in the legacy of patriarchy, money politics, and gender stigma that limit women's space in formal leadership. However, local contexts such as in Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi Province, an area with a multicultural and multireligious local culture show different dynamics. Toraja traditional customs actually provide symbolic and practical space for women to actively participate in public life, both within the Tongkonan (traditional houses of the Toraja and South Sulawesi tribes) and in formal political contests. This raises an important question: how do traditional values embedded in Toraja's social structure contribute to strengthening women's political participation in the modern democratic era?

In the Toraja context, traditional values place women on an equal footing with men. The symbols of tongkonan (women) and alang (men) indicate an inseparable reciprocal relationship, reflecting equality in social life, customs, and leadership. Customary approval, church support, and social legitimacy have strengthened the position of Toraja women in general elections, setting them apart from many other regions in Indonesia that still limit women's roles in politics. This phenomenon demonstrates a fusion of custom, religion, and democracy, resulting in a unique pattern of women's political participation. Therefore, Toraja offers an important case study for understanding how local traditions can serve as a political resource that actually supports women's involvement in democracy .

Previous studies show that women's participation in politics is greatly influenced by cultural and structural factors. For example, highlight the low level of women's involvement in social forestry programmes in Toraja due to gender-insensitive policy design. Meanwhile, shows that in Bali, factors such as money politics, collective memories of historical violence, and the revitalisation of traditional institutions actually reinforce discrimination against women in politics. Both studies emphasise that local traditions can be either barriers or drivers of women's participation, depending on the accompanying socio-cultural context. On the other hand, Osawa's study in Japan shows that traditional gender norms are not always restrictive, but can be reinterpreted to encourage the political participation of conservative women. These findings are in line with , which shows that a female-friendly political context has a positive impact on women's participation in politics. add that the revival of adat in Indonesia after the New Order era has opened up new opportunities for indigenous peoples, including women, to participate in democratic spaces. Therefore, current academic discussions show a complex relationship between adat, gender norms, and women's political participation that continues to be a subject of debate.

However, research on the relationship between customs and women's political participation in Indonesia is still dominated by perspectives that view customs as an obstacle rather than a potential. Previous studies have mostly highlighted the exclusive and discriminatory aspects of customs, as seen in the findings of in Bali, Indonesia and in Ghana, while studies emphasising customs as cultural capital that supports women's political agency are still limited. Furthermore, although there is research on the revival of customs in the era of decentralisation , few studies directly link this to women's representation in contemporary electoral politics. This is a research gap that needs to be filled through the Toraja case study.

This study offers a new perspective, namely viewing customs not merely as cultural heritage, but as cultural capital that can be mobilised to strengthen women's legitimacy and confidence in politics. By highlighting local Toraja values, such as the symbol of tongkonan and the principles of *Tallu Bakaan*, namely *Kinaa* (wisdom), *Sugi'* (prosperity) and *Barani* (courage), this study seeks to show how local traditions can function as instruments of inclusive democracy. This provides a theoretical contribution to enriching the literature on the relationship between customs, gender and democracy, while offering a new perspective that customs can be strategic partners in efforts to increase women's political participation in Indonesia. Based on this framework, this article aims to analyse how Toraja customary values encourage women's participation in political contests in general elections in Indonesia, particularly in the context of local legislative elections in Tana Toraja. The main argument put forward is that Toraja customs, rather than being an obstacle, actually strengthen women's legitimacy, confidence, and social acceptance in politics.

Therefore, this study challenges the dominant assumption that customs are a limiting factor and demonstrates their role as a democratic force that promotes women's political representation.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of social meanings, experiences, and cultural values that cannot be reduced to statistical figures. The focus of this research is to understand the relationship between Toraja customs and women's political participation in the context of Indonesian electoral democracy. A case study is considered appropriate because it provides space to intensively examine a single phenomenon in a specific context, namely Toraja society, thereby producing a rich and in-depth contextual picture. A case study design was chosen because the Toraja context has cultural characteristics that are not always found in other traditional communities. This approach allows researchers to interpret women's political phenomena through a distinctive local lens, such as the tongkonan–alang symbol and the tallu bakaa principle embedded in the traditional Toraja value system. Therefore, this study is analytical in nature, seeking to connect traditional practices with the cultural context and traditions of Toraja society in political practice.

2 Literature overview

Studies on the relationship between customs, traditions, and local democracy have attracted widespread attention in political science and anthropology. argue that the revival of customs in post-Suharto Indonesia was not only born out of historical factors, but was also reinforced by decentralisation and international support for the rights of indigenous peoples. Customs, in this framework, function ambiguously: they can be a means of political inclusion and exclusion, depending on how elites and communities utilise them. The study complements this view by showing that local values can be interpreted by political elites to strengthen the legitimacy of local democracy, although they have the potential to fall into oligarchic domination if not managed transparently.

In the context of Tana Toraja, emphasise the importance of cultural legitimacy alongside formal legitimacy in local democracy. For indigenous communities, leaders must not only be legally valid, but also obtain customary recognition for the government to have full legitimacy. A similar situation can be seen in other contexts, such as Timor-Leste, where found a hybrid model between traditional and modern authorities as a compromise strategy between liberal democracy and customary legitimacy. These studies confirm that customary values are not merely remnants of tradition, but active components in contemporary democratisation.

In a broader discussion, this study also highlights how customs and local wisdom can shape social cohesion and governance. show that local wisdom such as *Dalihan Na Tolu* in North Sumatra plays an important role in reducing political polarisation among millennials, while emphasise that traditional leadership and indigenous knowledge in Africa remain relevant to the sustainable development agenda. These findings form the basis of the argument that local wisdom and customary institutions still have significant vitality in managing communities amid the wave of political modernisation. However, most of the literature is still limited to the relationship between custom and democracy in general, while how custom functions specifically in strengthening women's political representation has not been explored much.

Meanwhile, literature on women's political participation in a cultural context reveals various challenges. The study explains how situational and cultural

constraints limit women's participation in politics in Italy, while highlight the power of patriarchy and religious interpretation in Afghanistan, which weakens women's involvement in formal politics. , through a study in Iran, found that women's political culture itself, which is related to attitudes towards the system, elites, and self-capacity, correlates significantly with their level of participation. A study in Pakistan by also shows that political parties tend to provide limited space for women, usually only for those with a family political background, thereby reinforcing structural bias. Meanwhile, research by expands the context of participation to the digital realm, showing that feminist identity plays an important role in strengthening women's political participation online, especially on feminist issues. A study by reaffirms the role of patriarchy in Somalia as a major obstacle, even though women are increasingly active in education and public work.

From this series of studies, a consistent pattern emerges that women's political participation is often limited by patriarchal structures, gender-biased cultural interpretations, and the dominance of political elites. However, there are also indications that traditional cultural norms can be reinterpreted to encourage women's participation, as demonstrated in the research by and in the Japanese context (which shows that traditional norms can be a basis for agency). A key gap that emerges is the limited number of studies highlighting how traditional egalitarian values such as those in Toraja, which place women and men in symbolically equal positions (tongkonan for women and alang for men, collectively referred to as tongkonan-alang) and emphasise the principle of tallu bakaa (wise, intelligent, brave, stable) can function as cultural and symbolic capital to strengthen women's political participation in electoral democracy.

This study attempts to fill this gap by offering a new perspective: that customs do not always hinder, but can instead be a force that strengthens women's legitimacy, confidence, and political agency. The case study in Tana Toraja makes an important conceptual contribution to the global literature on gender, customs, and democracy, by showing that local traditions can be cultural capital that is in line with the agenda of women's political representation in contemporary democracy.

3 Metohd

3.1 Type and Design of Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of social meanings, experiences, and cultural values that cannot be reduced to statistical figures. The focus of this research is to understand the relationship between Toraja customs and women's political participation in the context of Indonesian electoral democracy. A case study is considered appropriate because it provides space to intensively examine a single phenomenon in a specific context, namely Toraja society, thereby producing a rich and in-depth contextual picture. A case study design was chosen because the Toraja context has cultural characteristics that are not always found in other traditional communities. This approach allows researchers to interpret women's political phenomena through a distinctive local lens, such as the tongkonan–alang symbol and the tallu bakaa principle embedded in the traditional Toraja value system. Therefore, this study is analytical in nature, seeking to connect traditional practices with the cultural context and traditions of Toraja society in political practice.

3.2 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is individuals who hold key roles in the political, customary, religious, and social spheres in Toraja. These individuals were selected because they represent various perspectives that shape women's political processes, ranging from customary legitimacy and church influence to formal electoral practices. By focusing on individuals, this study can analyse how key actors interact and contribute to women's political participation. In addition, this unit of analysis reflects the intersection between social domains: customs, religion, formal politics, and civil society. For example, customary leaders play a role in providing symbolic approval, religious leaders provide moral legitimacy, council members reflect formal representation, and the community functions as the basis of electoral support. The combination of these actors allows the study to reveal more comprehensively how local Toraja values function in strengthening or negotiating women's positions in contemporary democracy.

3.3 Data Sources and Collection Techniques

The data sources for this study consist of primary and secondary data combined to provide a comprehensive picture of the role of Toraja customs in encouraging women's political participation. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with eight key informants selected using purposive sampling methods and participatory observation. This approach was chosen because the study required informants who had formal and cultural authority, direct experience in politics and customs, and influence in the local community. The selection criteria included: (1) holding a position of authority in traditional, political, or religious affairs; (2) being involved in traditional discussions and electoral contests; (3) representing diverse perspectives (traditional leaders, legislators, churches, and communities); and (4) being recognised by the community as a figure with legitimacy and knowledge about women's roles in politics. Based on these criteria, the selected informants included traditional leaders, leaders of traditional organisations, female politicians, religious leaders, legislators, village officials, and community representatives.

Table 1. List of Key Informants for Research

No	Name of Informant	Position/Title	Representation Category	Reason for Selection (Purposive Criteria)
1	Ne' Layu Sarungallo	Traditional Leader of Ke'te Kesu'	Traditional Leader	Holds the highest traditional authority, understands traditional legitimacy and the position of women in the tongkonan structure.
2	Romba' Marannu	Chairperson of the Toraja Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN)	Traditional Leader/Traditional Organisation	Representing contemporary customary movements and advocacy for the rights of indigenous peoples.
3	Firmina Tallu Lembang	Member of the South Sulawesi Provincial Legislative Council (Toraja)	Politician/Woman	A Toraja woman who has successfully entered formal politics, a direct representation of women's participation.

		Constituency)		
4	Yunus Patiku	Deputy Secretary of the Toraja Church Synod	Religious Leader	Has influence in the moral legitimacy of religion and the church's support for women's involvement.
5	Yohanis Lintin Paembongan	Member of the Tana Toraja Regional Parliament (2019–2024)	Politician/Male	Voicing legislative views on women's representation in local parliament.
6	Darius Bangnga Datu	Head of Village, Kapala Pitu Subdistrict	Official/Community	Representing the views of the village community regarding customary and political legitimacy.
7	Ne' Limbong	Community Representative	Community (Women)	Providing grassroots perspectives on the role of women in politics.
8	Baso'	Community Representative	Community (Men)	Contributing the general public's views on women's involvement in electoral politics.

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Interviews were conducted face-to-face using semi-structured guidelines, which provided flexibility in exploring informants' narratives while maintaining consistency in the research focus. Interview questions focused on gender equality issues in Toraja customs, the role of customary legitimacy in politics, women's concrete experiences in legislative elections, and the relationship between customs, religion, and democracy. The interview process lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, was recorded with the informants' consent, and was then transcribed verbatim for further analysis. In addition to interviews, we also integrated participatory observation in various traditional and local political activities, such as discussions in tongkonan, traditional events involving community leaders, and political campaign activities. Participatory observation allows researchers to directly observe symbolic practices and social interactions that are not always revealed through interviews. Through this technique, researchers can capture gestures, symbols, and relational dynamics that reinforce or negotiate women's roles in the public sphere. Field notes from these observations were then used to enrich the interview results, providing an additional layer of data that deepened the analysis.

In addition to primary data, this study utilised secondary data in the form of legal documents (e.g. the General Election Law and gender affirmation policies), indigenous organisation archives, church synod reports, media reports, and academic literature. The integration of primary and secondary data is carried out through a triangulation of sources and methods approach, ensuring that the research findings not only reflect the subjective experiences of the actors but are also confirmed by formal documents and direct observations. The combination of interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis enables the research to capture phenomena holistically, contextually, and analytically, thereby strengthening its contribution to the global discourse on indigenous customs, gender, and

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in this study was conducted by combining grounded theory analysis and thematic analysis. Grounded theory analysis was used to identify patterns, categories, and themes that emerged from in-depth interview transcripts, while thematic analysis is used to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) in the data. This technique aims to organise data into thematic categories that bring out the main themes relevant to the research questions. The combination of these two techniques allows researchers to capture not only 'what' informants say, but also 'how' they construct their experiences, legitimacy, and political participation within the framework of custom and democracy. The grounded analysis process begins with the transcription of interview data, followed by open coding to identify initial categories. The next stage is axial coding, in which the relationships between categories are analysed. The final stage is selective coding, which is the formulation of main themes relevant to the research focus.

Table 2. Examples of Stages of Data Analysis Techniques with Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding

Analysis Stage	Descriptive Explanation	Research Informants
Open Coding	The interview data was transcribed and sorted into small units of meaning. Each statement was given an initial code to identify important issues without binding them to specific categories.	Ne' Layu' Sarungallo, Romba' Marannu, Firmina Tallu Lembang, Yunus Patiku, Yohanis Lintin Paembongan, Darius Bangnga Datu, Ne' Limbong, Baso'
Axial Coding	The initial codes were then grouped into more conceptual categories. At this stage, the researchers linked the categories, identified thematic patterns, and placed them in the Toraja socio-cultural context (customs, religion, formal politics).	All informants with a cross-category focus: traditional leaders (Ne' Layu', Romba'), religious leaders (Yunus Patiku), politicians (Firmina, Yohanis), community members (Darius, Ne' Limbong, Baso')
Selective Coding	The researcher filtered the categories into core themes most relevant to the research questions. These core themes were then linked to theoretical frameworks (e.g., Bourdieu's <i>cultural capital</i> and political representation theory) to explain the phenomena comprehensively.	All informants contributed, with an emphasis on the consistency of narratives from traditional leaders, female politicians, and grassroots community support.

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 2, presented in this image, illustrates the stages of qualitative data analysis using Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding techniques in the context of this research. This table also shows the relationship between the descriptive explanation of each stage of analysis and the research informants who contributed to each stage. In the Open Coding stage, the interview data was transcribed and sorted into small units of meaning, where each statement was given an initial code to identify important issues that emerged. At this stage, the informants involved, such as Ne' Layu' Sarungallo, Romba' Marannu, Firmina Tallu Lembang, and others, provided different perspectives, whether from the aspects of customs, religion, politics, or society.

In Axial Coding, the initial codes obtained from Open Coding were grouped into more conceptual categories, allowing researchers to identify thematic patterns and relationships between these categories. All informants played an important role in connecting these categories, with a focus on traditional leaders, religious leaders, female politicians, and the community. In Selective Coding, the categories that have been grouped become core themes relevant to the research questions. These core themes are then linked to theories such as cultural capital (Bourdieu) and political representation theory to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon under study. All informants contribute to creating a coherent narrative and reinforcing the central theme of the study, which leads to a deeper understanding of how tradition and politics are intertwined in supporting women's participation in local democracy.

Table 3. Examples of Stages of Data Analysis Techniques with Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding

Data	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
“Politics is not new in Toraja. In our customs, we have long been familiar with the deliberative process of selecting a <i>to parenge</i> ’ or traditional leader. That is a form of politics. The difference is that we use the principle of kinship. So Torajan customs is a way of maintaining balance, not just a struggle for power.”	- Politics is not a new thing - Traditional deliberation politics - Election of <i>the to parenge</i> - Family principle - Maintaining balance - Not a power struggle	- Politics based on deliberation - Legitimacy of traditional leadership - Kinship-based politics - Mechanisms for maintaining social harmony	- Traditional as an instrument of deliberative democracy based on kinship and social balance

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 3 above shows an example of the stages of data analysis applied to the interview with Ne' Layu' Sarungallo, Chief of Ke'te Kesu', using the Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding data analysis techniques. In Open Coding, the researcher identified units of meaning from the informant's statements, such as "Politics is not new", "Customary deliberation", "Election of to parenge", "Principle of kinship", "Maintaining balance", and "Not a power struggle". These codes refer to the main issues discussed by informants related to Toraja customary politics. In the Axial Coding stage, these codes are grouped into more conceptual categories, such as deliberation-based politics, legitimisation of customary leadership, kinship politics, and mechanisms for maintaining social harmony. This stage aims to connect relevant categories and find patterns in the data. At the end of the Selective Coding stage, the grouped categories are refined into core themes relevant to the research focus, namely traditional politics as an instrument of deliberative democracy based on kinship and social balance. This theme reflects the concept that customary politics in Toraja is not merely a contest for power, but rather an effort to maintain social harmony and strengthen the legitimacy of customary leadership.

In addition to grounded theory analysis, this study also analysed the data using

thematic coding analysis. Thematic coding analysis is a qualitative technique used to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) in data. This technique aims to organise data into thematic categories that bring out the main themes relevant to the research questions. The analysis process began by categorising data segments (codes) that emerged from interview transcripts or field notes, which were then organised into broader themes. Each identified theme provided insight into the phenomenon being studied, in this case related to the role of Toraja customs in encouraging women's political participation. The thematic analysis process was carried out through verbatim stages and categorising data based on relevant themes. In the first stage, verbatim (word-for-word) transcribed interview data is analysed to identify emerging units of meaning. Each piece of data is labelled or coded according to the issues or concepts found in the interview. These codes represent important elements of the data content related to the research topic.

After the initial codes were obtained, the researchers then grouped and categorised these codes into larger themes. These categories enabled the researchers to identify the main patterns and relationships between codes related to the phenomenon under study. In the final stage, researchers filter and select the core themes that are most relevant to the research focus in order to link them to existing theory and to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon being studied. Thus, thematic analysis allows researchers to organise complex data into a structured framework, identify important patterns, and link them to a broader context and theory. The following is an example of a table showing the stages of the thematic data analysis coding process:

Table 4. Example of Thematic Data Analysis Coding Stages

Informant	Statements (Verbatim)	Thematic Coding (Categories)
Ne' Sarungallo (Traditional Leader)	Ne' Layu' "Politics is not new in Toraja. In our customs, we have long been familiar with the deliberative process of selecting <i>to parenge'</i> or traditional leaders. That is a form of politics. The difference is that we use the principle of kinship."	Customary Politics, Deliberation, Customary Leadership, Principle of Kinship

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 4 above illustrates a thematic analysis of an interview with Ne' Layu' Sarungallo, Traditional Leader of Ke'te Kesu'. The statements provided by this informant reveal views on customary politics in Toraja, where politics is seen as part of a long-standing tradition, carried out through a deliberative process to select customary leaders (*to parenge'*). Politics in the context of Toraja customs is carried out based on the principle of kinship, which emphasises the importance of balance and togetherness in decision-making. From these statements, the main themes that emerge are customary politics, deliberation, customary leadership, and the principle of kinship. This thematic analysis helps to understand how Toraja customary values function in the local political process, which differs from formal politics and prioritises social solidarity.

4 Result

Our findings reveal that Toraja customs function as social and cultural capital that strengthens the political legitimacy of women in society, both in the customary sphere and in formal politics. The principle of gender equality contained in customs, reflected in the symbols of tongkonan and alang, gives women an equal place with

men in the social and political structure. Customary blessings and values such as tallu bakaa (wisdom, intelligence, courage, and economic stability) strengthen women's position in politics, making them political agents capable of competing in legislative elections. The principle of Tallu Bakaa, which consists of Kinaa (wisdom), Sugi' (prosperity), and Barani (courage), is at the core of the values that underpin women's involvement in Toraja customary politics. These values are not only criteria for individuals who want to lead in Toraja society, but also serve as universally accepted social guidelines for assessing leadership suitability, both in the context of customs and formal politics. Kinaa emphasises wisdom in decision-making, a quality that is highly valued in traditional deliberations. Sugi' describes the ability to create prosperity, both materially and socially, which is necessary to lead a community successfully. Meanwhile, Barani teaches the courage to act in accordance with the truth and face challenges, a trait that is very important for women who want to participate in politics, especially in the face of patriarchy and structural barriers.

These three values, which form part of Toraja's cultural capital, give women the social and political legitimacy to take on equal roles in leadership, both within customary spaces and within the formal government structure (). With the principle of Tallu Bakaa as a reference, Toraja women are not only seen as supporters within the family or community, but also as legitimate and respected leaders in political processes and social decision-making. Furthermore, Toraja politics, which is based on customary deliberation, emphasises deliberative democracy that prioritises social balance and mutual agreement, providing space for women to participate without being hindered by the dominance of power. Thus, customs and religion, which support women's participation, show that local wisdom in Toraja not only strengthens local democracy but also opens opportunities for women to play an active role in politics, both through traditional deliberation and formal elections, challenging the view that customs are a barrier to gender equality in politics.

Custom as a Source of Political Legitimacy for Women

Custom as a source of political legitimacy for women in the Toraja context plays a very important role in supporting women's participation in politics, both in customary and formal spaces. Based on interviews with key informants, such as Layu' Sarungallo and Romba' Sombolnggi, it appears that in Toraja customs, women have an equal position to men, reflected in the symbols of tongkonan (women) and alang (men), which complement each other and have deep symbolic meanings. Women in Toraja are not only considered complementary, but also the centre of life in the family and community, with highly valued roles in important decision-making, including in the process of selecting traditional leaders (to parengé'). Custom provides symbolic blessings that strengthen women's political legitimacy, making them worthy of advancing in politics, both in the context of traditional deliberations and in formal political contests. In addition, the principle of tallu bakaa (wise, intelligent, courageous, and economically stable) is a guideline that determines who is worthy of leadership, regardless of gender.

Our analysis reveals that Toraja customs not only function as a socio-cultural structure, but also as a source of legitimacy that provides equal space for women to participate in politics, both in their capacity as traditional leaders and in formal political roles. The power of this customary legitimacy is profound, as it is supported by strong social values accepted by the entire community, strengthening women's position in politics with strong support from family and society.

Table 5. Grounded Theory of Custom as a Source of Political Legitimacy for

Women

Informant	Verbatim/Statements	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Layu' Sarungallo (Traditional Leader)	"In Toraja tradition, women and men are equal. We liken the tongkonan to women and the alang to men."	Gender equality, Tongkonan symbol (women), Alang symbol (men)	Gender equality in Toraja customs, Customary symbols as legitimisation	Custom as a source of political legitimacy for women
Layu' Sarungallo (Traditional Leader)	"Politics is not a new thing in Toraja. In our customs, we have long been familiar with the deliberative process of selecting <i>to parenge'</i> ."	Customary politics, Customary deliberation, Election of <i>to parenge'</i>	Political legitimacy in customs, the deliberative process as a form of politics	Customary politics as an instrument of deliberative democracy for women
Layu' Sarungallo (Traditional Leader)	"Toraja women are encouraged by their parents to go to school so that they can be successful and become women with wise minds."	Women are encouraged to pursue education; education as social capital	Education as the foundation of leadership, the role of women in society	Education as cultural capital and political legitimacy for women
Romba' Sombolinggi (Female Traditional Leader)	"The tongkonan is a symbol of women's, a place for deliberation, while the alang is for men. The two cannot be separated."	The symbol of tongkonan and alang, Women's role in customs, Customary deliberation	Women's involvement in customs and politics, Equality of roles between women and men	's gender equality in Toraja customs as political legitimacy for women
Romba' Sombolinggi (Female Traditional Leader)	"Customs provide the same space as men. We have the same space in customs and politics."	Equality in customs, women's political participation	Equality in customary and formal politics, Women's participation in the public sphere	Custom as an inclusive space for women in politics
Yunus Patiku (Church Leader)	"The Toraja Church fully supports women's involvement in politics, provided they have the calling and ability."	Church support, Women's involvement, Religious legitimacy	The role of religion in supporting women in politics, Religious legitimacy for women	Religion as a pillar of legitimacy for women in politics
Firmina Tallu Lembang (Politician)	"If a woman has obtained permission from <i>the To'parenge'</i> in the Tongkonan, then the	Customary permission, Family support, Social	Family support in politics, Traditional blessing as	Family and customs as key factors in the

	entire family will give their full support."	legitimacy	social legitimacy	political legitimacy of women
Firmina Tallu Lembang (Politician)	"Custom teaches us about courage, wisdom, and a sense of responsibility. We women are not taught to be afraid."	- Traditional education - Courage - Women's authority	- Customary education and values as leadership capital - Women's qualities in politics	- The <i>Tallu Bakaa</i> principle as capital for women's leadership in politics

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 5 above shows a theoretical analysis based on data identified and organised from interviews with key informants regarding the role of Toraja customs in encouraging women's participation in politics. This analysis process was divided into three main stages: Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding, which aimed to identify the main themes relevant to the research and relate them to existing theories. In the Open Coding stage, researchers identified units of meaning in interview statements that reflected key concepts related to women's political legitimacy through customs. Initial codes that emerged from the interviews, such as gender equality, customary deliberation, education, and customary blessings, indicated important elements in the Toraja customary social structure that served to strengthen women's position in politics. For example, statements from Layu' Sarungallo and Romba' Sombolinggi regarding gender equality in customs and deliberation-based politics reflect the view that in Toraja customs, women have an equal role to men in the political process and decision-making.

At the Axial Coding stage, the codes found were grouped into more conceptual categories to explore the relationships between elements. The main categories that emerged were political legitimacy in customs, education as social capital, and family support as social legitimacy. These categories connect findings from various informants showing that customary legitimacy, whether in the form of customary blessing or education, serves as a key factor enabling women to engage in politics. Education is considered as a fundamental asset for women to lead, while customary blessing provides legitimacy that strengthens their position in formal political spaces.

In the Selective Coding stage, researchers filtered and formulated the core themes most relevant to the research focus, namely custom as a source of political legitimacy for women. These findings show that Toraja custom is not only a cultural structure that preserves tradition, but also a source of cultural capital that provides social and moral legitimacy for women in politics. The principle of tallu bakaa (wise, intelligent, courageous, and economically stable) described by Firmina Tallu Lembang and Yohanis Lintin Paembongan serves as a standard of quality that women must meet in order to lead, both at the customary level and in formal politics. Therefore, Toraja customs are a factor that strengthens women's involvement in legislative and political contests in Toraja.

The analysis shows how customs function as an important tool of legitimacy, providing women with space to participate in politics, which may have previously been limited in many other cultures. These results make an important contribution to the literature emphasising the role of cultural capital in encouraging women's

political participation in the context of local democracy, showing that customs can be a positive force in supporting gender equality and women's political participation.

Toraja Custom and Deliberative Democracy: A Space for Political Balance

Toraja customs reveal that in the Toraja political context, customary deliberation plays a central role in shaping political dynamics that prioritise consensus and mutual agreement over individualistic power competition. Based on interviews with Layu' Sarungallo and Romba' Sombolinggi, it was found that Toraja customary politics is rooted in deliberative principles, where important decisions, including the election of customary leaders (to *parenge'*), are carried out by prioritising the principles of kinship and social harmony. This shows that in customary politics, women have equal space to participate, with considerations based more on collective wisdom and social harmony than on the competitive politics often found in liberal democracies. Therefore, Toraja customs not only function as social regulators but also as a deliberative political mechanism that strengthens political balance, provides space for inclusive participation, and avoids social polarisation.

Table 6. Grounded Theory of Toraja Custom and Deliberative Democracy: Space for Political Balance

Informant	Verbatim/Statements	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Layu' Sarungallo (Traditional Leader)	"Politics is not a new thing in Toraja. In our customs, we have long been familiar with the deliberative process of selecting <i>to parenge'</i> or traditional leaders."	Customary politics – Customary deliberation – Election of <i>to parenge'</i>	Deliberative democracy – Legitimacy of traditional leadership	Deliberative democracy based on deliberation in Toraja traditional politics
Romba' Sombolinggi (Female Traditional Leader)	"Toraja customs have long had a tradition of politics. For example, in the election of <i>to parenge'</i> in tongkonan, the community has practised democracy."	Customary political tradition - Democracy in customs - Deliberation for the election of customary leaders	Family-based democracy - Tradition of deliberation	Deliberative democracy as a mechanism for political balance
Yunus Patiku (Church Leader)	"Within the church itself, we have practised politics in a healthy sense, for example, the election of church administrators, the election of the council (), and even the synod."	Church democracy - Healthy politics - Elections in the church	Church democracy as a model of deliberative politics - The role of the church in supporting political participation	Church involvement in the process of deliberative politics and healthy
Firmina Tallu Lembang (Politician)	"Custom teaches us about courage, wisdom, and a sense of responsibility."	Customary education - Women's	Customary values as leadership	Tallu Bakaa as a criterion for women's

	We women are not taught to be afraid; rather, we are shaped to stand boldly in the truth."	courage - Leadership in politics	capital – Women's authority in politics	leadership in deliberative politics
Darius Bangsa Datu (Community)	"Women often participate in traditional deliberations, so they are accustomed to discussing leadership. In the legislature, women can bring a different perspective, for example on children's education and family health."	Traditional deliberations - Women's role in politics - Women as bearers of different perspectives	Women's involvement in deliberations - Women's perspectives in politics	Women's involvement in politics as a form of deliberative democracy
Limbong (Community, Housewife)	"In Toraja customs, women are always present at traditional events and participate in deliberations, so there are no restrictions."	Women's participation - Traditional deliberation - Discussions in traditional forums	Women's political participation - Inclusive political participation spaces	Custom as an inclusive space for women's involvement in deliberative politics

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 6 above illustrates the grounded theory analysis with a focus on "Toraja Customs and Deliberative Democracy: A Space for Political Balance". This table includes verbatim or interview excerpts from informants, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which reflect the stages of data analysis based on in-depth interviews with informants who have direct understanding and experience of Toraja customs and the role of women in politics. In Open Coding, researchers identified small units of meaning that emerged from each informant's statement, such as customary politics, customary deliberation, the role of women, and healthy democracy. These codes describe key issues in the deliberative democracy process that occurs in Toraja customs, as well as the role given to women in politics. In the axial coding stage, these codes were grouped into more conceptual categories, such as deliberative democracy, the legitimacy of traditional leadership, and kinship-based politics, which show the relationship between themes and how Toraja politics prioritises mutual agreement to maintain social balance.

In the Selective Coding stage, researchers filtered these categories and found the core theme, namely deliberative democracy in Toraja politics. This theme connects the practice of traditional deliberation and women's participation, which allows women to play an active role in politics without gender restrictions. Tallu Bakaa (wisdom, courage, economic independence) is a key requirement for women to lead, both in the traditional and formal political contexts, showing that traditional and religious legitimacy provides an inclusive space for women to be involved in political decision-making. This table illustrates how Toraja customs, based on deliberative democracy through deliberation and gender equality, create an inclusive space for women to participate in politics, both in traditional and formal political spheres, strengthening women's role in fairer and more balanced political decision-making. These findings challenge the narrative that often considers customs to be a barrier to women's participation and show that deliberative politics based on

customary es can run parallel to democratic principles that promote equality and dialogue.

Toraja Women as Agents of Political Change: Support from Customary Institutions and the Church

The findings of this study show that Toraja women act as agents of political change, driven by the support of tradition and the church. In Toraja tradition, women are not only given equal space with men, but are also encouraged to play an active role in politics through traditional blessings that provide social legitimacy. The principle of *tallu bakaa* (wise, intelligent, brave, economically stable) is the main criterion upheld by tradition to ensure that women are qualified to lead, both in traditional and formal spaces. The Toraja church, which previously limited the role of women, has undergone significant theological changes, accepting female pastors and supporting women's involvement in politics. This change shows that the church no longer views women's roles based on gender, but rather on individual abilities and calling.

The results of the interviews above highlight how the role of the Toraja church, affirmative action policies, and customary support contribute to increasing women's involvement in politics, particularly in legislative elections in Toraja. Dkn. Yunus Buana Patiku, a leader of the Toraja Church Synod, explained that the Toraja church initially limited women's roles in church ministry due to Western cultural influences that perceived pastors as exclusively male. However, since 1986, the Toraja church has undergone theological reflection that has resulted in important changes, including the ordination of the first female pastor. This change became a turning point, where the church now views ministry not based on gender, but on individual calling and ability. This shows that the Toraja church has embraced gender equality and provides strong support for women's involvement in politics, both within the church and in the public sphere.

In addition, Yohanis Lintin Paembongan, a member of the Tana Toraja Regional Representative Council, added that a clear legal basis, namely Law No. 7 of 2017 on Elections, which requires a 30% quota for women, has opened up great opportunities for women to become involved in politics. According to him, this affirmative action policy ensures that women's space in politics has been legally recognised and that there is no longer any reason for political parties to ignore opportunities for women. Women, especially in Toraja, now have equal opportunities to compete in formal politics, with strong social support.

Furthermore, Firmina Tallu Lembang, a female Toraja politician, emphasised that traditional support in Toraja culture is very important. If a woman obtains permission from *the To'parenge'* in Tongkonan, the entire extended family will give their full support for her to become involved in politics. Firmina explained that the values of *tallu bakaa* (wisdom, intelligence, courage, economic stability) are the accepted standards of leadership in Toraja culture. With a good education, an understanding of women's roles, and strong customary support, Toraja women feel more confident and worthy of leadership. This shows that customary support is not only moral support, but also provides important social and political legitimacy for women in achieving leadership positions in formal political spaces.

Table 7. Thematic Analysis Coding of Toraja Women as Agents of Political Change: Customary and Church Support

Informant	Statements (Verbatim)	Thematic Coding (Category)
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Layu' Sarungallo (Traditional Leader)	"Politics in Toraja tradition is a way of maintaining balance, not just a power struggle. If women have the ability, they can become traditional leaders or government leaders."	Politics in Toraja customs, Women's involvement in politics, Women's leadership
Romba' Sombolinggi (Female Traditional Leader)	"Toraja customs have long had a tradition of politics. Even the church supports women in leadership roles. This is proof that customs are not a barrier, but a support."	Customary support – Custom as a pillar of women's participation – Church support
Yunus Patiku (Church Leader)	"The Toraja church has abandoned its old limitations and now stands on equal footing in supporting women's involvement in the public sphere, including politics."	- Church support for women - Women's involvement in politics - Changes in the church's view of women
Firmina Tallu Lembang (Politician)	"Custom teaches us about courage, wisdom, and responsibility. We women are not taught to be afraid; rather, we are shaped to stand up for the truth."	- Traditional education - Women's courage - Women's role in leadership
Darius Bangsa Datu (Head of Lembang)	"Women in Toraja are accustomed to discussing leadership in traditional deliberations. In the legislature, women can bring a different perspective, for example on children's education and family health."	- Women in traditional leadership - Women as agents of change in the legislature - The influence of women in politics
Junita Suprianto (Student)	"Toraja women have a great opportunity to become council members. Custom and religion support them, they do not prohibit it. They have advantages over men, so it is natural that many people believe in electing women."	- Support from tradition and religion - Women in politics - Women's advantages in the legislature
Limbong (Housewife)	"Women have the ability to lead, not only at home but also in society. With the support of family, tradition, and the church, women can be more confident."	- Support from family, tradition, and the church - Women's strength in leadership - Women's involvement in the legislature

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 7 above shows a thematic coding analysis focusing on "Toraja Women as Agents of Political Change: Support from Customary Institutions and the Church". Through interviews with various informants, it can be seen how the support of customary institutions and the church plays an important role in encouraging women's involvement in Toraja politics, both in the context of customary politics and formal politics. Layu' Sarungallo (Customary Leader) stated that politics in Toraja customs is a way of maintaining balance and not merely a struggle for power, emphasising the importance of women's involvement in politics based on the principles of deliberation and equality. This shows that in Toraja customs, women have an equal position to men in terms of leadership, both in the customary sphere and in government. On the other hand, Romba' Sombolinggi (Female Traditional Leader) added that traditional support for women, coupled with

the support of the church, shows that Toraja customs are not a barrier but rather a support for women's participation in politics. The church, which previously limited the role of women, now fully supports women's involvement in the public sphere, including politics. This underlines that the change in views within the Toraja church regarding gender has opened up greater space for women in ministry and politics.

Furthermore, an interview with Yunus Patiku (Church Leader) confirmed that the Toraja church has now abandoned its old restrictions on women's roles, indicating that the Toraja church now fully supports women's involvement in politics. This is in line with the church's changing views, which value individual abilities over gender in all aspects of life, including politics. Meanwhile, Firmina Tallu Lembang's (Politician) statement regarding traditional education that teaches women to have courage, wisdom, and a sense of responsibility shows that the social and cultural capital taught in Toraja customs gives women the confidence to engage in politics. Darius Bangsa Datu (Head of Lembang) revealed that Toraja women, who are accustomed to speaking in traditional deliberations, have great potential to bring about change in legislative politics, especially in voicing social issues such as education and health. Finally, Junita Suprianto (student) and Limbong (housewife) showed that the support of customs and religion, as well as family support, are factors that increase women's confidence to engage in politics, proving that women's involvement in legislative politics is increasingly encouraged by cultural values and strong social support from traditional communities and churches. These findings indicate that Toraja women, with the continued development of traditional and church support, act as agents of political change who have the ability to lead and contribute to socio-political change in Toraja.

5 Discussion

The results of this study show that Toraja customs play an important role in encouraging women's involvement in politics, both in traditional and formal political spheres. Based on interviews with traditional leaders and church leaders, it appears that politics in Toraja customs are governed by the principles of deliberation and equality, which provide equal opportunities for men and women to participate in decision-making. Customary approval and education are key assets for women to engage in politics, with the values of *tallu bakaa* (wisdom, intelligence, courage, economic stability) as the accepted standards of leadership in customs. Support from family, customs, and the church strengthens women's social legitimacy, enabling them to not only play a role in customary deliberations, but also to compete in formal politics, as seen in women's participation in the House of Representatives and the legislature in Toraja.

In addition, the Toraja church has also contributed greatly to opening up space for women to engage in formal politics, which was previously limited by traditional gender views. The Toraja church, which initially limited women's roles in church ministry, has undergone significant changes since 1986 with the ordination of its first female pastor. This theological reflection mirrors the church's shifting views on gender, which now fully supports women who wish to engage in politics. Therefore, the church not only provides space for women to serve at the altar, but also supports them in political participation, making the church one of the main pillars in the process of legitimising women in Toraja politics.

This support from traditional customs and the church shows that Toraja women have strong social and cultural capital, which influences their confidence and leadership abilities in politics. Toraja women are seen as having great potential to

bring about change in political contests, especially on social issues that are more sensitive to the interests of women and families. With strong support from the traditional community, as well as education and cultural values that teach courage and responsibility, Toraja women are able to voice issues that are neglected in politics, and are not limited to domestic roles in the household. Their involvement in formal politics proves that Toraja women not only have access to political spaces, but also the ability to lead at various levels of government.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital provides insights relevant to the findings of this study, in which Toraja customs function as cultural capital that gives women social access and legitimacy in politics. As explained by Bourdieu, cultural capital encompasses knowledge, skills, and lifestyles that enable individuals or groups to gain prestige and social mobility. In this context, Toraja customs are not only a cultural structure that regulates social life, but also a cultural resource that gives women legitimacy to lead, both at the customary and formal political levels. An education-based approach, as well as the value of *tallu bakaa*, functions as cultural capital that strengthens women's political agency in Toraja, while minimising structural barriers for women in politics. Customary approval and church support demonstrate how cultural capital plays a role in strengthening women's position in politics, giving them equal access to the public sphere.

Furthermore, the theory of Deliberative Democracy is highly relevant to the findings that show that Toraja customary politics is carried out by prioritising deliberation and social balance. In deliberative democracy theory, the necessity of rational discussion and equal participation in decision-making is very important. Traditional deliberation in Toraja, which involves all parties in collective decision-making, reflects the principles of deliberative democracy that prioritise open dialogue and consensus. Toraja customary politics emphasises equality and balance, which gives women space to participate in the political deliberation process without internal hierarchy or coercion. These findings show that even though there are affirmative action policies at the national level that require quotas for women in politics, the values of deliberative democracy applied in Toraja customary politics serve to strengthen women's involvement in political decision-making.

The findings of this study show that Toraja women play a role as agents of political change, driven by the support of traditional customs and the church. In Toraja customs, women are given a position equal to men, which is reflected in the symbols of *tongkonan* (women) and *alang* (men), as well as in the principle of gender equality that underlies the role of women in traditional deliberations and formal politics. In addition, traditional education that teaches values such as courage and wisdom also provides women with the social capital necessary to lead, both in the context of tradition and formal government. With the blessing of tradition and the support of the church, Toraja women have the social legitimacy that strengthens their position in formal political contests. The Toraja church, which previously limited the role of women, now fully supports women's involvement in politics, indicating that changing views within religion contribute to women's involvement in a broader political space.

These findings are in line with Rhoads' findings, which highlight that despite a 30% quota for women's representation in politics in Bali, the main challenge in increasing women's political participation lies not only in affirmative policies but also in cultural and social factors that influence women's perceptions and opportunities in politics. Although in Bali, the factors of money politics and collective memory hinder women's progress, this study shows that in Toraja,

customs serve as a positive support for women to engage in politics, prioritising family values and deliberation rather than the competition for power that often dominates in many other places.

These findings also connect with those of [1], which show that although traditional gender norms in many countries such as Japan hinder women's political participation, conservative women in Japan can use their traditional norms to encourage political activism. In the Toraja context, customary norms that promote gender equality and the active role of women in customary decision-making actually provide a way for women to participate actively in politics without having to betray their traditional roles as mothers and caregivers. Thus, Toraja women, while adhering to traditional values, have successfully utilised customary norms as a means of political empowerment. Henley & Davidson's study [2] on the revival of customs in post-Suharto Indonesia shows that customs can serve as a positive tool for political mobilisation, especially in the context of decentralisation and democratisation. This is reflected in this study, in which Toraja women politicians consider the support of customs and the church as an integral part of their political legitimacy. With the church's changing views on women and legally mandated quotas for women, Toraja women have greater access to formal political spaces, similar to the democratisation process that has promoted women's advancement in previously conservative regions.

On the other hand, findings from the study [3] in Ghana reveal that although affirmative actions such as quota policies can improve women's participation, socio-cultural barriers remain a major challenge. This research is in line with findings that Toraja cultural values actually serve as reinforcing factors, providing women with equal access to politics, thanks to the support of customs, education, and the involvement of the church in facilitating gender equality. Thus, the findings of this study support the important role of customs and the church as key pillars in supporting women's participation in politics and social change. The theoretical implications of these findings show that Cultural Capital Theory and Deliberative Democracy Theory provide deeper insights into how Toraja customs function as social and cultural capital that supports women's political participation. This study shows that social support from customs and the church can open up space for women to engage in formal politics without sacrificing their traditional cultural values.

Furthermore, the principle of customary deliberation, which promotes social balance and deliberation, reflects the characteristics of deliberative democracy, which provides space for equal participation. However, the weakness of this study lies in the limited diversity of the informant sample, which focused on traditional and church leaders and politicians, without considering the views of women from various social classes and backgrounds. Future research could explore the role of women from various social strata in Toraja politics, as well as how external factors, such as money politics or quota systems, influence the success of affirmative policies in increasing women's involvement. Further research could also explore the interaction between traditional values and modern political dynamics to enrich the theory of women's political participation in the context of indigenous societies.

6 Conclusions

This study reveals that Toraja customs play a significant role in encouraging women's involvement in politics, particularly in the 2024 legislative elections in Toraja. Toraja customs provide strong social and political legitimacy for women to engage in politics, emphasising gender equality and traditional deliberation as basic

principles in political decision-making. The support of the Toraja church, which now fully supports women's involvement in politics, reinforces this finding. The church, which previously limited women's roles, now recognises women's ability to participate actively in formal politics, indicating a significant change in views on women's roles in the public sphere. The principle of tallu bakaa, which teaches values such as *Kinaa* (wisdom and intelligence), *barani* (courage), and *sugi'* (economic stability), has become the standard for assessing the quality of women's leadership, both in customary and formal politics. These findings also show that education and family support play an important role in building the confidence of Toraja women to engage in politics. Despite challenges, customary and church support are key factors that strengthen women's involvement in politics in Toraja. This study also makes an important contribution to the understanding of the role of customs in facilitating women's political participation, which can be used as a model in other contexts with similar cultural values. The absence of perspectives from women from different social classes or backgrounds may be a limitation in terms of understanding how women from all walks of life perceive customary support in politics. Future studies should involve informants from various social strata, including women from communities that are more marginalised in customary society, in order to understand the role of customs in supporting or limiting women's participation in various social contexts.

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