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## **Global Norms, Local Practice? The localization of global norms on women's political participation in India and Indonesia**

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## **Global Norms, Local Practice?**

*The localization of global norms on women's  
political participation in India and Indonesia*

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## **Abstract**

The UN, as a prime global norm entrepreneur, has launched countless efforts to spread its norm on women's political participation globally. Whether this norm is accepted and implemented on the ground, depends on local contexts. Using Acharya's (2004) framework of norm localization, it becomes clear that the prevailing traditional and patriarchal norms prevent the substantive participation of women in politics in both India and Indonesia. In India, instances of norm localization have taken place due to the potential for framing, grafting and reconstruction of traditional family norms. The norm of women's political participation has been reconstructed to fit into the pre-existing familial structures. In Indonesia, no such localization has taken place. Strong religious and cultural norms, and the absence of frameworks for reconstruction, prevent norm localization. Instead, evidence points towards norm resistance. Even though instances of norm localization have taken place only in India, this has not led to a substantial change in the level of norm implementation between the countries. In both India and Indonesia, the norm is accepted on paper, but in reality, the traditional social norms prevent the full and equal participation of women in the political realm.

## **List of Abbreviations**

CSW - Commission on the Status of Women

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

CEDAW SEAP - CEDAW Southeast Asia Program

IOs - International Organizations

KPPRI - Women's Parliamentary Caucus Indonesia

MoWECP - Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection Indonesia

NGOs - Non-Governmental Organizations

PRIs - Panchayati Raj Institutions

RSCD - Resource and Support Centre for Development

UN - United Nations

UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

WPS - Women, Peace and Security

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## 1. Introduction

*“If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights once and for all.”* (Hillary Clinton 1995)

This is what then first lady of the United States, Hillary Clinton, stated during the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing. In front of high-ranking officials from almost all member states, she sent a powerful, yet controversial message to the states where women do not hold equal positions as men. However, she also expressed a normative point of view. One that the UN had started to express on a global scale as well.

Over the past decades, the UN has become an indispensable player in the international arena. Being the world's largest international organization, it has come to play an essential role in maintaining global order. The large number of UN member states, housing a wide range of different perspectives on global issues, brings forward questions about the normative character of the UN. The UN has actively spread norms on women's political participation, but it remains puzzling whether and how these norms are accepted locally in its member states.

In this thesis, I examine how the global norms surrounding women's political participation spread by the UN are accepted and practiced locally. Through a cross-case comparison between India and Indonesia, I aim to answer *How are the UN's global norms on women's political participation localized in Indonesia and India?*

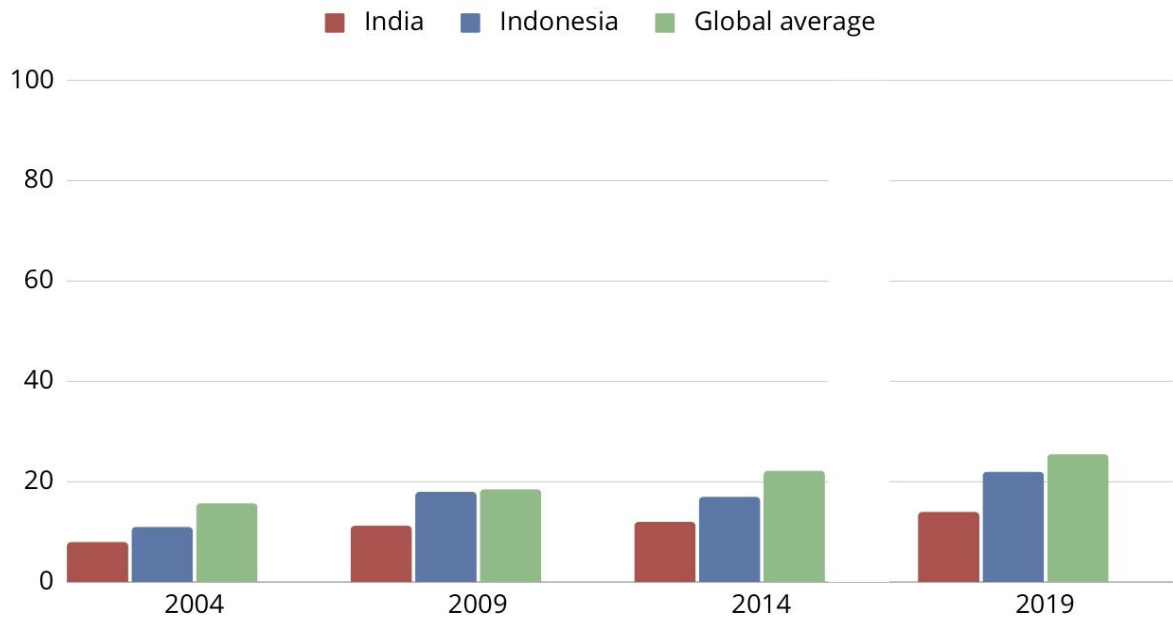
While there is no scholarly consensus on the delineation of women's political participation, I define it as the active involvement of women in political processes, which includes women's inclusion in political decision-making, as well as passive participation, such as voting and women's interests representation through indirect participation. As the UN keeps promoting gender equality, women worldwide engage and participate less in politics than their male counterparts. Local actors play a crucial role in whether global norms are practiced on the ground. Therefore, it is relevant to study the local contexts that might or might not allow for the acceptance of a global norm.

My research will focus on the level of rhetorical acceptance of the global norm in India and Indonesia respectively. After all, to understand how local actors engage with the norm, one must look at local rhetoric and attitudes towards the norm. This does not mean that no attention will be paid to concrete manifestations of these attitudes. As indicated in Figure 1, though remaining low, the percentage of women elected during general elections between 2004 and 2019 has incrementally increased. Indonesia consistently scores several percentage points higher than India, but whether this signals higher norm acceptance in Indonesia than in India, is something I examine in this thesis. Furthermore, there is no adequate data available on the voter turnout among women. Through my analysis of norm localization, I draw conclusions on the indicators for norm localization, and their implications for norm acceptance.

India and Indonesia are interesting cases to study in the context of my research, as they are populous democratic states engaged with the UN and its efforts for the advancement of women's participation. On paper, women's political participation should thus be accepted as a norm, however, in both countries, women face significant obstacles to entering politics. This makes it interesting to examine the local contexts of these cases. A central concept used to study the local contexts of the case studies and how these contexts shape norm acceptance, is Acharya's (2004) norm localization. Norm localization is defined as the "active construction (through framing, grafting and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors" (Acharya 2004, 245). I will examine to what extent the UN norm of women's political participation is localized in India and Indonesia, and which factors contribute to this.



### Percentage of women elected in lower house parliamentary elections



#### Sources:

**India:** Election Commission of India

**Indonesia:** Komisi Pemilihan Umum

**Global:** Interparliamentary Union

<https://eci.gov.in/general-election/>

<https://www.kpu.go.id/>

<http://archive.ipu.org/>

*Figure 1: Percentage of women elected in parliamentary elections in India and Indonesia, in comparison to the global average*

In what follows, I review the existing literature surrounding UN norm diffusion and argue that women's political participation should be researched as a stand-alone norm, taking into account the agency of local actors. I then provide a theoretical framework based on constructivism, where local contexts and norm localization are central concepts. Finally, I explicate my choice for a comparative case study between India and Indonesia, arguing that the local political, religious and cultural contexts are crucial for my study. Then follows the empirical part of my study, where I analyse the extent of norm localization in India and Indonesia respectively. Finally, in the discussion I compare and contrast the two cases.

## 2. Literature Review

Large international organizations, like the UN, spread norms, understood as ‘standards of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity’ (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891). How they do this is frequently studied within academia. In what follows, I review the existing arguments and show that women’s political participation and local contexts in norm acceptance have been somewhat neglected. By focusing on UN norm diffusion, this research builds on the literature discussed here but adds to them a perspective of local agency in the acceptance of global norms.

### 2.1. *UN Norm Diffusion*

International Organizations (IOs) are often theorized as the prime diffusers of international norms, which they spread to state and non-state actors across the globe. In diffusing global norms, the UN aims to instigate normative change in its member states (Park 2006, 1). IOs themselves play a role in implementing these norms (Park 2006, 17; Engberg-Pedersen, Fejerskov and Cold-Ravnkilde 2019, 41). The frameworks and perspectives from which UN norm diffusion is studied, vary greatly. There is an academic focus on how norms are shaped by international actors (Berliner and Prakash 2012, 150; Oksamytna and Wilén 2022, 2358; Sundrijo 2021, 9). Other works focus on the sources of the global norms that IOs diffuse (Park 2006, 18). Global norms are adopted and adapted by regional and national actors for strategic reasons, and sometimes, they are ‘incidentally’ adopted (Oksamytna and Wilén 2022, 2368). While these arguments may explain norm adaptation in certain contexts, I argue that more attention should be paid to the agency of local actors in norm acceptance and implementation.

My thesis will build on these works in conceptualizing the UN as an important norm diffuser, but it will provide an alternative focus on the agency of local actors. While IOs play an indispensable role in the diffusion of global norms to local contexts, the acceptance, and with that, the successfulness of norm diffusion, is ultimately determined by local actors.

## *2.2. UN Women's Rights Norms*

When it comes to the diffusion of global norms, promoting gender equality internationally has become a prime goal of the UN over the decades. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) forms the first and most prominent embodiment of its interest in gender equality (Engberg-Pedersen, Fejerskov and Cold-Ravnkilde 2019, 44). Since the 1960s, many more UN initiatives followed. Besides the four Conferences on Women, the UN created CEDAW (Engberg-Pedersen, Fejerskov and Cold-Ravnkilde 2019, 46). However, most work on these efforts do not adequately address women's political participation as a norm (Krivenko 2009, 4). After the initial attention on political participation, focus quickly shifted to other issues relating to education and healthcare (Engberg-Pedersen, Fejerskov and Cold-Ravnkilde 2019, 53). While certainly important, I argue that women's political participation is understudied despite its relevance as a stand-alone goal, thus, we should return academic focus to it.

In addition to this, the implementation of CEDAW in Muslim-majority countries has received notable academic attention. The intersection of human rights and religion can often cause tensions between global and local norms. Many scholars have paid attention to the dynamics between Islam and women's rights norms, examining the creation of religious frameworks for the implementation of CEDAW (Krivenko 2009; Salem 2017). These scholars have provided an insightful overview of the role of religion in the implementation of UN's women's rights norms. However, the importance of local actors is not addressed in these works. My research will use the concepts of religious adaptation to examine the role religion plays in the norm acceptance in India and Indonesia.

As a result of the UN's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, the academic debate has been overshadowed by a conflict focus (Binder, Lukas and Schweiger 2008; Tryggestad 2015; Trojanowska 2019; Horst 2017; Renzulli 2017; Popovic, Barr and Lyytikäinen 2010). Women's political participation is often conceptualized and studied in the context of conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Tryggestad 2015; Horst 2017). While gender equality is a necessary precondition for sustained peace, it is not the only reason why it should be pursued as a global goal. The UN's WPS agenda has made important contributions for gender equality worldwide, and the above-mentioned works can provide useful insights into the dynamics of norm diffusion in the realm of women's rights, but it has driven the focus away from women's rights as its own goal.

### *2.3. The Political Participation of Women*

Due to the significant amount of research on women's political participation, the conceptualization of what it entails varies greatly. Women's political participation is often linked with women's socioeconomic emancipation (Milazzo and Goldstein 2019; Engberg-Pedersen, Fejerskov and Cold-Ravnkilde 2019). After all, economic participation of women can allow for more female participation in political bodies (Milazzo and Goldstein 2019, 56). Despite this, decoupling the two allows for the examination of how political participation as a stand-alone norm is implemented on the local level. While women's socioeconomic conditions might be an explaining factor for increased political participation in certain cases, to research the level of norm acceptance, political participation is better examined as a stand-alone norm. Fadia (2014, 537) regards political participation as one part of broader 'female empowerment,' but merely looks at female political participation in domestic contexts, disregarding the role of the UN and (global) norm acceptance. Overall, the normative aspect of women's political participation is missing from the literature.

The works reviewed above provide useful insights into UN norm diffusion, and the UN's efforts on women's political participation. In my work, I will combine these works into a comprehensive framework that addresses the agency of local actors in the UN's norm implementation, while providing a unique focus on women's political participation as a norm in and of itself.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

Understanding the local implementation of the UN's women's participation norms, means creating an understanding of the way in which local contexts shape existing norms, and how they ultimately shape the acceptance or resistance of global norms. In doing so, the agency of local actors should be taken into account, as they ultimately determine what happens with a norm after it is diffused.

#### *3.1 Constructivist Approach*

The world is ultimately held together by norms. Whether at a local or global level, norms shape the behavior of states and the people living in them. Constructivism offers an insightful approach in understanding how norms are created and ultimately implemented.

Constructivism regards norms as socially and ideationally constructed and it views the behavior of (political) actors as a process constructed by intersubjective ideas (McCourt 2022, 2; Wendt 1999, 1). Using this approach, specifically viewing constructivism as “structural idealism,” helps me understand how global norms are implemented. In essence, this entails that political behavior is shaped by social structures on a local, national and transnational level (Vaughn and Kowert 2011, 4). The diffusion and implementation of norms can be viewed as one of these socially and structurally constructed processes. In my case, I will look at how the UN's global norms are locally accepted and implemented on the ground.

Finnemore and Sikkink define a norm as ‘a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity’ (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891). A global norm, in this context, is a standard of appropriate behavior that is set to be diffused across many states and international actors. In my case, ‘appropriate behavior’ refers to women being able to equally participate in political life, and the given identity of the actors studied is their UN membership and democratic political structure. The inherent link of norms with ‘appropriateness’ illustrates the importance of context-specificity. Given that India and Indonesia are both democratic UN member states who ratified several women's rights conventions, they are expected to uphold the norm and deem it as ‘appropriate behavior’ themselves. Whether and to what extent this is the case on the ground, is what I examine in this thesis.

### *3.2 Norm Localization*

To understand when and how global norms are implemented on a local level, I will build on Acharya's (2004) theory of norm localization. Norm localization is defined as "the active construction (through framing, grafting and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors" (Acharya 2004, 245). It is a dynamic process of global norm acceptance (Acharya 2004, 250). Rather than a simple process of norm diffusion leading to norm adaptation, it takes into account the agency of local actors. In essence, the definition of norms as 'appropriate' behavior that is context-specific, ties into what Acharya defines as localization. Whether a norm is localized, depends in the first place on the context of the locality, and in turn, the locality determines what is appropriate.

Within norm localization, framing, grafting and reconstruction are central concepts. Framing refers to the use of language to interpret the new norm in linkage with local norms. Grafting refers to the association of the new norm with a pre-existing norm in a similar issue area, to garner support for the new norm (Acharya 2004, 244). Framing and grafting are thus merely ways to re-represent the norm; they might be considered stepping stones to norm reconstruction. Reconstruction occurs when the substance of the norm is altered (slightly) to fit in pre-existing local normative frameworks (Acharya 2004, 244). Norm localization is likely in cases where the global norm can enhance local legitimacy, pre-existing local norms are strong, and if there are credible local 'insider proponents' of the global norm (Acharya 2004, 248). After all, if the norm already has support from credible local actors, it is more easily adopted as they trust the insider proponent to know what is good for the community. Part of my research will therefore focus on these 'insider proponents' as well as potential insider 'opponents'. I will examine who the insider proponents (or opponents) in the cases of Indonesia and India are and how they help (or prevent to) localize the UN's norms on women's political participation.

Besides localization, Acharya offers two alternative pathways for international norms; norm resistance (the global norm is not implemented locally) and norm displacement (the global norm completely replaces pre-existing local norms) (Acharya 2004, 254). Norm displacement rarely occurs right away, but long-term localization of a norm might end in displacement by the global norm (Acharya 2004, 253). Norm resistance occurs when the local standards of appropriateness do not match the global norm, and there is little room for framing, grafting or reconstruction to make it fit with prior norms.

Acharya's framework of norm localization is relevant in the cases of Indonesia and India, as both countries have a rich history of traditions, values and established normative frameworks that seep into daily political life and society as a whole. The complex local contexts of the cases invites for a more profound study on the implementation of global norms. Whether the norm is localized, resisted, displaced or anything in between, depends on a wide range of factors. I expect that in both Indonesia and India, traditions and pre-existing norms play a significant role; either facilitative or hampering. I expect that if the UN and local norm-takers can frame women's political participation to increase the legitimacy of prior traditions and institutions, it leads to a greater norm acceptance.

## **4. Methodology**

In this section, I discuss the methods used to answer my research question. First, I justify my choice of conducting a comparative case study and address potential weaknesses. Second, I explain my case selection. Finally, I address the different methods of data gathering that I will be using in my thesis.

### *4.1 Comparative Case Study and Context-Specificity*

To study how the UN has implemented its norms on women's political participation, I will conduct a comparative case study of two cases. A comparative case study allows me to construct and identify new hypotheses and identify potential left-out variables (George and Bennett 2005, 27). A case study is the most effective method for context-specific research, because it allows me to conduct an in-depth study of the contexts and dynamics of norm localization and explain how norm acceptance and political participation are shaped in detail, even if they are complex in nature.

I choose to conduct a comparative rather than a single case study, as it highlights how differences in context, even if they are subtle, may lead to different outcomes. Indonesia and India are expected to have similar levels of norm acceptance, since they have similar political structures and prevailing cultural norms. Focusing on the context-dependent nature of the cases allows me to conduct in-depth analyses of the cases. While lacking overall generalizability, this method allows me to draw from the case studies lessons about the localization mechanisms involved.

### *4.2 Case Selection*

The cases I choose to study in-depth are Indonesia and India. They are interesting cases to answer my research question, as they both are among world's largest democracies, yet the political position of women is under pressure. Both countries are also engaged with the UN when it comes to conventions surrounding women's rights. Since on a surface level, these countries have a lot in common, it is relevant to examine the local contexts of these countries.

While India and Indonesia are interesting and relevant cases for my research, they are located in one region and they share a similar political system. This means that the comparative case study naturally does not represent the dynamics of norm acceptance in other parts of the



world. Furthermore, there are some practical constraints to the case studies, particularly in the case of Indonesia. For the India case study, primary sources are all available in English. However, for Indonesia, many primary sources are solely available in Indonesian, a language that I do not speak. While suboptimal, the range of available sources in English, combined with secondary sources, nevertheless allow me to adequately analyse the level of norm acceptance in Indonesia and answer my research question.

#### *4.3 Data Collection and Analysis*

I will consult a number of different primary sources, and a small number of secondary sources. The primary sources I consult are mainly grey literature, such as reports and documents from NGOs concerned with women's participation, speeches of government and UN officials, and government white papers regarding women's political status. Additionally, I conducted three semi-structured interviews. I reached out to 19 different organizations and individuals, however, I initially only received one response. Through snowballing, I managed to conduct a total of three interviews. One interview was with a country representative of UN Women India, one with the director of RSCD, an Indian NGO focused on women in governance, and the last one was with a professor of women and politics in India at Amherst College. See Annex 1.1 for more details. Unfortunately, I have not received responses from Indonesian individuals or organizations, so data for this case study will come from primary sources complemented by secondary sources.

To examine how the norm is localized in Indonesia and India, I analyzed several indicators for norm localization. I analyzed both practical manifestations of norm acceptance, such as instituted policies to enhance women's political participation, and the discourse surrounding the norm. In the speeches, I analyzed how and when women's political participation is discussed. In the various reports, I analyzed the attitudes towards the norm, as well as the prevailing traditions and norms. Since prior norms and traditions, as indicated by Acharya, are important indicators of norm localization, they are relevant for my study. As described earlier, insider proponents also play an important role in norm localization; therefore, I analyzed the attitudes of trusted actors and institutions to conclude whether they contributed to norm localization, or perhaps norm resistance.

While the data only provides me with circumstantial evidence for norm localization, the fact that the conditions of norm localization are clearly laid out by Acharya, makes the indicators mentioned above credible to draw conclusions on.

## 5. Empirics

The UN has diffused its norms on women's participation across India and Indonesia, but the extent to which it has been localized in both countries, depends on a wide range of context-specific factors. Below, I briefly discuss the UN's norm campaigns in India and Indonesia. Then, I analyse the extent of norm localization in India and Indonesia, focusing on attitudes towards the norm, the role of pre-existing norms, and insider proponents.

### *5.1 UN Norm Creation and Diffusion*

#### *5.1.1. Defining the norm*

Despite the UN's countless conventions on women's rights, CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration continue to be the most significant in their influence. Article 7 of CEDAW states that all women have the equal right to vote in elections, participate in the formulation of government policy, hold public office, and perform public functions in all levels of government (United Nations General Assembly 1979). The Beijing Declaration includes the importance of incorporating women's perspectives in its definition of the norm (United Nations 1995). Combining the Beijing Declaration and CEDAW definitions, the UN norm can be defined as equal access to and full participation of women in political and decision-making bodies. This includes women's right to vote and be eligible, as well as their right to contribute to the formulation of government policy and implementation thereof. The UN promotes and diffuses this norm across the globe, including India and Indonesia.

#### *5.1.2. UN Norm Campaigns in India and Indonesia*

The UN has made efforts to increase the political participation of women in Indonesia and India. As part of the CEDAW Southeast Asia Program (CEDAW SEAP), the UN works together closely with local and national governments, embassies and NGOs to facilitate programmes aimed at implementing the norm on local levels.

In Indonesia, as part of the CEDAW SEAP, the UN engages in Gender Transformative Programming to positively impact the attitudes towards women's leadership (United Nations Indonesia 2023). CEDAW has been a guiding principle for women's empowerment (Wakil Presiden Republik Indonesia 2015; OHCHR 2012). In India, the UN Conferences on Women have sparked numerous local initiatives for women's participation (Basu, in interview). These

and other campaigns, while making local impacts, do not guarantee the acceptance or implementation of the norm on the ground. In the next sections, I review the extent to which the norm is localized in India (5.2) and Indonesia (5.3).

## *5.2 Case Study: India*

In India, the number of women participating in the political process has steadily increased since its independence, as can be seen in Figure 1. However, there remain a number of substantial challenges to the acceptance of the norm.

### *5.2.1. Attitudes towards Women's Political Participation in India*

Despite not being a 'novel', or 'foreign' idea, the participation of women in politics and decision-making has been far from regarded as a given. Women have played a part in political processes, most significantly the independence and democratization movements, yet, the prevalent notion in Indian society is that women should be limited to the private sphere (Kuruvilla 2021, 63; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2014, 8). The woman is regarded merely as an 'implementer' of decisions made by the man (Kuruvilla 2021, 64). Because women are normatively confined to the private sphere, the perceived 'winnability' of female political candidates is low. Due to this, women are often not given tickets to seriously contest in elections (High Level Committee on the Status of Women 2015, 35). The patriarchal norms behind these attitudes prevail over a larger scale of women's issues, and have a significant effect on the potential for norm localization.

The negative attitudes towards the norm are not limited to men, women themselves have regarded women's political participation as inappropriate in Indian society (Government of India 1974, 319; Kuruvilla 2021, 49). Traditional gender norms are disproportionately prominent with members of upper castes and classes (Raskar, in interview; Government of India 1974, 319). Members of upper castes, who tend to occupy higher levels of political positions, thus have the power to 'lead by example' in their acceptance of women in politics, yet they largely oppose the norm. Indian women seem to be stuck in a vicious cycle, since the support and attitudes of the community around them are often a deciding factor in their choice to run for election or take part in political processes (ICRW and UN Women 2012; Kuruvilla 2021, 65).

Despite this, there are opportunities for a shift in attitudes. As evidenced by historical accounts of women's involvement with the Indian independence movement, the (successful) participation of women in political processes garners more widespread support for women's participation (Government of India 1974, 303; Kuruvilla 2021). The independence movement has made such deep impacts on Indian society, that it is used by Indian officials as an instrument for framing; when they speak of women's political participation, the independence movement is often brought up as a reminder of women as "architects" of modern India (United Nations India 2019; Government of India 1974, 303). This framing takes place in different local and national contexts. Both Basu and Raskar corroborate this in their interviews; demonstrating that women use their political power in productive ways for society at large, is ultimately what reduces negative social attitudes. But as will be discussed in 5.2.3., it is up to political parties and other powerful actors to initiate this change in attitudes.

There seems to be a discrepancy between the political norm acceptance of government institutions, and the widespread societal norm acceptance. While government bodies have instated measures to increase norm acceptance, communities and families on the ground remain critical of the norm. The negative attitudes that, despite progress made, prevail in Indian society, ultimately impede the potential for localization.

### *5.2.2. The Role of Prior Norms and Traditions*

As has become clear, traditional norms continue to play a significant role in Indian society. Traditional family norms are the most prevalent in their influence. These norms impose several barriers on women's political participation. In the first place, while the number of women in politics has steadily increased in India, especially on local levels, many women are heavily influenced by family preferences in their voting behavior (Government of India 2015, 234). Women are often told by their husbands who to vote for, since politicians rarely cover women's issues (Government of India 2015). When women are elected for political office, they often serve as 'puppets' for their husbands. The woman is merely 'the face' of the office, while her husband dictates the political decisions for her (Kuruvilla 2021, 6; ICRW and UN Women 2012, 20).

Since many women are only able to participate in political bodies due to familial ties, the family is a deciding factor in whether or not women participate (High Level Committee on

the Status of Women 2015, 35; Kuruville 2021). Women across India indicate that spousal encouragement is their main reason for political success (ICRW and UN Women 2012, 29). Furthermore, when looking at reasons why women choose not to (re)run for political office, a key reason is their inability to combine political work with their household responsibilities (ICRW and UN Women 2012).

While practically speaking, more and more women are taking part in politics, and this is (somewhat) accepted in society, when looking more closely, we find out that familial ties and traditional family notions still prevail. Paradoxically, while family traditions do not fully hamper the political participation of women, they clearly limit women's independence in the political process. On the other hand, one could argue that by connecting the norm of political participation to these family traditions, through a process of grafting, women that would traditionally be confined to the private sphere, are now at least somewhat engaged with politics. This process of grafting and framing becomes apparent when looking at how trusted political figures, like Modi, speak about women's political participation. In his speeches, Modi often refers to the 'family legacy' that women play a crucial role in, as the 'starting point of political participation' (Pandit 2022; Economic Times 2023). Tied into this, Amrita Basu refers to the fact that a lot of Indian women that do manage to enter political office, were preceded by family members. This type of 'dynastic politics,' while seemingly undemocratic as women do not enter on their own merit, can be seen as a successful local substitute for quotas or other forms of affirmative action (Basu, in interview). After all, it provides a means for women's representation that is in line with traditional family norms. This could be evidence of norm localization, as the UN norm has been rhetorically reconstructed to fit 'appropriately' into domestic contexts.

### *5.2.3. Insider proponents and opponents*

*Panchayati Raj Institutions* (PRIs) are important players in the process of norm acceptance, as they constitute the local self-governments on the village level, and thus represent the community at grassroots level. While PRIs are credible institutions for local governance, and widely respected by the community, they lack the conviction that women's political empowerment is a worthy norm to adopt (ICRW and UN Women 2012). They have the potential to become valuable insider proponents on the lowest level of governance, but they do not actively support or promote the norm; they might be called 'fence-sitters' (Kuruville 2021, 60).

Political parties play an essential role in the process of norm acceptance, as they are widely trusted bodies for political leadership. Women's political participation is largely dependent on parties' mobilization efforts (Government of India 1988, 154; Government of India 2015, 963; Kuruvilla 2021, 63). They are potential insider proponents, but in reality often prove to be opponents, as they hamper the political emancipation of women. In their manifestos, they claim to support women's political participation, but in reality they continuously make it hard for women to run as candidates, and rarely address women as a serious constituency (Government of India 2015; High Level Committee on the Status of Women 2015). The party manifesto of the BJP, the biggest party in India, for the 2019 elections claims to "to take substantive measures (...) to achieve gender equality," and prime minister Modi has repeatedly addressed the importance of empowering women and achieving gender equality (Bharatiya Janata Party 2019; Pandit 2022). However, this stands in stark contrast to the political reality that women face, as there remains a reluctance to nominate women candidates and include them in decision-making (Basu, in interview; Government of India 2015, 930).

The lack of support by trusted (local) institutions like PRIs prevent the norm from being widely accepted. While political parties, most notably the BJP, seem to rhetorically accept the norm, this acceptance does not translate into social and political realities.

#### *5.2.4. Extent of localization*

In terms of practical manifestations of norm acceptance, there is a big divide between national and local levels of power. On lower levels, women's participation is relatively higher, but on higher levels, as shown in Figure 1, women do not exceed 15%. This is also translated into policy, as the 73rd and 74th Amendment, which are widely perceived as some of the most progressive legislature in India to promote gender equality, allocate 33% of seats to women and some states initiated quotas of 50% (Kuruvilla 2021, 48; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2012, 10; Kalaramadam 2018, 8). However, this only applies to local village- and municipal-level bodies. These quotas remain on lower levels of governance, and initiatives to install quotas at national levels have been stalled in the political process (Rai 2017, 64).

Besides the national-local divide, there is a discrepancy between the rhetorical and practical acceptance of the norm in India. While the norm of women's political participation seems, to

some extent, to be ‘rhetorically accepted,’ the practical manifestations and implementation of the norm point in a different direction. The wide range of government measures seem rather hollow expressions of norm acceptance, given the societal attitudes surrounding the norm and the general unwillingness to act on change. In the end, to truly change the acceptance of the norm on a societal and institutional level, the traditional attitudes towards this norm need to transform in civilian communities and party officials alike.

Between 1974 and now, not much has changed in terms of attitudes and insider proponents. While policy has changed, the role of traditional norms remains significant. Due to the role that women have historically played in political processes, some instances of framing have taken place to establish increased legitimacy for the norm; after all, if women were important then, they should be politically important now. Additionally, grafting has taken place to combine the global norm with prevailing local notions about family, which has somewhat increased norm acceptance. There is thus some potential for increasing prior legitimacy, and this has been used as a tactic by insider proponents, but this has not happened widely with other prior norms. Overall, there does not seem to be widespread potential for the increase of legitimacy of prior norms through norm reconstruction, since no such frameworks were implemented in Indian society. This limits the potential for norm localization.

### *5.3 Case Study: Indonesia*

Indonesia, at first glance, seems to have initiated progressive policies to advance women’s political participation. However, strong traditional cultural, religious and social norms pose notable challenges to the potential for norm localization.

#### *5.3.1. Attitudes towards Women’s Political Participation in Indonesia*

Attitudes on women’s political participation in Indonesia vary depending on how broadly ‘political participation’ is defined. Overall, the political participation of women seems to be accepted as a norm by political bodies and actors. The Indonesian government has passed several laws in favor of the norm; most significantly, the General Election Law 10/2008, which states that one in every three candidates for any political party should be a woman (Soetjipto 2014, 2; UNDP 2010, 1). Other political bodies, such as the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (MoWECP) repeatedly claim that women’s political participation is crucial for strengthening democracy in Indonesia (Supanji 2021; Republic of Indonesia 2020, 10; Soetjipto 2014, 26). The government of Indonesia depicts itself as a



‘global leader’ in women’s empowerment, and, as stated by former vice-president Jusuf Kalla, increasing women’s political participation is a key priority of the government (Wakil Presiden Republik Indonesia 2015).

At first glance, attitudes towards women’s political participation thus seem rather supportive of the norm, since progressive policies and quotas have been introduced with support of the populace. However, when it comes to the substantive inclusion of women’s voices in policy-making, political bodies and local communities in Indonesia seem less supportive. Patriarchal values are very strong in Indonesian society, among both men and women. Women internalize these patriarchal values, which might be the most pervasive barrier to increased participation (UNDP 2010, 25; Mariana and Rahmatunnisa 2016, 267). The same applies to political parties. On the surface, they seem to support women’s political empowerment. Substantively, however, attitudes that women are not apt political leaders prevail in most party managements (Soetjipto 2014, 23; UNDP 2010, 28). In society at large, politics is seen as a masculine domain (OHCHR 2012, 1).

These patriarchal attitudes lead the government to focus primarily on quantity rather than quality of political representation. While the number of women in politics has increased as a result of various initiatives, women’s influence on decision-making remains minimal (UN Women 2020, 49; UNDP 2010, 33). All in all, the notion of women as political actors is becoming increasingly normalized within Indonesian politics and society, but when it comes to the substantive inclusion of women’s voices in political processes, attitudes remain traditional. This points to a critical stance on the global norm, which limits the potential for norm localization.

### *5.3.2. The Role of Prior Norms and Traditions*

Patriarchal values heavily influence the perception of women's political participation, and can be ascribed to several pre-existing institutions and traditional norms. They are categorized into religious, cultural, and traditional family norms.

Religion plays a crucial role in the acceptance of the norm. In particular, traditional Islamic values on gender roles have gained traction in Indonesian society, and heavily influence social attitudes (Mariana and Rahmatunnisa 2016, 267). Some religious groups use Islam as a means to discourage women from entering politics, and with that, they also influence men in their attitudes on women’s participation (UN Women 2020, 10). This, accompanied by

growing religious fundamentalism in Indonesia, poses a challenge to the acceptance of the norm (Soetjipto 2014, 23; Wieringa 2015, 27). While not mutually exclusive, political actors within Indonesia often contrast women's political participation with Islam. President Widodo even phrased Indonesia's progress on gender equality "in spite of" its predominantly Muslim population (Office of Assistant to Deputy Cabinet Secretary for State Documents and Translation 2018). No religious frameworks have been established to reconcile traditional religious gender norms with the norm of women's participation. The MoWECP has organized interfaith seminars for religious leaders on the promotion of women's empowerment, but this has not had a significant impact on the acceptance or implementation of the norm (Bhayangkari 2022).

In addition to, and (partly) as a result of religious norms, traditional family norms also play an important role in Indonesian society. Like in India, the notion that the public sphere is not meant for women is commonly shared in Indonesia (UNDP 2010, 24). Consequently, political structures remain patriarchal in nature, which leave little room for women to participate in decision-making (UNDP 2010, 23). Women's household responsibilities serve as practical constraints to their entry into politics, and stereotyping constrains the women's confidence to participate in decision making, which poses even more barriers to their participation (Mariana and Rahmatunnisa 2016, 267; Amnesty International 2012, 6; W20 Indonesia 2022).

Thirdly, prevailing norms on Indonesian culture play into the acceptance of the norm. In a number of Indonesian communities, the notion that Indonesian culture is separate from that of the 'West' dictates that Indonesia should maintain its traditional (gender) norms. Women's political participation is regarded as a solely Western norm, and therefore as 'moral decadence' (Wieringa 2015, 36). Women in political office actively threaten the family structures that are regarded as the base of Indonesian society (Wieringa 2015, 38; Dewi 2022, 3). Since these cultural notions are so deeply rooted in Indonesian society and identity, the potential for localization of a 'foreign' norm like women's political participation, depends heavily on the possibility to increase the legitimacy of these local institutions. So far, this does not seem the case, and the norm is, at least within certain communities, regarded as incompatible with Indonesian society.

### 5.3.3. Insider proponents and opponents

As mentioned, governmental actors generally tend to be supportive of the norm, albeit on a ‘superficial’ level. President Widodo, for example, has been a supporter of the norm. He has been selected by the UN as a champion in the *He for She* campaign launched to increase women’s empowerment (Wakil Presiden Republik Indonesia 2015; Yulius 2016). In this position, he has drawn attention to women’s representation in politics, and actively promoted the 30% quota for women in parliament (UN Women 2017). Given his position as president, with a high approval rate of 76,2%, he can be considered as an insider proponent (Lamb 2023). Additionally, the MoWECP has initiated several policies for the advancement of women’s political participation (Supanji 2021; UN Women 2020, 47). The ministry can therefore also be regarded as an insider proponent. As it has the political power to sway public opinion, their promotion of women’s participation is an important driving force of norm acceptance in Indonesia (Wieringa 2015, 36). However, their focus is merely on increasing the number of women in elections. This can be considered as hollow expressions of norm acceptance, as women are not encouraged to substantively engage in decision making (UN Women 2020, 47).

Another crucial actor is the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus (KPPRI), which consists of female members of the representative council (IPU Parline, n.d.). The caucus is aimed at promoting women’s participation in public life. The KPPRI is, theoretically, a powerful insider proponent, since all members, as parliamentarians, were voted into politics by the populace, and are therefore trusted political actors. However, in reality, the effectiveness of the caucus is curbed by the strategic power of political parties (Soetjipto 2014, 22; Mariana and Rahmatunnisa 2016, 267). The ideals of the political parties are systematically prioritized over KPPRI proposals, which leads to a lack of consolidation power (Soetjipto 2014, 21; Mariana and Rahmatunnisa 2016, 267). With that comes the fact that not all members are in favor of the norm. Ultimately, the issue comes back to the internalization of traditional gender norms that permeate Indonesian society. While having the potential to form a significant political unit in support of women’s political participation, the caucus has not had much impact. It rhetorically accepted the norm, but it has not brought substantive change to the reality of the norm.

Political parties, similarly to India, remain ‘fence-sitters’ when it comes to norm acceptance. While paradoxically, women are increasingly politically represented by political parties, these

same parties do not support women's contribution, and merely involve women as a formal requirement (Soetjipto 2014, 24; UNDP 2010, 24; Mariana and Rahmatunnisa 2016, 267). Again, the norm is accepted in the narrow sense, yet the substance of the norm is ignored, or resisted.

There are a number of 'women's movements' active in Indonesia. Noteworthy is that these tend to promote traditional gender roles, rather than political participation. A notable example of this is Dharma Wanita Persatuan. This is an organization of wives of civil servants that promotes the notion of women as housewives (Dharma Wanita Persatuan, n.d.). The organization links these gender norms to religion, as their priority is to "maintain religious beliefs and values" (Dharma Wanita Persatuan, n.d.). It uses religion as a tool for norm resistance.

#### *5.3.4. Extent of localization*

Unlike in India, there does not seem to be a national-local divide when it comes to the level of norm acceptance in Indonesia. The government has initiated efforts to incorporate communities at all levels. This inclusive focus forms potential for localization, as it could help positively influence the attitudes of local communities. However, as evidenced above, there are still a number of challenges.

As has become clear, there is a difference between quantitative and substantive representation of women. The number of women participating in politics, while still low, has been steadily increasing over the past decades. The government has initiated several policy efforts to ensure this and seems eager to promote it. When speaking about the quality of representation, women are not able to bring gendered perspectives into politics. Substantive representation is low, and so is the potential and general will for improvement. So, the norm is primarily resisted in Indonesia.

## 6. Discussion

### *6.1. Similarities in Norm Localization between India and Indonesia*

It can be concluded that in India and Indonesia, the manifestations of norm acceptance are similar despite their differences in norm localization. Most importantly, in both cases, the norm seems to be rhetorically accepted taking the narrow definition of the norm. Women's participation is prioritized by government actors 'on paper'. When it comes to women's substantive contribution to politics, however, the norm is resisted. Linking this back to the definition of the norm as involving both women's right to vote, as well as their right to contribute to policy formulation and implementation; the first part of the norm has been accepted in both India and Indonesia the latter part has been met with resistance.

The prior norms and traditions that influence the potential for norm localization, are fairly similar in both cases. In particular, the prevalent role of the family and the traditional gender norms that come with it, form crucial barriers to women's entry into politics. This, combined with the fact that important political actors do not adequately support the norm, leads to little substantive change in norm acceptance in both countries.

### *6.2. Differences in Norm Localization between India and Indonesia*

Despite prevailing similarities between the two cases, there are a number of subtle differences between the cases. In India, some instances of grafting, framing and reconstruction have taken place to fit the norm in local contexts. There were instances of framing where women's political participation was brought up in a framework of women in the independence movement. Furthermore, key political actors, such as Modi, used a form of grafting to connect the norm of family values to women's participation, and through this, ultimately used traditional family norms to reconstruct the norm.

In Indonesia, there are no instances of localization. This might be, in part, explained by the fact that women have historically played less of a role in the democratization movements. Whereas in India, women participated in these historically respected movements, women in Indonesia were generally excluded from sociopolitical movements until the turn of the century. Indonesia's history of efforts for gender equality is relatively short; it only started after the downfall of Suharto's regime in 1998 (Mariana and Rahmatunnisa 2016, 265). In

India, however, women's involvement has been initiated since its independence in 1947 (Menon 2022, 11).

Furthermore, religion plays a notable role in the strong patriarchal attitudes towards the norm. As brought up in the Literature Review, religion and human rights can cause tensions between global and pre-existing local norms if no frameworks for reconciliation are implemented (Krivenko 2009; Salem 2017). In Indonesia, the norm was not linked with pre-existing (religious) norms or reconstructed to fit in existing religious frameworks. This might explain why the norm is resisted in Indonesia. Religion does not play a prominent role in India, and even if the traditional values prevalent there are in part due to religion, Indian localities have found ways to link pre-existing values with the norm, which has led to some extent of norm localization.

### *6.3 Comparing and Contrasting the Two: Concluding Remarks*

Thus, in both countries, the norm is accepted in its narrow sense. One could argue that representation in terms of numbers is a crucial first step, as it allows women to become a 'critical mass' in political bodies. However, women are not listened to substantively as they work within the institutional structures designed for men, which has made it impossible to produce real change.

In India, the norm has been rhetorically accepted, and despite resistance to the practical manifestations of the norm, some instances of norm localization have taken place. In Indonesia, the rhetorical acceptance of the norm seems higher than in India, as more progressive policies are in place. This might explain the slightly higher numbers of women in politics. In terms of the substantive part of the norm, though, the resistance is arguably stronger than in India since the barriers to participation are more deep-rooted. The political voices against the norm are stronger, and the underlying cultural and religious norms surrounding the role of women have not lent themselves for reconstruction. The deep-rooted role of religion in Indonesian society, as well as the fact that women have not been involved in historical processes, might explain the difference in norm localization between the two countries. While norm localization has taken place in India, and Indonesia has resisted the norm, the practical manifestations of (lack of) norm acceptance are similar in both countries.

## 7. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have used a constructivist approach to research how global norms on women's political participation are localized in India and Indonesia. Using a framework of norm localization, I examined the role of local contexts and actors in norm acceptance. Through the analysis of primary and secondary sources, accompanied by semi-structured interviews, I have conducted a comparative case study and answered the research question: *how are the UN's global norms on women's political participation localized in India and Indonesia?*

The UN, as prime norm diffuser, has launched various efforts to spread the norm of women's political participation in India and Indonesia. The extent to which this norm is accepted and implemented locally, however, depends on prevailing attitudes towards the norm, pre-existing norms and traditions, and the presence of insider proponents. In India, the strong traditional family norms have allowed for a process of grafting and reconstruction, where the norm of political participation is associated with pre-existing norms of familial ties, or 'dynastic politics'. Furthermore, the involvement of Indian women in historical democratization movements have resulted in framing by insider proponents, to make the norm more accepted in Indian society. Despite these instances of localization, the norm is only accepted 'on paper' in India; while new policies have been initiated to advance women's political participation, women are still not regarded as equal political actors.

In Indonesia, attitudes towards women's political participation remain patriarchal; while the notion of women's participation is becoming more normalized in terms of quantity, the substantive implications of the norm are not accepted in Indonesia. Religion, family values and cultural norms pose challenges to norm acceptance. The strong influence of religion has led to the promotion of traditional gender roles throughout Indonesia. No frameworks have been instated to reconcile these pre-existing norms with the global norm. This, combined with the historical exclusion of women from democratization efforts, has resulted in no instances of norm localization. Despite some surface-level efforts, Indonesia has predominantly resisted the norm.

Thus in both India and Indonesia, the norm has been met with resistance. This has concrete implications for women in both countries, as they are discouraged from contributing to politics. It also has implications for the state of democracy, as half of the population continues to be marginalized in the political realm. Lastly, it has implications for the UN's

ability to successfully diffuse global norms; despite its countless efforts in both countries, the prevailing local norms and values prevent true norm acceptance.

The research process has brought about relevant topics for future study. In particular, since the involvement of women in political processes seems to go hand in hand with democratization efforts, it would be interesting to conduct a study on the link between level of democratization and norm acceptance of women's political participation. Linked to this, something that this study has not been able to do, is research norm diffusion in the context of non-democratic states. Future studies could apply the framework of localization to non-democratic UN member states to examine whether democracy is a precondition for effective UN norm diffusion.



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## Annex

### *Annex 1.1 Background Information on Interviews*

<i>Name of interviewee</i>	<i>Position of interviewee</i>	<i>Relevance of interview</i>	<i>Date, time and location of interview</i>
Poulomi Pal	Programme Specialist on Violence Against Women at UN Women India	While this interview was meant for gathering background information, Ms. Pal has provided me with links to relevant reports and referred me to a number of relevant other interviewees.	Date and time: Monday, May 8, 2023 at 07:30 AM. Location: online (Teams)
Bhim Raskar	Director of the RSCD	As director of an NGO focused on increasing women's political participation, Raskar has been able to give me detailed insights into the challenges of women's participation and the stance of local and national actors on this.	Date and time: Wednesday, May 17, 2023 at 11:00 AM. Location: online (Zoom)
Amrita Basu	Professor of Political Science, Women's Studies and Asian Civilizations at Amherst College	Having extensive knowledge of Indian politics and society, Basu has provided me with her insights on how the political culture in India ties into norm acceptance.	Date and time: Wednesday, May 17, 2023 at 09:00 PM. Location: online (Zoom)

*Table 1: Additional information on the conducted interviews.*