

Research paper

Advancing Gender Equality in Indonesia: Public Policy Challenges in a Developing Democracy

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ABSTRACT

This study examines gender equality advancement in Indonesia through a public policy systems perspective. Although Indonesia has adopted extensive reforms, such as ratifying CEDAW, institutionalising gender mainstreaming, introducing electoral quotas, integrating gender indicators into national development plans, and strengthening legal protections against sexual violence, equality outcomes remain uneven across regions and sectors. Using qualitative document analysis of national legislation, development plans, institutional reports, and scholarly literature, the study explores how institutional design, decentralisation, policy capacity, and resource–enforcement alignment shape implementation outcomes. Findings reveal that Indonesia’s gender governance architecture is formally comprehensive but operationally inconsistent. Decentralised governance mediates reform effectiveness by amplifying disparities in administrative capacity, fiscal resources, and political commitment across subnational governments. Policy success depends on the alignment of analytical, operational, and political capacities, supported by credible fiscal integration and enforcement readiness. The study argues that constraints to gender equality stem less from a lack of formal commitments and more from systemic governance incoherence. By integrating feminist institutionalism with policy capacity theory in a decentralised democratic context, this research contributes to comparative debates on gender governance and positions gender equality as an indicator of institutional alignment and state capability in developing democracies.

Keywords: gender equality, public policy, decentralisation, feminist institutionalism, gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive budgeting, developing democracies

Indonesia’s democratic consolidation since the late 1990s has unfolded alongside an explicit state commitment to gender equality, yet the distance between policy commitment and lived equality remains a central governance challenge (Hidayat et al., 2025). In a developing democracy, gender equality is not only a matter of rights and representation; it is also a question of state capacity, accountability, and policy coherence across institutions and levels of government (Diprose, 2023). While prior studies on Indonesia have largely examined gender equality through institutional, legal, or socio-cultural lenses in isolation, limited attention has been given to understanding gender equality as a systemic public policy challenge shaped by interacting governance capacities and institutional dynamics (Athallah et al., 2025; Diprose, 2023).

Indonesia’s commitment to women’s rights and gender equality is anchored in international and national frameworks. Indonesia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) through Law No. 7 of 1984, embedding international gender-equality obligations into

domestic legal commitments (Sales & Tavares, 2025). Over time, these commitments were operationalized through governance instruments that sought to integrate gender concerns into the “routine” machinery of development policy. A pivotal milestone is Presidential Instruction (Inpres) No. 9/2000, which promoted gender mainstreaming across national development processes and across government agencies (Inayatillah et al., 2025). These frameworks signal a durable policy intent: gender equality is not positioned as an add-on but as part of how development should be planned, budgeted, implemented, and evaluated. However, existing research has tended to treat these frameworks descriptively, often overlooking how their effectiveness depends on the alignment between institutional design and policy capacity across governance levels (Barbera et al., 2025; Liang, 2026).

However, policy intent does not automatically translate into policy impact. Indonesia’s development planning system has increasingly treated gender equality as measurable and governable through indicators and targets, reflected, for example, in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024, which explicitly references gender development and empowerment indicators as part of national priorities (Wulandari, 2025). The country also produces official gender-related indices and statistics through the national statistics agency (BPS) and related government reporting infrastructures, demonstrating an expanding measurement ecosystem for gender equality (Kasuma & Irianto, 2023). At the same time, international benchmarking continues to show that Indonesia faces persistent gaps across multiple dimensions of gender equality. For instance, the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2023 places Indonesia in the lower middle of global rankings, reflecting uneven progress and ongoing deficits across key domains (Widyanawati & Aisyah, 2025). This divergence between institutional commitment and policy outcomes highlights a critical gap in the literature: the absence of integrative frameworks that explain how governance structures, decentralisation, and policy capacity interact to shape gender equality outcomes in developing democracies. This tension between expanding frameworks, plans, and indicators on the one hand, and persistent or uneven outcomes on the other, frames the core puzzle of this study: why do gender equality reforms in policy not consistently translate into gender-equal governance outcomes in a developing democracy? Addressing this puzzle requires moving beyond single-theory or sectoral approaches toward a systems-oriented perspective that captures the interplay between institutions and capacities. In Indonesia, this puzzle is shaped by at least four intertwined public-policy dynamics.

First, gender equality policy operates within a complex institutional landscape. Gender mainstreaming, by design, disperses responsibility across ministries, agencies, and subnational governments rather than concentrating it in a single institution. While this whole-of-government approach can normalize gender responsiveness, it can also dilute ownership and create uneven implementation, especially where agencies interpret mainstreaming as a compliance exercise rather than a transformative governance principle (Diprose, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2025). The World Bank’s policy-oriented work on Indonesia has long highlighted both the promise of gender mainstreaming and the institutional constraints that limit its effectiveness (Athallah et al., 2025). Second, decentralization reshapes how equality reforms travel. Indonesia’s post-Reformasi governance system gives significant authority and discretion to subnational governments (Hasanudin et al., 2025). This can enable locally tailored gender policies, but it can also produce fragmented implementation capacity, variable political will, and uneven prioritization across provinces and districts (Hanani et al., 2025). In such contexts, national commitments may be interpreted through local political economies, budget constraints, and socio-cultural norms, creating differences not only in results but in how gender equality is defined and pursued in practice.

Third, gender equality in public policy is increasingly linked to the quality of democratic governance itself (Barbera et al., 2025). A developing democracy relies on accountability mechanisms, transparent institutions, civil society oversight, rights-protecting legal systems, and credible policy evaluation to ensure that rights commitments become enforceable realities (Liang, 2026). Where these accountability channels weaken, gender policy may remain rhetorically present but practically fragile. Broader governance conditions, such as the strength of oversight and civic space, therefore, matter for the sustainability and credibility of gender equality reforms (Akinbi, 2025). Fourth, gender equality policy is inseparable from the state’s response to gender-based violence and women’s legal protection. Indonesia’s Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (UU TPKS) represents a significant policy and legal development in recognizing and addressing sexual violence, including forms facilitated by digital technologies (Lestari et al., 2025). Yet major legal reforms also raise governance questions: implementation readiness, institutional coordination, resource allocation, service delivery for survivors, and the capacity of law enforcement and judicial systems to apply reforms consistently and fairly (Pratama et al., 2025). In other words, landmark legislation can advance normative commitments while simultaneously exposing practical constraints within the policy system. These dynamics suggest that advancing gender equality in Indonesia is not solely about whether the state has adopted the right policies; it is also about how policies are governed, how they are financed, interpreted, enforced, monitored, and revised across institutions and levels of government.

To address these gaps, this study adopts a novel integrative approach by combining feminist institutionalism with policy capacity theory within a public policy systems lens. This integration enables a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional rules, actor dynamics, and multi-level policy capacities jointly shape gender equality outcomes—an approach that remains underexplored in the context of Indonesia and comparable developing democracies (Barbera et al., 2025; Diprose, 2023). This study therefore treats gender equality as a public-policy challenge in a developing democracy: an issue that sits at the intersection of rights, development planning, institutional capacity, accountability, and political contestation. Building on this framing, the study aims to examine the principal public policy challenges shaping gender equality advancement in Indonesia. It asks:

1. How is gender equality constructed and prioritized across Indonesia's public policy architecture (laws, national development plans, and institutional mandates)?
2. What recurring implementation challenges emerge in translating gender commitments into governance practice (e.g., coordination, budgeting, accountability, capacity, decentralization)?
3. How do contemporary legal and governance developments illuminate the opportunities and limits of gender equality reforms in a developing democratic context?

The contribution of this paper is threefold. First, it synthesizes how gender equality is embedded in Indonesia's policy and planning apparatus, from foundational commitments (CEDAW ratification; gender mainstreaming directives) to contemporary governance instruments (national planning targets, indicators, and sectoral reforms). Second, it identifies the policy-system bottlenecks that repeatedly constrain progress, emphasizing that gaps are often produced by governance dynamics (implementation capacity and accountability) rather than the absence of formal commitments. Third, it situates Indonesia's gender equality agenda within the broader pressures and possibilities of a developing democracy, where civic space, oversight institutions, and conditions for legal implementation shape whether reform yields meaningful change.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Advancing gender equality in developing democracies has increasingly been understood not merely as a matter of social reform, but as a test of governance quality, institutional coherence, and state capacity (Aslam & Asif, 2025; Inayatillah et al., 2025). Contemporary scholarship positions gender equality as a public policy outcome shaped by institutional design, political incentives, administrative competence, fiscal commitment, and enforcement capacity (Keddie, 2023; Mansoor et al., 2020; Sales & Tavares, 2025). In this sense, equality is not only a normative aspiration but also an indicator of how effectively democratic institution's function.

Gender equality and the governance problem

In developing democratic contexts, policy systems often operate under conditions of uneven administrative capacity, fragmented authority, and contested political legitimacy. Indonesia exemplifies this dynamic. Since the Reformasi era, the country has combined competitive elections and constitutional reform with persistent challenges such as party gatekeeping, clientelism, bureaucratic fragmentation, and uneven subnational capacity (Aspinall et al., 2021). These structural features shape not only representation but also the translation of policy commitments into implementable programs (Spillane et al., 2002). From a governance perspective, gender equality advances when democratic accountability mechanisms (representation, civil society oversight, legal enforcement) align with administrative mechanisms (planning, budgeting, coordination, and monitoring) (Aina & Olayode, 2012; Mohyeddin, 2024). When this alignment weakens, equality commitments may remain rhetorically strong yet operationally fragile (Mustaqim, 2023). This commitment-implementation gap is widely recognized in comparative gender and development research and is particularly salient in decentralized political systems (Gatiningsih & Saputra, 2026).

Gender mainstreaming: institutional promise and structural limits

Since the Beijing Platform for Action, gender mainstreaming has become the dominant global paradigm for institutionalizing equality (Maluleke, 2025). Rather than isolating women's issues in specialized agencies, mainstreaming seeks to embed gender analysis throughout the policy cycle (True & Mintrom, 2001). Indonesia formally adopted this paradigm through national planning directives and executive instructions, signaling high-level institutional commitment (Butudoka, 2022). However, international scholarship demonstrates that mainstreaming is inherently vulnerable to symbolic compliance. Moser and Moser (2005) show that many governments successfully adopt mainstreaming language and frameworks but struggle with implementation due to weak incentives, limited technical expertise, and insufficient accountability mechanisms. Similarly, Squires (2005) distinguishes between mainstreaming as inclusion (adding gender language), reversal (prioritizing women's

concerns), and displacement (transforming institutional logics). Only the latter yields transformative change. Feminist institutionalism deepens this analysis by emphasizing that institutions are embedded with gendered norms and power relations (Mackay et al., 2010; Bharti, 2025). Formal reforms, such as mainstreaming mandates or quota laws, must confront informal practices, bureaucratic routines, and political hierarchies that often reproduce inequality. In Indonesia, this tension is evident where policy documents reflect gender commitments, yet administrative cultures and incentive structures do not consistently internalize them.

Decentralization and uneven gender governance

Indonesia's post-1999 decentralization reforms redistributed significant authority to provincial and district governments (Jackson, 2025). While decentralization can enable locally tailored gender initiatives, it also produces variability in implementation quality. Research on Indonesian democracy shows that local political economies and bureaucratic competence differ substantially across regions (Aspinall et al., 2021). Consequently, national gender mandates encounter diverse interpretations and levels of commitment at the subnational level. Studies of women and democratization in Indonesia, like, Budianta (2006), highlight how local political dynamics influence whether gender equality is prioritized or marginalized. In some districts, proactive leadership has strengthened gender-responsive planning and budgeting; in others, reforms remain procedural (Athallah et al., 2025). This unevenness reflects a broader public policy principle: when authority is decentralized, outcomes depend heavily on local capacity and monitoring mechanisms from the center (Kasuma & Irianto, 2023). For example, several provinces such as Aceh and Yogyakarta have introduced locally adapted gender-responsive development initiatives that integrate gender indicators into regional planning and budgeting processes. In contrast, other districts demonstrate more procedural approaches where gender mainstreaming is incorporated primarily through formal reporting rather than substantive programmatic change. These differences reflect variations in bureaucratic capacity, political leadership, and fiscal resources across subnational governments, highlighting how decentralization mediates the translation of national gender commitments into local governance outcomes (Scheffers, 2026).

Representation, political capacity, and democratic mediation

Women's political representation is frequently viewed as both a democratic outcome and a policy lever. Indonesia's electoral quota mechanisms have contributed to incremental increases in women's parliamentary presence (Lestari & Kurniawan, 2025). Yet comparative research indicates that quota effectiveness depends on party recruitment practices, placement mandates, and electoral competition (Hillman, 2017). Structural barriers within parties and campaign financing systems can constrain substantive influence even when descriptive representation improves (Hjelm et al., 2026). This insight connects to the concept of political policy capacity (Wu et al., 2015), which emphasizes the state's ability to build coalitions, sustain legitimacy, and mobilize support for reform. Without sustained legislative and political backing, gender equality policies may lack continuity during budgeting, oversight, and implementation stages.

Fiscal commitment, policy capacity, and enforcement

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is often presented as a mechanism to align policy ambition with fiscal reality. UN Women (2016) documents GRB as a critical tool for institutionalizing equality across the Asia-Pacific region, yet implementation depends heavily on technical competence and political commitment (Asiedu, 2023). Indonesian evaluations similarly reveal that GRB can become a technocratic reporting exercise rather than a strategic instrument linked to measurable outcomes. Policy capacity theory provides a useful analytical lens here (Sukmawan et al., 2023). Wu et al. (2015) conceptualize capacity across analytical (data and knowledge), operational (administrative coordination and resources), and political (stakeholder management and legitimacy) dimensions. Gender equality reform requires all three. Analytical capacity supports gender-disaggregated data systems; operational capacity ensures inter-ministerial coordination and local implementation; political capacity sustains reform momentum across electoral cycles (Silva et al., 2025). The growing integration of digital technologies and algorithmic tools into public administration creates new governance challenges, including questions of equity, accountability, and gendered access that directly affect how capacity is built and exercised across institutional levels (Özçelik & Işıklı, 2024; Shishakly, 2025). Gender-based violence (GBV) policy illustrates the importance of enforcement capacity. Indonesia's Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes represents a major normative advance (Ningrum, 2024), yet scholarship emphasizes that legal reform must be matched with institutional readiness, survivor services, and judicial competence to produce meaningful change (Santoso et al., 2023). GBV policy thus functions as a "stress test" for state accountability and cross-sector coordination (Gupta, 2026).

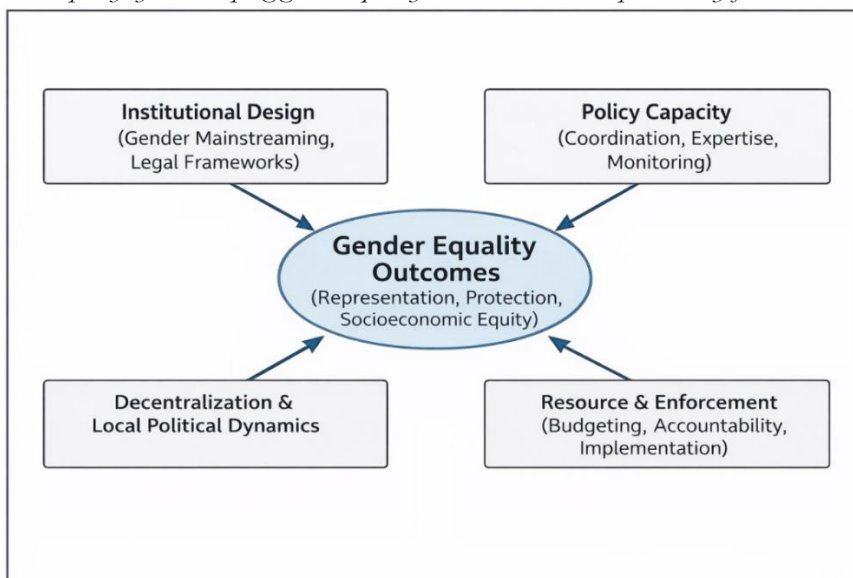
Integrated conceptual framework

Synthesizing these strands, this study conceptualizes gender equality in Indonesia as the outcome of an interconnected public policy system composed of four mutually reinforcing domains. First, institutional design provides the normative foundation through legal frameworks, gender mainstreaming mandates, and electoral quota regulations that articulate the state's formal commitment to equality. Second, decentralized governance mediates how these commitments are translated into practice, as subnational political dynamics, administrative capacity, and local leadership generate regional variation in implementation. Third, policy capacity, encompassing analytical, operational, and political competencies, determines the feasibility, coordination, and sustainability of reforms, shaping whether institutional mandates are coherently executed across sectors and levels of government (Wu et al., 2015). Finally, resource and enforcement alignment ensures that commitments are operationalized through adequate budgeting, effective monitoring systems, and credible legal enforcement mechanisms. Together, these domains illustrate that gender equality in Indonesia emerges not solely from legislative reform but from the alignment and interaction of governance structures across institutional layers.

Figure 1 conceptualizes gender equality in Indonesia as the outcome of an interconnected public policy system rather than as a standalone social objective. It illustrates how institutional design (legal frameworks and gender mainstreaming mandates), decentralization and local political dynamics, policy capacity (coordination, expertise, monitoring), and resource and enforcement mechanisms (budgeting, accountability, implementation) jointly shape equality outcomes in representation, protection, and socioeconomic equity.

Figure 1

Public policy system shaping gender equality in Indonesia, developed directly from the literature review.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in documentary and institutional analysis to examine how Indonesia's public policy system shapes gender equality outcomes. Given that the research question concerns governance structures, institutional arrangements, policy coherence, and implementation dynamics, a qualitative approach is appropriate because it enables in-depth examination of policy content, institutional logic, and administrative processes rather than measuring individual attitudes or behavioral outcomes. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suited to exploring complex policy environments in which meaning, interpretation, and institutional interaction matter as much as formal rules (Patton, 2022; Yin, 2018). From an epistemological perspective, the study adopts an interpretive policy analysis approach that views policy documents as institutional artefacts reflecting governance priorities, political negotiations, and administrative practices. Rather than treating policy texts as neutral records, this perspective recognizes that policies both shape and represent institutional realities. Qualitative document analysis therefore enables deeper understanding of how gender equality is constructed, interpreted, and operationalized within Indonesia's governance system.

Research design

The study employs qualitative document analysis (QDA) as its primary methodological strategy. Document analysis is widely recognized as a rigorous and systematic procedure for reviewing and interpreting policy texts,

official records, legislative documents, institutional reports, and related materials to elicit meaning and generate empirical insight (Bowen, 2009). In public policy research, documentary analysis is especially valuable when examining institutional design, governance reforms, and administrative capacity because official documents both reflect and shape state priorities and implementation structures. This research adopts a policy-system analytical lens, meaning documents are examined not merely for descriptive content but for how they articulate institutional responsibilities, resource allocation mechanisms, coordination structures, accountability provisions, and enforcement procedures. The approach aligns with interpretive policy analysis traditions that view policies as institutional artifacts embedded in broader political and administrative systems (Fischer & Forester, 1993).

Data sources

The study relies exclusively on secondary data, selected through purposive and relevance-based criteria. Data sources include:

- National legislation related to gender equality and protection (e.g., gender mainstreaming directives, electoral quota regulations, Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes).
- National development planning documents (e.g., RPJMN 2020–2024 and associated gender policy frameworks).
- Official reports from ministries, Bappenas, Komnas Perempuan, and Statistics Indonesia (BPS).
- Parliamentary and institutional reports concerning representation and budgeting.
- Policy evaluations and governance analyses from reputable international organizations (e.g., UN Women, World Bank).
- Peer-reviewed academic literature examining Indonesian decentralization, representation, and gender governance.

Documents were selected based on three criteria including, direct relevance to gender equality or governance structures; institutional authority (governmental, parliamentary, or internationally recognized organizations); and temporal relevance (with emphasis on post-Reformasi reforms and especially developments after 2015, including recent legal reforms). This triangulation of legislative, administrative, statistical, and scholarly sources enhances analytical depth and reduces reliance on any single institutional perspective.

Analytical strategy

The analysis follows a thematic and interpretive coding approach informed by qualitative content analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). The coding process was conducted in three stages. First, an open coding phase involved iterative reading of policy documents to identify preliminary themes related to institutional design, decentralization dynamics, policy capacity, and enforcement mechanisms. Second, these initial codes were refined and organized into broader thematic categories aligned with the conceptual framework developed in the literature review, including analytical, operational, and political dimensions of policy capacity as well as resource–enforcement alignment. Third, the coded material was systematically compared across documents to identify patterns of convergence, contradictions, implementation gaps, and structural bottlenecks within Indonesia’s gender governance system.

Rather than treating policy documents as neutral descriptions, the analysis interprets them as institutional artefacts that reflect governance priorities, administrative structures, and accountability mechanisms. Specifically, the analysis examines how gender equality is framed within policy discourse (as a normative commitment or operational obligation), how responsibilities are distributed across institutions and governance levels, whether budgeting and enforcement mechanisms are clearly articulated, and how monitoring and accountability systems are institutionalized. This interpretive strategy enables the study to move beyond descriptive cataloguing toward identifying broader governance dynamics and systemic policy interactions (Kushnir, 2025). The objective is therefore explanatory rather than purely descriptive: to understand how institutional configurations and policy capacities shape gender equality outcomes within a decentralized democratic system.

Trustworthiness and rigor

To ensure methodological rigor, the study applies established qualitative criteria of credibility, dependability, and transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is strengthened through data triangulation across legislative, administrative, statistical, and academic sources. Dependability is supported by systematic coding procedures aligned with the conceptual framework. Transparency is ensured by clearly specifying data sources, selection criteria, and analytical logic. Although the study does not rely on interviews or primary fieldwork, documentary analysis is particularly appropriate for institutional research where formal mandates, fiscal instruments, and legal structures are central objects of inquiry (Bowen, 2009). By systematically examining

authoritative documents and cross-validating findings with peer-reviewed scholarship, the study maintains analytical robustness while avoiding the biases associated with single-source reliance.

Synthesis: Indonesia's gender equality policy architecture and governance challenges

Indonesia's gender equality trajectory reflects a layered and evolving policy architecture in which legal commitments, planning instruments, fiscal mechanisms, and decentralised implementation structures interact (Athallah et al., 2025; Suryahadi et al., 2023). As argued in the conceptual framework (Figure 1), gender equality outcomes depend on the coherence of institutional design, decentralised governance dynamics, policy capacity, and enforcement alignment. This section applies that framework empirically.

Historical institutional layering of gender policy

Indonesia's gender policy architecture has developed incrementally through a process of institutional layering in which successive reforms have added new mandates, instruments, and governance mechanisms without fully replacing earlier structures (Diprose, 2023). As illustrated in Figure 2, the trajectory begins with the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) through Law No. 7/1984, which anchored gender equality within Indonesia's formal legal system and aligned domestic commitments with international human rights obligations (Simangunsong & Situmeang, 2025). This foundational moment established a rights-based normative framework, positioning gender equality as a constitutional and international responsibility of the state. However, as feminist institutionalist scholarship suggests, the adoption of formal legal commitments does not automatically transform institutional practice, particularly when embedded norms and administrative routines remain unchanged (Mackay et al., 2010). The second major layer emerged with Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000, which institutionalised gender mainstreaming across national development processes. This reform marked a shift from rights-based declaration toward administrative integration (Inayatillah et al., 2025). Gender equality was reframed as a cross-cutting development concern to be incorporated into planning, budgeting, and program evaluation across ministries and subnational governments. Yet, consistent with the global literature on mainstreaming (Moser & Moser, 2005; Squires, 2005), the dispersion of responsibility across agencies increased coordination demands and created variability in implementation. Rather than centralising authority, mainstreaming redistributed it, making outcomes contingent upon institutional ownership and technical expertise within each agency.

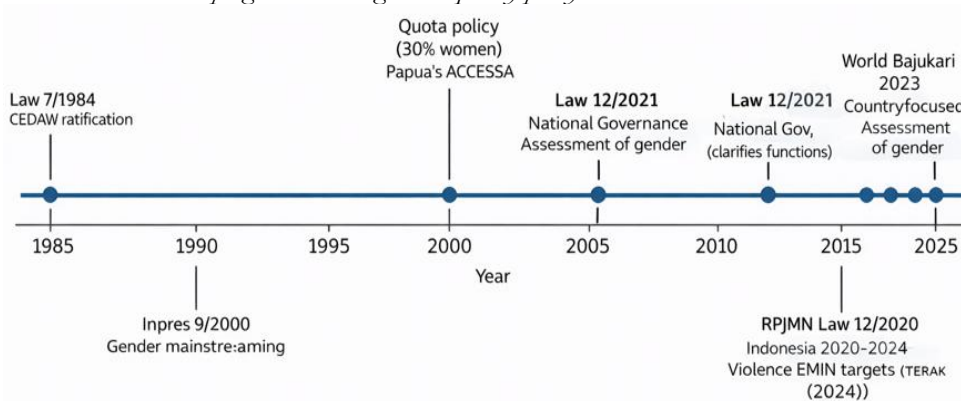
Electoral quota reforms introduced in the early 2000s constituted a third layer of reform by targeting political representation. By requiring political parties to include a minimum proportion of women among legislative candidates, these measures sought to enhance women's descriptive representation in parliament. Empirical studies indicate that quota rules contributed to gradual increases in women's parliamentary presence, though party recruitment practices and electoral competition continue to shape substantive influence (Aspinall et al., 2021; Hillman, 2017). This phase illustrates how institutional reform in the political domain can expand representation while still confronting entrenched party hierarchies and financing structures. The passage of Law No. 23/2014 on Regional Government clarified the distribution of authority between central and subnational governments, reinforcing Indonesia's decentralised governance structure (Hasanudin et al., 2025). While not a gender-specific law, its implications for gender policy are significant. Decentralisation mediates how national mandates are translated into local practice, producing regional variation in administrative capacity, political commitment, and resource allocation (Siburian, 2024). Consequently, equality outcomes increasingly depend on subnational governance quality, a dynamic widely observed in decentralised democracies (Hidayat et al., 2025). More recent reforms signal a move toward managerial institutionalisation. The National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024 embeds gender indicators within performance-based planning frameworks, linking equality goals to measurable development targets (Wulandari, 2025). This shift integrates gender into performance governance, connecting normative commitments with monitoring systems and budgetary processes. Similarly, the enactment of Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS) represents a significant strengthening of the legal framework addressing gender-based violence, expanding criminal definitions and emphasising victim protection mechanisms (Ningrum, 2024). However, the effectiveness of this reform depends on enforcement readiness, inter-agency coordination, and the availability of survivor services, underscoring the distinction between legislative advancement and operational impact.

Moreover, the sequence presented in Figure 2 exemplifies institutional layering. Each reform adds a new governance instrument, legal, political, fiscal, or administrative, while existing institutional norms and capacity constraints persist. As feminist institutionalism argues, new rules coexist with established practices, producing hybrid institutional arrangements in which the depth of internalisation varies across sectors and levels of government (Mackay et al., 2010). Indonesia's formal commitments to gender equality have therefore strengthened considerably over time, yet the degree to which these commitments are embedded in everyday

administrative routines and local governance structures remains uneven. This layered evolution provides the foundation for understanding the coordination and capacity challenges analysed in the subsequent sections.

Figure 2

Selected milestones shaping Indonesia’s gender equality policy architecture



Institutional Architecture of Gender Governance

The institutional architecture of gender governance in Indonesia reflects a gradual but significant shift from rights-based commitment toward integrated governance and performance-oriented policy instruments. The distribution of authority and the evolution of key reforms are summarised in Table 1, which captures the major milestones shaping Indonesia’s gender equality framework across legal, political, planning, and enforcement domains.

Table 1 demonstrates that Indonesia’s gender equality architecture has evolved through cumulative institutional layering, with successive reforms adding new governance dimensions rather than replacing earlier frameworks. The 1984 ratification of CEDAW established a normative human-rights foundation, embedding equality within constitutional and diplomatic commitments but requiring domestic institutional translation to influence planning and administration (Sales & Tavares, 2025). Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000 shifted gender equality into the domain of public administration through gender mainstreaming, redefining it as a cross-ministerial development obligation; however, as Moser and Moser (2005) caution, diffusion without clear incentives, monitoring, and capacity risks procedural rather than transformative outcomes. Electoral quota reforms in the early 2000s strengthened women’s descriptive representation, yet party gatekeeping, financing dynamics, and candidate placement rules continue to constrain substantive impact (Aspinall et al., 2021; Hillman, 2017), illustrating that political inclusion alone does not ensure systemic transformation. The incorporation of gender targets within the RPJMN 2020–2024 marked a shift toward managerial governance, embedding equality within performance indicators and budgeting cycles, though effective implementation depends on analytical and operational policy capacities (Wu et al., 2015). Finally, Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS) introduced a robust enforcement dimension, expanding legal protections while testing inter-agency coordination and operational readiness within Indonesia’s decentralised system. Overall, the architecture is institutionally dense and formally comprehensive, yet consistent with feminist institutionalist insights (Mackay et al., 2010), its translation into substantive equality remains contingent upon incentive structures, institutional coherence, and cross-level capacity alignment.

Table 1

Core milestones in Indonesia’s gender equality policy architecture

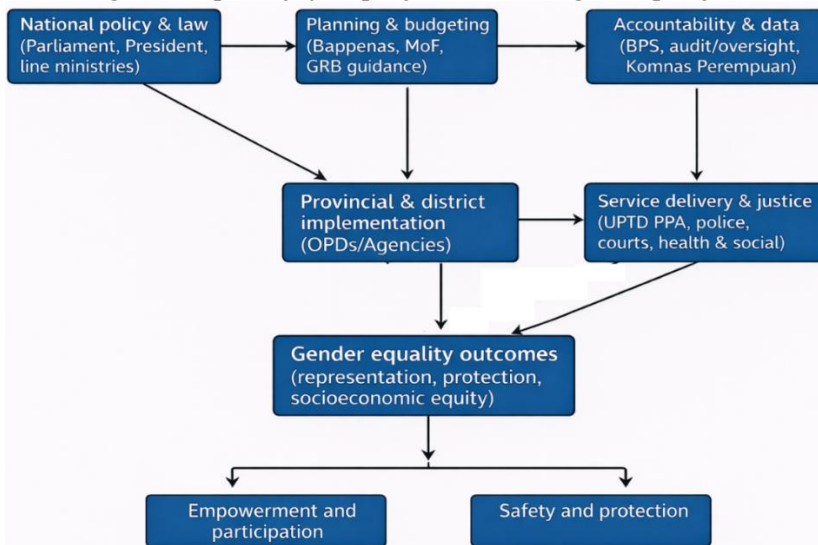
Period	Policy Instrument	Primary Governance Function	Institutional Significance
1984	Law No. 7/1984 (CEDAW Ratification)	Anchors equality in international legal commitments	Establishes rights-based normative baseline and international accountability obligations
2000	Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000 (Gender Mainstreaming)	Integrates gender considerations into national development planning	Diffuses gender responsibility across ministries and levels of government
2003–2019	Electoral quota measures (candidate requirements)	Increase women’s descriptive political representation	Expands access to legislative institutions but remains shaped by party structures
2020–2024	RPJMN 2020–2024 (National Medium-Term Development Plan)	Embeds gender indicators and targets within performance planning	Links equality objectives to measurable development and budgeting frameworks
2022	Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS)	Strengthens legal protection, criminal enforcement, and survivor rights	Tests institutional coordination, enforcement readiness, and service delivery capacity

Multi-level governance pathways

Gender equality policies in Indonesia do not produce outcomes solely through legislative adoption; rather, they move through a series of interconnected governance pathways before translating into tangible social and institutional change. This multi-level process is illustrated in [Figure 3](#), which conceptualises the flow from national policy commitment to local implementation and measurable gender equality outcomes.

Figure 3

Multi-level governance pathways from policy commitment to gender equality outcomes



As shown in [Figure 3](#), Indonesia's gender equality pathway begins at the national policy-design level, where the President, Parliament, and line ministries formulate laws and executive mandates, such as gender mainstreaming regulations, electoral quotas, and Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS), that establish the normative and legal foundation of equality. Implementation authority, however, is dispersed within Indonesia's decentralised governance system, transferring substantial responsibility to provincial and district governments. The second stage involves planning and fiscal translation through Bappenas and the Ministry of Finance, which embed equality priorities into the RPJMN 2020-2024 and gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) frameworks, thereby linking legal commitments to performance indicators and expenditure allocations; without such integration, mandates risk remaining symbolic (Wu et al., 2015). The third stage occurs at the subnational level, where Organisasi Perangkat Daerah operationalise policies within diverse political and administrative contexts. Variation in capacity, elite incentives, and bureaucratic professionalism produces uneven implementation outcomes, with decentralisation acting as a mediating variable between national commitment and local delivery (Aspinall et al., 2021). The fourth stage concerns justice and service-delivery institutions, police, courts, health, and social services, whose coordination and operational readiness determine whether enforcement-based reforms such as TPKS generate substantive protection. Finally, oversight and data institutions, including BPS and Komnas Perempuan, create accountability feedback loops by producing gender-disaggregated data and monitoring violence and representation trends, strengthening evaluative capacity and adaptive governance (Bengan et al., 2025). Overall, the pathway highlights that Indonesia's framework is structurally comprehensive but outcome-contingent, with effective equality dependent on cross-level coordination, fiscal alignment, and institutional capacity.

Institutional roles and policy levers

Indonesia's gender governance system is characterised by institutional density and multi-level distribution of authority. Gender equality is not housed within a single ministry or agency; rather, it is embedded across legislative, executive, planning, fiscal, oversight, and service-delivery institutions. To clarify the distribution of responsibilities and the mechanisms through which policy is operationalised, [Table 2](#) maps the institutional ecosystem shaping gender equality outcomes.

[Table 2](#) reveals that Indonesia's gender equality system is horizontally and vertically dispersed. At the national design level, the Parliament and the President establish the legal and strategic direction of gender governance. Legislative reforms such as the Sexual Violence Crimes Law (Law No. 12/2022) and executive mandates on gender mainstreaming define the normative scope of equality. Line ministries translate these broad mandates into sector-specific strategies (Ningrum, 2024). However, the authority to design policy is

institutionally distinct from the authority to allocate resources or implement programs. The planning and fiscal governance level plays a pivotal intermediary role. Bappenas integrates gender priorities into national development plans, while the Ministry of Finance determines how these priorities are reflected in budget allocations. The incorporation of gender targets into the RPJMN and the development of Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) instruments signal a shift toward performance-oriented governance. This layer determines whether equality commitments are accompanied by measurable indicators and financial backing. Without integration into planning and fiscal systems, legal reforms may lack operational traction. The data and oversight domain provides the analytical backbone of the system. Statistics Indonesia (BPS) produces gender-disaggregated data across socioeconomic sectors, while Komnas Perempuan documents trends in gender-based violence and monitors institutional responses. These institutions strengthen accountability by supplying evidence for policy evaluation. Their work contributes to what policy capacity theory defines as analytical capacity, the ability of the state to generate and use evidence to inform decision-making (Wu et al., 2015). Without reliable data systems, the feedback loop between implementation and reform weakens. Civil society organizations and independent oversight institutions also play an important role in strengthening gender governance. Organizations such as Komnas Perempuan contribute significantly to monitoring gender-based violence, documenting institutional responses, and advocating policy improvements. Through annual reports and collaboration with international organizations and local advocacy groups, these actors provide critical accountability mechanisms that complement formal state institutions. Their involvement highlights the broader governance ecosystem in which gender equality reforms are monitored, contested, and strengthened.

Table 2
Institutional map of gender governance in Indonesia

Governance Level	Key Institutions	Primary Roles in Gender Governance	Core Policy Levers
National Design	Parliament (DPR), President, Coordinating Ministries, Line Ministries (e.g., Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection)	Formulate legal frameworks, national strategies, and sectoral mandates; establish national priorities	Laws, executive instructions, ministerial regulations, national action plans
Planning & Fiscal Governance	Bappenas (National Development Planning Agency), Ministry of Finance	Integrate gender into development planning and fiscal allocation; align equality goals with performance indicators	RPJMN targets, performance-based budgeting, Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) instruments
Data & Oversight	Statistics Indonesia (BPS), Komnas Perempuan, Audit and supervisory bodies	Generate gender-disaggregated statistics; monitor gender-based violence; provide accountability reporting	Statistical publications, CATAHU reports, compliance monitoring tools
Subnational Implementation	Provincial governments, District/City governments (Organisasi Perangkat Daerah)	Translate national mandates into regional plans and programs; manage service delivery at local level	Regional development plans (RPJMD), local regulations, program implementation frameworks
Justice & Service Delivery	Police, Prosecutors, Courts, Health Services, Social Services, UPTD PPA	Enforce legal protections; provide survivor assistance; implement sector-specific equality programs	Case-handling protocols, protection orders, referral systems, service standards

At the subnational level, provincial and district governments assume primary responsibility for implementation. Under Indonesia’s decentralised framework, local governments manage development planning (RPJMD), social services, and community programs. This structure creates opportunities for context-sensitive adaptation but also introduces variation in capacity, resource availability, and political commitment. Regions with stronger bureaucratic competence and gender-sensitive leadership may adopt innovative budgeting or service models, while others may prioritise compliance over substantive reform. Finally, justice and service-delivery institutions operationalise legal protections and programmatic commitments. Police, prosecutors, courts, health facilities, and social services implement the enforcement and protection components of gender governance. In the context of the TPKS law, their effectiveness determines whether expanded legal definitions translate into meaningful survivor protection. Coordination across these actors is essential, particularly in cases of gender-based violence, where multi-sectoral response systems are required. Overall, Indonesia’s institutional ecosystem reflects both strength and complexity. The breadth of actors involved signals mainstreaming success in terms of diffusion; however, it also amplifies the risks of fragmentation and uneven implementation. The effectiveness of gender equality governance therefore hinges not merely on institutional presence but on systemic coherence across this multi-level architecture.

Policy instruments and implementation bottlenecks

While Indonesia has developed a comprehensive set of policy instruments to advance gender equality, the effectiveness of these instruments depends on how they function within the broader governance system. The

presence of legal mandates, planning tools, and fiscal mechanisms does not automatically ensure substantive transformation. To assess functional performance, Table 3 examines the core policy instruments and identifies recurrent implementation bottlenecks observed in policy analyses, institutional assessments, and scholarly research.

Table 3

Gender policy instruments and recurrent implementation bottlenecks

Policy Instrument	Intended Governance Function	Observed Implementation Challenges	Governance and Theoretical Implication
Gender Mainstreaming (Inpres No. 9/2000)	Integrate gender analysis across policy design, planning, budgeting, and evaluation processes	Procedural compliance (“tick-box” reporting); uneven gender expertise across ministries and regions; weak monitoring incentives	Institutional diffusion without clear ownership; inclusion without transformation (Squires, 2005)
Electoral Quotas (Candidate Requirements)	Increase women’s descriptive representation in legislative bodies	Party gatekeeping; placement at lower candidate list positions; campaign financing barriers; limited influence within party hierarchies	Descriptive representation does not guarantee substantive policy influence
Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB)	Align fiscal allocations and performance indicators with gender equality objectives	Budget tagging without outcome linkage; limited gender-disaggregated performance measures; weak integration between planning and finance units	Resource allocation misalignment; operational capacity constraint
Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS)	Expand criminal definitions; strengthen survivor protection; enhance accountability mechanisms	Enforcement readiness gaps; coordination deficits among police, courts, and service providers; uneven service infrastructure across districts	Enforcement capacity constraint; legal reform without operational coherence

Table 3 demonstrates that Indonesia’s gender equality agenda is supported by diverse policy instruments, yet each encounter structural and capacity-related constraints during implementation. Gender mainstreaming, institutionalised through Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000, is intended to embed gender considerations across the policy cycle and normalize equality within routine governance processes. However, consistent with broader assessments of Indonesia’s institutional landscape (Diprose, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2025), mainstreaming often operates as procedural compliance rather than transformative reform. As Squires (2005) and Moser and Moser (2005) argue, the inclusion of gender language does not automatically alter institutional logics, incentives, or resource allocation patterns, particularly where accountability mechanisms and technical expertise remain limited. Electoral quota measures have incrementally improved women’s descriptive representation (Lestari & Kurniawan, 2025), yet party gatekeeping, placement rules, and campaign financing structures continue to mediate substantive influence (Hillman, 2017; Aspinall et al., 2021), reflecting constraints in political policy capacity (Wu et al., 2015). Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) seeks to align equality commitments with fiscal allocations through integration into the RPJMN and national budgeting processes, but Indonesian evaluations indicate that GRB can devolve into budget tagging without outcome-based monitoring when analytical and operational capacities are weak (UN Women, 2016; Sukmawan et al., 2023). Similarly, Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS) marks a significant normative and enforcement-oriented advance (Ningrum, 2024), yet its effectiveness depends on inter-agency coordination, survivor services, and judicial readiness across decentralized jurisdictions (Santoso et al., 2023; Pratama et al., 2025). Across these instruments, recurring bottlenecks cluster around coordination gaps, uneven subnational capacity, fiscal misalignment, and enforcement limitations, reinforcing this study’s central argument that Indonesia’s gender equality challenge lies less in the absence of formal commitments than in governance-system dynamics that shape how those commitments function in practice. For instance, several evaluations of gender mainstreaming implementation reveal misalignment between national planning mandates and subnational administrative capacity. While ministries are formally required to integrate gender analysis into planning processes, local governments often lack trained personnel and technical guidelines to operationalize these mandates. Similarly, gender-responsive budgeting initiatives sometimes function primarily as reporting mechanisms rather than strategic planning tools because coordination between planning agencies and finance units remains limited. These examples illustrate how institutional misalignments between policy design and implementation capacity can weaken the operational impact of otherwise comprehensive policy frameworks.

Governance challenges synthesised

The preceding analysis of institutional evolution, governance pathways, and policy instruments reveals recurring patterns across Indonesia’s gender equality architecture. While the country has developed a relatively comprehensive and layered policy framework, implementation outcomes remain uneven and contingent. To synthesise these findings, **Table 4** aligns the empirical observations with the four domains of the conceptual

framework introduced earlier: institutional design, decentralisation dynamics, policy capacity, and resource-enforcement alignment.

Table 4 underscores that Indonesia's gender equality challenges are systemic rather than episodic, reflecting structural tensions across interconnected governance domains. The first domain, institutional design, captures the gap between formal mandate and operational authority. Indonesia has established robust legal and policy commitments, ranging from gender mainstreaming directives to Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS), yet many instruments rely on coordination and administrative guidance rather than enforceable performance obligations. As feminist institutionalist scholarship argues, formal rule adoption often coexists with entrenched informal norms, limiting transformative change (Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010; Squires, 2005). In Indonesia, this dynamic has produced instances of procedural compliance, where gender language is incorporated into planning documents without substantive shifts in resource allocation or program logic (Diprose, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2025). The second domain, decentralisation dynamics, introduces structured variability into implementation. Post-Reformasi decentralisation grants significant authority to provincial and district governments, enabling contextual adaptation but also generating uneven execution depending on local political will, bureaucratic competence, and fiscal strength (Aspinall et al., 2021; Hasanudin et al., 2025). The third domain, policy capacity, concerns the state's analytical, operational, and political ability to design, coordinate, and evaluate reforms (Wu, Ramesh, & Howlett, 2015). Indonesian evidence suggests that coordination gaps across ministries and subnational governments, alongside limitations in gender-disaggregated data and evaluative feedback systems, weaken adaptive learning and policy coherence (Kasuma & Irianto, 2023; Sukmawan et al., 2023). The fourth domain, resources and enforcement alignment, highlights the dependence of legal and budgeting reforms on implementation readiness. While TPKS represents a major normative advance (Ningrum, 2024), its impact depends on inter-agency coordination, judicial competence, and survivor-service infrastructure (Santoso et al., 2023). Similarly, gender-responsive budgeting requires outcome-based integration into fiscal systems rather than symbolic tagging (Asiedu, 2023). Collectively, these domains reinforce the study's central claim: Indonesia's gender equality agenda is constrained less by the absence of formal commitments than by challenges of systemic alignment across institutions, capacities, and enforcement mechanisms. Gender equality outcomes ultimately depend on the degree to which institutional design, decentralised governance, policy capacity, and resource credibility converge within a coherent democratic governance framework. In addition to institutional structures, political and socio-cultural dynamics also influence policy implementation. Bureaucratic incentives within public administration may prioritize procedural compliance over transformative policy change, particularly when gender mainstreaming is evaluated primarily through reporting requirements. Local political dynamics also shape implementation priorities, as subnational leaders may differ in their commitment to gender equality reforms depending on electoral incentives and political coalitions. Furthermore, socio-cultural norms surrounding gender roles may influence both policy acceptance and administrative behaviour, particularly in regions where traditional gender expectations remain influential.

Table 4

Governance challenges across the policy-system domains

Framework Domain	Empirical Challenge	Manifestation in Practice	Structural Consequence
Institutional Design	Mandates lack enforceable incentives and monitoring mechanisms	Gender mainstreaming embedded in planning documents but weakly linked to performance sanctions; uneven institutional ownership	Symbolic or procedural compliance rather than transformative change
Decentralisation Dynamics	Regional variability in administrative capacity and political commitment	Divergent levels of GRB implementation, protection services, and gender programming across provinces and districts	Uneven equality outcomes by geography
Policy Capacity	Coordination deficits, limited technical expertise, and fragmented responsibilities	Weak inter-ministerial integration; insufficient gender-disaggregated data usage; limited evaluation feedback loops	Reduced policy coherence and adaptive governance capacity
Resources & Enforcement	Misalignment between legal reform and fiscal or operational readiness	Budget tagging without outcome linkage; uneven enforcement of TPKS law; service delivery gaps	Limited substantive impact despite formal reform

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings: Advancing gender equality in a decentralised developing democracy

The analysis of Indonesia's gender policy architecture reveals a paradox common to developing democracies: formal commitments to gender equality have expanded significantly, yet operational outcomes remain uneven and geographically differentiated. This pattern reflects not policy absence but the interaction between

institutional layering, decentralised governance, and uneven policy capacity. Indonesia has ratified CEDAW, institutionalised gender mainstreaming, introduced electoral quotas, embedded gender targets in the RPJMN, and enacted Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS), signalling strong normative commitment (Sales & Tavares, 2025; Inayatillah et al., 2025; Ningrum, 2024). Yet feminist institutionalism reminds us that rule adoption alone does not transform embedded power relations or bureaucratic norms (Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010). As Squires (2005) argues, inclusion of gender language without institutional displacement risks procedural rather than transformative change. Decentralisation further mediates outcomes. Indonesia's post-Reformasi governance structure grants significant discretion to subnational governments, enabling contextual adaptation but also producing variability in implementation quality (Aspinall et al., 2021; Hasanudin et al., 2025). Comparative governance research shows that in decentralised democracies, equality outcomes are shaped by local political incentives, bureaucratic competence, and fiscal capacity (Diprose, 2023). Thus, uneven results reflect heterogeneous governance environments rather than weak national frameworks.

The findings also underscore the importance of policy capacity alignment. Wu, Ramesh, and Howlett (2015) conceptualise capacity across analytical, operational, and political dimensions. Indonesia's system demonstrates high institutional density but inconsistent integration: gender-disaggregated data systems and monitoring mechanisms remain uneven (Kasuma & Irianto, 2023), coordination gaps persist across ministries and local governments (Sukmawan et al., 2023), and sustained political commitment fluctuates across electoral cycles (Lestari & Kurniawan, 2025). By integrating feminist institutionalism with policy capacity theory, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that these capacity gaps are not merely technical deficiencies but are embedded within institutional structures and power relations, offering a more comprehensive explanation than single-theory approaches. Finally, enforcement credibility and fiscal integration determine whether policy ambition translates into lived equality. Evidence on gender-responsive budgeting and TPKS implementation suggests that legal reform must be matched by resource allocation, trained personnel, and cross-sector coordination to achieve substantive impact (UN Women, 2016; Santoso et al., 2023). Importantly, this study extends existing scholarship on Indonesia and other developing democracies by providing an integrated analytical framework that links institutional design, decentralisation, and policy capacity within a unified explanation of gender equality outcomes. Overall, gender equality functions as a diagnostic lens for governance quality. Advancing equality in Indonesia requires not additional legislation alone, but systemic alignment across institutional design, decentralised mediation, policy capacity, and enforcement credibility, highlighting the central role of governance coherence in translating democratic commitments into equitable outcomes.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to three interrelated theoretical conversations. First, it extends feminist institutionalism within decentralised governance contexts. Feminist institutionalism emphasises the interaction between formal rules and informal norms in shaping gendered power relations (Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010; Waylen, 2014). Building on this foundation, the present study demonstrates that in decentralised administrative systems, institutional layering produces differentiated internalisation across governance levels. In Indonesia, gender mainstreaming mandates diffuse responsibility across ministries and subnational governments, yet ownership, incentives, and enforcement capacity vary considerably (Diprose, 2023; Hasanudin et al., 2025). This suggests that feminist institutionalism should engage more explicitly with vertical governance fragmentation and intergovernmental dynamics in decentralised democracies, where rule adoption does not guarantee uniform institutional transformation. Second, the study foregrounds policy capacity theory as a mediating mechanism linking formal commitments to substantive equality outcomes. While gender governance research frequently centres on rights, representation, or normative frameworks, this analysis highlights the importance of analytical, operational, and political capacities in sustaining reform trajectories (Wu, Ramesh, & Howlett, 2015). Equality outcomes depend on gender-disaggregated data systems, inter-agency coordination, fiscal alignment, and sustained political support (Sukmawan et al., 2023; Kasuma & Irianto, 2023). By reframing gender equality as a capacity-dependent governance outcome, the study bridges feminist scholarship and public policy theory, positioning equality as a test case of systemic policy coherence rather than solely a normative aspiration. Third, the Indonesian case refines debates on decentralisation and equality. Comparative governance scholarship shows that decentralisation can both enable local innovation and entrench regional disparities, depending on institutional strength and political incentives (Aspinall et al., 2021; Faguet, 2014). The findings here demonstrate that decentralisation amplifies existing administrative and fiscal asymmetries, rendering gender equality spatially contingent. High institutional density at the national level, laws, plans, and mandates, can coexist with uneven local implementation, reinforcing the importance of multi-level alignment. Collectively, the study advances a policy-system perspective on gender equality in developing democracies. It argues that reforms achieve durable impact when institutional design, decentralised governance, policy capacity, and enforcement credibility converge within a coherent governance architecture. The integration of feminist institutionalism with policy capacity

theory provides a complementary analytical lens for understanding gender equality governance in decentralized democratic contexts. Feminist institutionalism highlights how gendered norms and power relations shape the functioning of formal institutions, while policy capacity theory explains how institutional competencies influence the effectiveness of policy implementation. Together, these perspectives reveal that gender equality outcomes depend not only on the adoption of formal reforms but also on the capacity of governance systems to translate normative commitments into coordinated administrative action.

Practical and policy implications

The findings generate several actionable implications for policymakers and governance institutions. First, gender mainstreaming mechanisms should move from procedural compliance toward enforceable performance integration. Linking mainstreaming requirements to measurable budgetary and evaluation criteria would strengthen ownership across ministries and subnational governments. For instance, embedding gender-specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within ministerial and regional performance contracts, tied to funding allocations or incentive structures, could ensure stronger compliance and accountability. Second, capacity-building initiatives must prioritise subnational administrative systems. Given the centrality of decentralisation, targeted investment in local planning expertise, gender-responsive budgeting skills, and service coordination mechanisms is essential. National frameworks alone cannot equalise outcomes without strengthening local implementation capacity. In practice, this could involve the establishment of regional gender policy support units, continuous professional training programmes for local officials, and technical assistance partnerships between national ministries and subnational governments.

Third, gender-responsive budgeting should shift from input-based tagging to outcome-based accountability. Integrating gender-disaggregated performance indicators into fiscal reporting systems would improve resource alignment and transparency. Adopting digital public financial management systems that track gender-related expenditures and outcomes in real time could further enhance transparency and enable evidence-based policy adjustments. Fourth, enforcement of the Sexual Violence Crimes Law requires institutional readiness beyond legislative reform. This includes coordinated training across police, judiciary, health, and social services; adequate funding for survivor support infrastructure; and monitoring mechanisms to ensure consistent application across regions. Establishing specialised multi-agency task forces at provincial and district levels, along with standardised service delivery protocols, could improve coordination and ensure more consistent enforcement outcomes.

Finally, strengthening data systems and feedback loops remains crucial. Expanding gender-disaggregated data usage in policy evaluation and integrating oversight findings into planning cycles would enhance adaptive governance capacity. The development of integrated national, local data platforms and regular public reporting mechanisms could strengthen transparency, facilitate cross-regional learning, and support continuous policy improvement. In practical terms, several institutional reforms could strengthen gender equality governance. These include establishing clearer inter-ministerial coordination platforms for gender mainstreaming, integrating gender-responsive indicators into national and regional performance evaluation systems, strengthening monitoring mechanisms within gender-responsive budgeting frameworks, and expanding training programs for local administrators responsible for gender policy implementation. Additionally, formalising coordination between central oversight bodies and local governments through performance-based agreements and accountability audits could further reinforce implementation consistency. Such targeted reforms would enhance institutional coherence and improve the operational effectiveness of existing policy instruments.

Limitations and future research

Along with several strengths, some limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study relies on qualitative document analysis and secondary data sources. While this approach is appropriate for examining institutional architecture and governance structures, it does not directly measure citizen-level perceptions, behavioural outcomes, or service-user experiences. Future research could complement this analysis with subnational case studies or mixed-method investigations to explore how policy design translates into lived experiences of equality. Second, the study adopts a national-level analytical framework. Although decentralisation variability is discussed, more granular comparative research across provinces and districts would deepen understanding of how local political economies mediate gender policy outcomes. Comparative regional analysis within Indonesia could illuminate patterns of best practice and structural constraint. Third, the focus on institutional coherence leaves scope for further exploration of informal norms and socio-cultural dynamics that influence gender governance. Feminist institutionalism emphasises the interaction between formal rules and informal power relations; future studies could empirically examine how informal practices shape mainstreaming effectiveness or enforcement credibility. Finally, longitudinal evaluation of the Sexual Violence Crimes Law and gender-responsive budgeting reforms will be necessary to assess their long-term impact. As these reforms mature, empirical assessment of

enforcement consistency, fiscal integration, and outcome measurement will provide stronger evidence of systemic transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the advancement of gender equality in Indonesia through a policy-system lens, arguing that equality outcomes depend less on the presence of legal commitments than on the coherence of governance structures across institutional layers. Indonesia has constructed a dense normative and procedural framework, anchored in CEDAW ratification, gender mainstreaming directives, electoral quota measures, integration of gender targets within national development planning, and the enactment of Law No. 12/2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS), demonstrating sustained formal commitment (Sales & Tavares, 2025; Inayatillah et al., 2025; Ningrum, 2024). Yet consistent with institutional theory, formal rule adoption does not automatically produce substantive transformation when embedded norms, incentives, and administrative routines remain only partially aligned (Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010). The findings show that gender equality outcomes hinge on alignment across four interdependent domains: institutional design, decentralised governance dynamics, policy capacity, and resource–enforcement credibility. Decentralisation plays a pivotal mediating role. While it creates space for contextual adaptation and innovation, it also amplifies disparities in bureaucratic competence and fiscal strength across regions, rendering equality outcomes geographically contingent (Aspinall et al., 2021; Faguet, 2014). This reinforces a broader governance principle: in developing democracies, decentralisation redistributes both opportunity and implementation risk. Policy capacity further conditions reform sustainability. As Wu, Ramesh, and Howlett (2015) argue, analytical (data and evaluation), operational (coordination and management), and political (leadership and legitimacy) capacities must align for policy systems to function coherently. Where any dimension is weak, institutional density coexists with uneven impact. Legal mandates and fiscal instruments, including gender-responsive budgeting and TPKS, generate durable outcomes only when supported by institutional readiness, inter-agency coordination, and credible enforcement mechanisms. In sum, Indonesia's experience positions gender equality as an indicator of governance quality. Progress depends not on incremental policy expansion alone, but on systemic coherence across governance layers. For Indonesia and comparable developing democracies, advancing gender equality requires strengthening alignment between institutional design, decentralised implementation, policy capacity, and enforcement credibility, transforming formal commitment into operational reality. The Indonesian experience also offers insights for other developing democracies seeking to institutionalize gender equality reforms. Many emerging democratic systems adopt progressive gender legislation and policy frameworks, yet face challenges related to implementation capacity, inter-institutional coordination, and enforcement credibility. The policy-system perspective developed in this study suggests that durable gender equality outcomes depend on the alignment of institutional design, administrative capacity, and accountability mechanisms across governance levels. As such, strengthening policy capacity and institutional coordination may be as critical as adopting new legal reforms in advancing gender equality in comparable democratic contexts.

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Ethical statement

This study employed qualitative document analysis of publicly accessible materials, including national legislation, government institutional reports, national development plans, and peer-reviewed scholarly literature. No human participants, personal data, biological samples, or identifiable private information were involved at any stage of the research. Accordingly, formal ethical approval from an institutional review board or ethics committee was not required. The research was conducted in accordance with applicable academic integrity standards and the ethical guidelines of the relevant disciplinary community.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests. No financial, personal, or professional relationships exist that could have inappropriately influenced, or be perceived to influence, the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this research.

Author contributions

Author contributions are reported using the CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) framework. Kartivi: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing. Romi Saputra: Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing. Andi Pitono: Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – review and editing. Meliasta Hapri Tarigan: Data curation, Investigation, Writing – review and editing. All authors have read, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Data availability

This study is based exclusively on publicly available documentary sources, including Indonesian national legislation, government and institutional reports, national development planning documents, and peer-reviewed academic literature. No original primary datasets were generated or analysed during this study. All sources are fully cited in the reference list and are accessible through their respective official repositories.

AI disclosure

The authors confirm that no artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools or large language models were used at any stage of this research, including data collection, document analysis, interpretation of findings, or the drafting and revision of this manuscript. All intellectual contributions — including the conceptual framework, analytical reasoning, and written content — are solely the work of the named authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity of the research and its presentation.

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