

## The Development of Minangkabau Women's Electability in the Indonesian House of Representatives: An Analysis of the 2019 Legislative Election Turning Point

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### ABSTRACT

The electability of Minangkabau women in the House of Representatives has shown inconsistent development since the beginning of the post-reform democratic period, despite women holding an important role in the Minangkabau matrilineal cultural structure. Historically, West Sumatra has been among the provinces with the lowest levels of female representation in the House of Representatives. From the 1999 to 2014 general elections, no more than one woman was elected in any single term, and in some election periods no woman managed to gain a seat in parliament. However, the 2019 legislative elections marked the most significant change in two decades: three Minangkabau women won seats simultaneously, the highest number recorded since the reform era. This research aims to trace the historical development of Minangkabau women's electability from 1999 to 2019 and to analyse the key factors that enabled their electoral breakthrough in the 2019 legislative elections. Using a literature-based qualitative approach, this article traces the development of Minangkabau women's electability across this period and examines the factors that enabled the breakthrough in 2019. The findings show that the increase in the success of female candidates in 2019 was primarily driven by access to political capital — such as elite networks and party support — and strong social capital resources associated with community legitimacy and family reputation. This research concludes that matrilineal status does not necessarily translate into electoral gains for women, and that sustainable political representation relies heavily on structural, partisan, and resource-based dynamics.

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### INTRODUCTION

The representation of women's electability has been a major concern in comparative democracy studies, particularly in post-authoritarian contexts where formal institutional reforms coexist with deep-rooted gender hierarchies. In Indonesia, the implementation of a 30 percent gender quota for legislative candidates since the 2004 elections marks a significant normative commitment to women's political inclusion. However, empirical evidence consistently shows that an increase in the number of female candidates has not translated proportionally into electoral success, particularly in the country's open-list proportional representation system, which emphasises individual vote competition and candidate-centred campaigns (Aspinall, 2014; Sandra Amalia et al., 2021).

This disparity is especially evident in West Sumatra, a province dominated by the Minangkabau people, who constitute one of the largest matrilineal communities in the world. In Minangkabau custom, women occupy a highly respected symbolic and social position as guardians of lineage, property, and moral authority, generally represented through the concept of *bundo kanduang*. From a cultural perspective, such a matrilineal structure is often considered to provide a favourable environment for women's leadership and public participation (Brulé & Gaikwad, 2021; Kaaria et al., 2016; Robinson & Gottlieb, 2021; Sibale & Fischer, 2024). However, election results in West Sumatra suggest the contrary. Since the 2004 elections, female representation from the province in the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) has remained low, placing West Sumatra among the provinces with the lowest levels of female legislative representation.

Between the 1999 and 2014 legislative elections, no more than one Minangkabau woman was elected to the House of Representatives in each election cycle, and in the 2004 election no woman managed to secure a seat at all. This prolonged stagnation highlights a fundamental paradox: the high cultural status of women in Minangkabau society has not translated into sustained electoral success in formal political institutions (Jamilah & Ananda, 2024; Miswardi et al., 2024; Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022; Yunarti et al., 2025). Existing studies indicate that this paradox is shaped by the combination of matrilineal customs with patriarchal political practices reinforced by religious authority, party hierarchies, and patronage-based electoral competition. As a result, political power in West Sumatra remains largely mediated through male-dominated networks, despite women holding a prominent symbolic role in social life (Rinaldo, 2013).

Against this background, the 2019 legislative elections marked an unprecedented development. For the first time since the democratic transition, three Minangkabau women were simultaneously elected as members of the Indonesian House of Representatives. These results represent the highest female electoral success rate from West Sumatra in the post-reform era and stand in stark contrast to the pattern observed over the preceding two decades (Soetjipto, n.d.). Scholars in gender and electoral studies argue that women's electoral success is shaped less by cultural symbolism than by access to political capital — such as elite networks, party support, campaign resources, and dynastic connections — and social capital rooted in community legitimacy and family reputation. In Indonesia's candidate-centred electoral system, these forms of capital are often decisive, particularly in competitive constituencies where party labels alone provide limited electoral advantage. The success of female candidates in 2019 therefore raises important questions about the relative weight of structural, institutional, and resource-based factors in enabling women to overcome long-standing barriers to electoral progress (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995).

This research draws on theories of women's political representation and electoral success to explain the uneven progress of Minangkabau women in Indonesia's national legislature. This framework emphasises the interaction between electoral institutions, political capital, and social capital in shaping women's prospects for electoral success, rather than assuming a linear relationship between cultural status and political outcomes. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of why matrilineal social structures do not always translate into sustained parliamentary representation, and why the 2019 legislative elections may represent a critical juncture in this trajectory. This article aims to trace the development of Minangkabau women's electoral performance in the Indonesian Parliament from 1999 to 2019 and to analyse the conditions that resulted in the breakthrough in 2019. Using a qualitative approach based on

literature and secondary data, the study examines long-term trends in women's electoral performance and situates the 2019 election within a broader debate about gender, political capital, and local cultural contexts.

The benefits of this research are twofold. Theoretically, this study contributes to the existing literature on gender and political representation by providing empirical evidence from a unique matrilineal context that challenges the assumption of a direct relationship between cultural status and electoral success. It also enriches the application of political capital and social capital frameworks (Bourdieu, 1986; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995) in understanding women's electoral competitiveness in candidate-centred electoral systems. Practically, this research offers insights for political parties, women candidates, and policymakers in West Sumatra and similar regions regarding the structural and resource-based factors that enable women to overcome long-standing electoral barriers. The findings can inform strategies for strengthening women's political capital, including party support, elite networking, and campaign resource mobilisation, as well as the leveraging of community-based social capital. Furthermore, this study provides a historical baseline for evaluating whether future elections will sustain or reverse the breakthrough observed in 2019, thereby supporting evidence-based advocacy for sustainable women's political representation.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a literature-based qualitative research design drawing on secondary data to examine the electoral progress of Minangkabau women in the Indonesian Parliament and to assess the significance of the 2019 legislative election as a potential turning point. The qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this research as it allows for an in-depth analysis of historical electoral trends, institutional dynamics, and theoretical debates about gender and political representation without relying on primary fieldwork or interviews. This study adopts a historical-interpretive approach, tracing the electoral outcomes of women from West Sumatra across various election cycles between 1999 and 2019. Rather than statistically measuring cause-and-effect relationships, this study focuses on identifying patterns, shifts, and continuities in women's parliamentary representation and situates these developments within a broader theoretical framework of political and social capital. This design allows the article to analyse the 2019 general election within a longer temporal trajectory, which is critical to evaluating whether the election represented a substantive turning point or a chance electoral outcome.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic literature review using several academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and JSTOR, as well as institutional repositories from Indonesian universities. Keywords used in the literature search included "Minangkabau women," "electability," "legislative elections," "political capital," "social capital," "gender quota," and "West Sumatra representation." The search period covered publications from 1999 to 2024. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the research topic, credibility, and contribution to understanding women's electoral representation in West Sumatra. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and historical narrative methods. The analysis proceeded through several stages. First, electoral data from 1999 to 2019 were compiled and arranged chronologically to identify long-term trends in women's parliamentary representation from West Sumatra. Second, the collected literature was reviewed and synthesised to identify key factors influencing women's electoral success, including political

capital — such as party support, elite networks, and campaign resources — and social capital — such as community legitimacy, family reputation, and religious networks. Third, the 2019 election results were examined in relation to previous election cycles to assess whether the increase in women's electability represented a structural shift or a temporary anomaly. Finally, the findings were interpreted using theoretical frameworks on capital, political recruitment, and feminist institutionalism to explain the dynamics of women's electoral progress.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Studies of women's political representation have long distinguished between descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation (Pitkin, 1967). While descriptive representation focuses on the numerical presence of women in political institutions, feminist scholars argue that descriptive enhancement is not automatic or culturally determined, but rather depends on institutional and political contexts (Phillips, 1995; Krook, 2010). In many democracies, including Indonesia, formal commitments to gender inclusion — such as gender quotas — have expanded women's access to candidacy without guaranteeing electoral success. In Indonesia's open-list proportional representation system, candidates compete not only between parties but also within party lists, which increases the importance of individual-level resources. As a result, women's representation relies less on cultural norms or symbolic status and more on their ability to mobilise support through networking, visibility, and material resources. This institutional configuration is particularly important for provinces such as West Sumatra, where women's symbolic authority in customary structures does not directly translate into influence in party organisations or electoral machinery (Aspinall, 2014).

To explain the variation in women's electoral outcomes, this article adopts the concept of political capital, understood as the accumulation of resources that enables political actors to compete effectively in the formal political arena. According to Bourdieu's (1986) framework of capital, political capital includes access to party support, elite networks, organisational experience, name recognition, and campaign funding. Norris and Lovenduski (1995) emphasise that the political recruitment process is structured by supply and demand, in which women's success depends not only on their willingness to stand, but also on party gatekeepers' perceptions of their electability. In Indonesia, political capital is often strengthened through informal patronage networks, dynastic ties, and incumbency advantages (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016). Female candidates who lack access to these resources face structural disadvantages, regardless of cultural legitimacy or professional credentials. Conversely, women who possess strong political capital — whether through party leadership positions, family political ties, or prior electoral experience — are better positioned to overcome gender-based barriers in competitive constituencies. This framework is critical to understanding why only a small number of Minangkabau women were able to secure parliamentary seats before 2019, and why those elected in 2019 followed different political trajectories.

In addition to political capital, social capital plays an important role in shaping women's electoral prospects. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a resource embedded in social relationships, while Putnam (1993) highlights its role in fostering trust and collective action. In the electoral context, social capital is realised through community recognition, religious networks, professional associations, and family reputation. For female candidates, social capital often operates in a gendered manner. Although women may face exclusion from male-dominated political networks, they can simultaneously benefit from strong community ties and moral legitimacy rooted in family roles, religious involvement, or social activism. In

Minangkabau society, kinship networks and lineage-based authority remain influential at the local level, even when formal political institutions operate according to the logic of the national party system. However, social capital alone is insufficient unless it can be converted into electoral support through campaign organisation and party backing (Kittilson, 2011).

The electoral success achieved by Minangkabau women in 2019 suggests a convergence between social capital and political capital, in which candidates were able to translate community legitimacy into vote mobilisation within the constraints of the Indonesian electoral system. This intersection provides a useful analytical lens for assessing whether the 2019 election represents a structural shift or an alignment of favourable conditions. Feminist anthropological studies caution against equating the matrilineal system with gender equality in political power. Although matrilineality can confer authority upon women in the domestic and customary spheres, formal political power often remains embedded in patriarchal state institutions. In the case of the Minangkabau, scholars have shown that modern custom, Islam, and politics coexist in ways that frequently limit women's access to leadership in the formal political arena (Rinaldo, 2013).

From Indonesia's first post-reform general election in 1999 to the 2014 legislative election, the electoral performance of female candidates from West Sumatra remained consistently weak. Across these five election cycles, the number of women elected to the House of Representatives from the province never exceeded one per election. In the 2004 election, no woman from West Sumatra managed to secure a parliamentary seat, despite the introduction of gender quota regulations in the nomination process. This persistent underrepresentation suggests that formal institutional reforms — particularly the requirement for political parties to include at least 30 percent women on their candidate lists — are insufficient to meaningfully change electoral outcomes. Consistent with findings from previous studies, open-list proportional representation systems encourage individual vote-seeking behaviour and intensify intra-party competition, a condition that disproportionately disadvantages female candidates who lack access to powerful political and financial resources (Aspinall, 2014; Sandra Amalia et al., 2021).

From the first post-authoritarian general election in 1999 to the 2014 legislative elections, women's electoral representation from West Sumatra remained consistently low. Across these election cycles, the number of women elected to the House of Representatives from the province never exceeded one per election cycle, and in the 2004 election no women were elected at all. This prolonged stagnation occurred despite the formal adoption of gender quota regulations at the national level, reinforcing the argument that quota-based inclusion at the nomination stage does not result in genuine electoral competitiveness. The open-list proportional representation system, combined with high campaign costs and reliance on patronage networks, systematically disadvantages female candidates who lack strong political capital (Aspinall, 2014; Sandra Amalia et al., 2021).

**Table 1. Development of the Electability of Female Members of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia from West Sumatra**

No.	Election Year	Number of Candidates Who Qualified for the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia	Names of Members of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia
1	1999	1	Aisyah Amini (PPP)
2	2004	-	-
3	2009	1	Yulmiar Yandri (Democrat)
4	2014	1	Betti Shadiq Pasadigoe (Golkar)
5	2019	3	Athari Gauthi Ardi (PAN) Neti Zuairina (PKS) Lisda Hendrajoni (Nasdem)

Source: General Elections Commission (KPU) of the Republic of Indonesia, official election results for the years 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019 (compiled from KPU archives and verified through multiple sources).

This stagnation occurs within a socio-cultural context that is often considered to favour women. Despite the matrilineal structure of Minangkabau society and the symbolic authority conferred upon women in customary institutions, these cultural attributes did not translate into sustained electoral success. This reinforces existing studies arguing that matrilineality alone is insufficient to dismantle the patriarchal political practices embedded in modern party systems and electoral institutions (Rinaldo, 2013). The representation of women from West Sumatra has not shown cumulative progress over time. The electoral success of individual women has not generated momentum in subsequent elections, nor has it changed party recruitment practices on an ongoing basis. This pattern suggests that women's representation remains individual rather than institutional. These findings are consistent with feminist institutionalist studies emphasising that descriptive improvement without organisational learning tends to be fragile and reversible (Mackay et al., 2010). Prior to 2019, women's electoral presence in West Sumatra remained exceptional rather than the norm.

### **Gradual Change Without Structural Breakthroughs**

Although there were small fluctuations throughout the election cycles — particularly the election of a single woman in any given period — these results did not represent a structural change. Rather, they reflect individual-level success driven by exceptional candidates rather than broader transformations in party recruitment practices or voter behaviour. The presence of women in the House of Representatives from West Sumatra remains episodic and fragile, lacking continuity across election periods. The absence of cumulative progress suggests that women's electoral advancement before 2019 was constrained by stable structural barriers. These barriers — including male-dominated party leadership, reliance on patronage networks, high campaign costs, and limited access to strategic party list positions — have been consistently identified as obstacles to women's electoral success in Indonesia (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995).

The 2019 legislative election marked a significant departure from the previous pattern. For the first time since the democratic transition, three Minangkabau women were simultaneously elected to the House of Representatives. These results not only represent an increase in numbers but also a qualitative shift in women's electoral standing in the political

landscape of West Sumatra. The significance of this increase becomes clearer when viewed against historical trends. Rather than a marginal increase, the 2019 results disrupted a pattern of underrepresentation spanning at least two decades, signalling a breakthrough from entrenched electoral stagnation. The concentration of women's electoral success within a single election cycle suggests that enabling conditions existed in 2019 that had not previously been present or sufficiently developed. The 2019 breakthrough cannot be attributed solely to changes in formal electoral rules, most of which remained consistent with those of previous elections. Rather, secondary literature and electoral analysis suggest that successful female candidates possessed relatively strong political capital — including established party affiliations, elite networks, and campaign resources — in addition to significant social capital rooted in community recognition and family legitimacy. This convergence of resources enabled female candidates to compete more effectively in a candidate-centred electoral system. Importantly, their success does not reflect a broad transformation in gender norms among voters, but rather the ability of certain candidates to navigate and leverage existing political structures. These findings support the theoretical argument that women's electoral progress depends on strategic access to political and social capital, rather than cultural symbolism alone.

The 2019 legislative elections marked a significant change from the previous pattern. For the first time since the democratic transition, three Minangkabau women were simultaneously elected to the House of Representatives. This result represents the highest level of female representation from West Sumatra in the post-reform era. Although the 2019 election represented a clear departure from historical trends, its long-term significance remains contingent on whether similar results will be sustained in subsequent elections. From an analytical perspective, the 2019 election results can be regarded as a critical juncture, as they temporarily disrupted the established pattern of women's representation. However, whether this juncture leads to path-dependent change or regression depends on institutional learning within political parties and the continued accumulation of political capital by female candidates. The 2019 election results must therefore be understood as a conditional turning point — a moment of opportunity rather than a definitive transformation. This interpretation is consistent with the feminist institutionalist perspective, which emphasises both the potential and the fragility of gender-based institutional change.

### **Revisiting the Role of Matrilineal Culture**

One of the main contributions of this study is its challenge to deterministic cultural assumptions about matrilineal society and women's political representation. Although Minangkabau women occupy prominent symbolic and social positions in customary institutions, these findings reaffirm that cultural status alone does not confer electoral advantage. This supports the work of feminist anthropologists who have shown that matrilineality and political power are analytically distinct, particularly in modern state institutions governed by patriarchal norms and formal party structures. The prolonged stagnation in women's electoral outcomes between 1999 and 2014 suggests that matrilineal norms function primarily within the social and customary sphere, offering limited influence in electoral competition. Rather than facilitating political inclusion, cultural narratives about women's moral authority may coexist with an expectation that formal leadership remains the domain of men. The 2019 breakthrough cannot therefore be interpreted as evidence of a cultural shift; rather, it highlights the limitations of cultural frameworks as explanatory tools when isolated from institutional and political variables.

This reinforces the existing feminist position that cautions against assuming a direct relationship between the matrilineal social system and women's political empowerment. Although Minangkabau society grants women a central symbolic role in customary institutions, this cultural status operates more within the social and familial realm than in the formal political arena. Anthropological studies of Minangkabau society demonstrate that matrilineality coexists with patriarchal political practices, particularly in state institutions and party politics. The underrepresentation of women from West Sumatra prior to 2019 underscores the limitations of cultural framework explanations when divorced from institutional analysis. Matrilineal norms appear to coexist with political arrangements that continue to prioritise male leadership and elite control, rather than facilitating women's electoral advancement. These findings are consistent with broader studies of gender and politics in Indonesia, which emphasise the enduring influence of patriarchal norms in formal political institutions despite cultural diversity in gender arrangements (Rinaldo, 2013).

These findings strongly support a theoretical argument emphasising the centrality of political capital in shaping women's electoral success. Consistent with the recruitment model of Norris and Lovenduski (1995) and Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital, the women elected in 2019 possessed resources that enabled them to compete effectively in Indonesia's candidate-centred electoral system. These resources include access to party leadership, elite networks, organisational experience, and campaign funding. In the context of open-list proportional representation, where intra-party competition is intense, political capital serves as an important mechanism for addressing structural gender bias. The concentration of women's electoral success in 2019 demonstrates that when political capital reaches a certain threshold, female candidates can disrupt entrenched patterns of exclusion, even in provinces with historically low levels of representation. These findings are consistent with broader studies of Indonesian electoral politics, which underscore the importance of personal networks and resource mobilisation over ideological or programmatic appeal (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016).

This study further supports the theoretical argument that political capital is a determining factor in women's electoral success. In Indonesia's open-list proportional representation system, electoral competition is highly individualistic, with candidates prioritising access to party support, elite networks, and campaign resources. As Norris and Lovenduski (1995) argue, political recruitment and selection are shaped by supply-side and demand-side dynamics, with party gatekeepers playing an important role in determining candidate viability. The concentration of women's electoral success in 2019 suggests that successful Minangkabau female candidates were those able to accumulate sufficient political capital to compete effectively within this system. This interpretation is consistent with studies of Indonesian electoral politics that highlight the centrality of patronage networks, personal resources, and organisational positions in determining electoral outcomes (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016; Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

Although political capital is necessary, these findings also highlight the complementary role of social capital in enabling women's electoral progress. Community recognition, family reputation, and moral legitimacy — often rooted in local social and religious networks — provide female candidates with an initial foundation of trust and visibility. However, as Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993) argue, social capital alone does not guarantee electoral success. The 2019 elections illustrate how social capital becomes electorally meaningful only when effectively converted into vote mobilisation through party structures and campaign organisation. This process of conversion underscores the gendered nature of political networks:

women may possess strong social ties, but without access to formal political machinery, these ties remain politically underutilised. Successful candidates in 2019 were those able to bridge informal community networks with formal political institutions.

In addition to political capital, social capital plays an important role in women's electoral progress. Community recognition, family reputation, and social trust confer legitimacy and visibility upon female candidates within their constituencies. However, as Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993) theorised, social capital does not automatically translate into political power. The 2019 election demonstrates that social capital becomes electorally meaningful only when mobilised through formal political channels. Female candidates who are able to connect community-based legitimacy with party infrastructure and campaign organisation are more likely to convert social trust into votes. These findings highlight the gendered nature of political networks: although women may possess strong social ties, these ties must be strategically integrated into the electoral machinery to overcome institutional barriers (Daby, 2021; Di Meco, 2017; Mahsun et al., 2021).

This study characterises the 2019 legislative election as a conditional turning point rather than a definitive transformation. From the perspective of historical institutionalism, these elections reflect a temporary disruption of established patterns without evidence of sustained change in the underlying political structure. The absence of major institutional reforms between elections suggests that such breakthroughs are not structurally guaranteed but depend on the strategic positioning of individual candidates. This interpretation is consistent with feminist institutionalist studies that emphasise the fragility of gender-based institutional change (Mackay et al., 2010). Without sustained efforts to expand women's access to political capital and reform party recruitment practices, the gains observed in 2019 may remain exceptional rather than cumulative. The turning point therefore reflects an expansion of opportunity rather than a structural transformation.

Based on the trajectory of elections since 1999, the 2019 legislative election represents a temporary shift in the pattern of women's political representation, unaccompanied by permanent structural transformation. The absence of significant institutional reform between elections suggests that the observed breakthrough depended on a specific configuration of political and social resources, rather than on a fundamental realignment of electoral dynamics. The 2019 election is therefore best understood as a conditional turning point — a moment in which long-standing obstacles temporarily weakened, thereby creating space for women's electoral progress. Whether this moment will lead to sustainable change depends on the extent to which political parties internalise the lessons of 2019 and expand women's access to political capital in future elections.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article traces the electoral progress of Minangkabau women in the Indonesian Parliament by examining long-term electoral trends and analysing the significance of the 2019 legislative elections as a potential turning point. By situating the 2019 results within a historical trajectory spanning two decades, the study demonstrates that women's parliamentary representation from West Sumatra was marked by persistent stagnation prior to 2019, followed by an unprecedented breakthrough in a single election cycle. The findings indicate that the 2019 elections constituted a conditional turning point rather than a definitive transformation. The simultaneous election of three Minangkabau women disrupted a long-standing pattern of minimal representation; however, this shift was not driven by cultural change or institutional

reform. Instead, women's electoral success was shaped by the accumulation and strategic convergence of political capital — comprising party support, elite networks, and campaign resources — and social capital rooted in community legitimacy and family reputation. These results reinforce the theoretical argument that women's political representation relies on structural and resource-based dynamics rather than cultural symbolism alone.

By examining a matrilineal society with consistently low levels of women's parliamentary representation, this study challenges the assumption that cultural arrangements favouring women automatically translate into political empowerment. The Minangkabau case underscores the importance of distinguishing between symbolic authority in social institutions and effective power in the formal political arena. The analysis demonstrates that the 2019 breakthrough was driven by the convergence of political and social resources that enabled certain female candidates to compete more effectively in Indonesia's candidate-centred electoral system. Access to party support, elite networks, campaign resources, and strong community-based legitimacy played central roles in shaping electoral outcomes, enabling female candidates to temporarily overcome structural barriers. However, the 2019 elections did not fundamentally alter the structural conditions governing women's political representation. The absence of significant changes in party recruitment practices or electoral institutions suggests that the observed shift represents a temporary deviation rather than a sustained transformation. The sustainability of women's electoral progress therefore remains contingent on future political dynamics and the continued availability of political resources for female candidates. Overall, the success of women's electability in West Sumatra cannot be explained through cultural context alone; it is shaped by the interaction between institutional arrangements, political competition, and resource distribution. The 2019 legislative elections represent an important moment of change, but their long-term significance remains to be seen.

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