

Gender and Faith:

A Comparative Study of Religious Pluralism and Women's Empowerment in Pakistan and Indonesia in Pursuit of SDG 5

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Abstract

By utilizing the framework of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which calls for achieving gender equality, the article is an attempt to analyze the intersections between religious plurality and gender equality in Pakistan and Indonesia, the two largest Muslim-majority nations. The purpose of the comparison is basically to evaluate the difference between the approaches adopted by both states related to women's empowerment. It contrasts the ways in which the legal systems, governmental values, and civil society endeavors of each nation influence women's access to political engagement, education, and leadership in public and religious life. According to the report, Pakistan is among the countries with the lowest gender indices worldwide because of its long-standing patriarchal laws, growing religious radicalism, and restricted pluralism, all of which impede the country's progress toward gender-inclusive development. More women's empowerment and interfaith cooperation, on the other hand, have been made possible by Indonesia's pluralist government model, which is founded on its national ideology of Pancasila, legal quotas, and thriving faith-based groups. The article concludes, based on case studies of feminist movements and policy reforms that Pakistan can gain from Indonesia's integrated approach, which combines gender-inclusive policies, decentralized decision-making, and strengthened women's leadership with religious pluralism to promote equitable and sustainable development.

Keywords: Indonesia, Women's empowerment, Gender, Faith, SDG,

Introduction

Religious plurality and gender equality are two interrelated foundations of inclusive development. The UN's Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (United Nations, 2025)

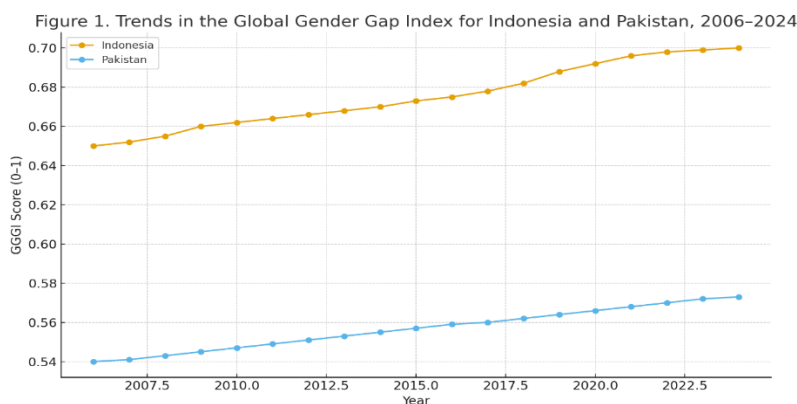
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is meant to be a global standard for social justice and human development. However, it is still a controversial issue in Muslim-majority societies due to patriarchal laws, religious conservatism, and unequal state enforcement of rights. Pakistan and Indonesia, which are the second and first biggest Muslim-majority countries in the world, can help us understand how things are different. Both countries have strong civil society networks, protect women and minorities in the constitution, and believe in democratic principles. But there are big differences between their paths when it comes to how they give women power and make faith diversity official.

Indonesia has a hybrid model of government that includes pluralism through its state ideology of Pancasila and includes women's participation in both religious and political life. However, Pakistan still ranks 142nd out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index in 2024 (UNDP). Even though the country has had decades of help from donors and a constitution that should make equality possible, it still faces problems like unfair personal laws, a lack of women in positions of power, and rising religious violence in 2024.

Figure 1: *World Economic Forum, 2024*



Source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Reports (2006–2024)

This difference is caused by more than just differences in culture or income. It talks about how the link between the government and religion affects women's rights. Even though Indonesia has some conservative elements, it has pushed for pluralistic policies (Effendy, 2003) that support six publicly recognized religions, spread power, and encourage pluralistic civic education (Hefner, 2000). Pakistan became a state after it was colonized. The Objectives Resolution (1949) and the Islamization policies of

the late 1970s and early 1980s shaped the country's law and religious system, which limits women's rights and religious freedom.

More and more studies show how important faith-based feminist groups are as change agents in both scenarios. Groups like KUPI, Rahima, and Fatayat NU demonstrate how Muslim women experts reinterpret Islamic texts to promote gender equality and affect government policy (Marcoes & Dzuhayatin, 2022).

In Indonesia, these movements challenge the secular-versus-religious dichotomy by showing how faith can be mobilized for progressive change. Within Pakistan, Aurat March has become a strong way for women to demand control over their bodies, changes to the law, and safety from violence, often directly facing religious extremists (Saigol, 2016).

The purpose of the study is to engage religious plurality and gender equality is to investigate the previous research as a successful case study to infer lessons for Pakistan. It offers an opportunity for Pakistan to learn from Indonesia, which is the largest Muslim-majority state, and is based on its hybrid model, which is based on Pancasila, women's religious education, and interfaith education.

The study does this by making three significant contributions:

1. The article makes a comparative framework that strengthens the goals of SDG 5, pluralism. Empowerment, women's education, and pluralism.
2. It contributes that rather than only chanting slogans, there is a need to embed policy in the system and to work for it by inferring lessons from real time case.
3. It is also significant as it evaluates the Indonesian case for Pakistan.

In order to serve the above purposes few questions are posed about how women's empowerment and religious plurality are institutionalized differently in Pakistan and Indonesia. How do feminist movements rooted in faith play their role in achieving the goal of SDG 5 in each nation? Along with which aspects of Indonesia's model can be customized to fit the sociopolitical circumstances of Pakistan?

Multiple qualitative data sets have been used from policy documents, NGO reports, and secondary datasets like the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index and the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. A comparative case study design has been utilized to address the diversity of the topic. A thematic content analysis approach is employed to find recurring patterns in the ways that religion and gender policy

interact. Multiple details related to variations in funding, representation, and legal frameworks are depicted visually in charts and graphs.

This case study, particularly the comparison, has academic significance for real-time policy ramifications for how states with a majority of Muslims can pose stability or balance for their religious identities with their gender equality pledges. The study adds to international discussions on accomplishing SDG 5 in environments where religion continues to be a potent social and political force by emphasizing the achievements and failures of both nations. This is how the rest of the paper goes. The literature on Islamic feminist movements, women's empowerment, and religious pluralism is reviewed in Section 3 after discussing the part 1 of the introduction. The research approach is described in depth in Section 4. Results and discussion are arranged according to five theme areas in Section 5. A summary of the results and suggestions for Pakistani policy are provided at the end of Section 6, and concluding remarks are added in section7.

Literature Review

The State and Religious Pluralism

When it comes to Muslim-majority countries, official responses to religious pluralism vary from restrictive Islamic frameworks to hybrid or secular regimes. In political philosophy, religious plurality is the acknowledgement and institutional accommodation of several faiths within a single polity (Eck, 2001). Indonesia and Pakistan are prime examples of divergent trajectories.

An ongoing conflict between Islamic identity and democratic pluralism is reflected in Pakistan's constitutional evolution. Scholars have documented how General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization program in the late 1970s institutionalized patriarchal interpretations of Sharia through Hudood Ordinances and blasphemy laws, disproportionately affecting women and religious minorities (Saigol, 2016).

Despite limited reforms of the 2006 Protection of Women Act, Pakistan remains bound by a legal-religious structure that simultaneously constrains pluralism and gender equality (Shaheed, 1994). The first ever constitutional guidelines based on the Objectives Resolution of 1949 and all the constitutions define Islam as the state religion, which may give the impression that can result in unequal protections for minorities and women.

This pluralist infrastructure has allowed Indonesia to experiment with gender-friendly policies that integrate religious actors rather than marginalize them. In contrast, Indonesia has institutionalized pluralism through its founding ideology of Pancasila, which enshrines belief in one God while recognizing multiple religions (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Scholars note that Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution provide a flexible framework that accommodates Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as official religions and empowers civil society to mediate state religion relations (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Empowerment of Women in States with a Majority of Muslims

While the international conversation on women's empowerment frequently assumes secular paths, religious institutions and norms continue to play a significant role in many Muslim societies (Moghadam, 2013). In Pakistan, women's political participation has increased since the 2002 resuscitation of gender quotas, which set aside 17% of seats in the national assembly for women, but female lawmakers are subject to party patronage restrictions and have little real influence over religious policy. In Indonesia, the 30% quota for women in party lists, along with decentralization reforms, has resulted in stronger local-level representation, especially in provinces like Aceh and West Java, where religious conservatism is prominent. Maternal mortality, educational attainment, and women's labor force participation are just a few of the SDG 5 indicators that show sharp differences between Pakistan and Indonesia (Mohmand, 2018)¹⁰. These differences cannot be attributed only to economic factors; they are also associated with institutional support for pluralism and civic engagement.

Faith-Based Movements and Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism- the attempts of Muslim women scholars and activists to read Islamic texts to promote gender justice is the subject of an expanding body of scholarship. Historically, feminist activity in Pakistan has alternated between secular NGOs and reforms motivated by religious beliefs (Mohmand, 2018). While more recent movements like the Aurat March openly question patriarchal interpretations of religion, the Women's Action Forum (WAF) in the 1980s and 1990s took a primarily secular legal-rights stance Riaz (2025). Despite criticism that the Aurat March alienates conservative audiences, its deliberate use of Islamic ethical frameworks indicates that faith-based feminism is changing.

One of Indonesia's first attempts to institutionalize female religious authority is the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) (KUPI Secretariat, 2022). Scholars contend that these initiatives show how Islamic hermeneutics can be mobilized to advance SDG 5, challenging the secular-religious binary common in global gender policy (Blackburn, 2004). In 2017 and 2022, KUPI convened women Islamic scholars (ulama) to issue fatwas denouncing gender-based violence, environmental destruction, and child marriage as un-Islamic. Rahima and Fatayat NU similarly train women religious leaders to promote gender justice in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools).

Pluralist Citizenship and Interfaith Education

It becomes clear that gender norms and religious plurality interact critically in education. The state-mandated Civic Education (Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan) and Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama) curricula in Indonesia (Rahman, 2004), on the other hand, place a strong emphasis on tolerance, pluralism, and gender equality. Research indicates that students exposed to pluralist curricula display higher levels of interfaith empathy and support for women's rights (Ali, 2023). In Pakistan, textbooks have historically depicted minorities and women in subordinate roles, reinforcing patriarchal and exclusionary narratives (Muwahidah, 2024). Recent reforms under the Single National Curriculum aim to revise these portrayals, but have come under fire for further Islamizing content (Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, 2023).

Local Governance and Decentralization

The local implementation of women's empowerment and religious pluralism is also influenced by decentralization policies. Scholars warn that decentralization can also reinforce local patriarchies, as demonstrated by Aceh's implementation of Sharia bylaws (Blackburn, 2004). Decentralization is a two-edged sword that, depending on local political dynamics, can either reinforce progressive or conservative norms. Pakistan's governance experiments during 2001 and 2010 provided new spaces for women's participation, but they lacked strong enforcement mechanisms (Khattak, 2010) on how these spaces should be utilized independently. Meanwhile, Indonesia's 'big bang' decentralization of political, administrative, and economic systems in 2001, which transferred substantial powers to local units, including control over education and social welfare, enabled provincial innovations in gender programming. It was a fundamental restructuring of the governance system (Ahmad & Mansoor, 2002).

Policy Learning and Transferability

Comparative studies emphasize the need for selective adaptation, emphasizing grassroots engagement, religious legitimacy, and incremental change (Khattak, 2010). The present paper's analytical framework is informed by the literature on policy transfer and lesson drawing, which emphasizes that successful adoption of foreign models requires contextual sensitivity (Derichs & Fleschenberg, 2019). Directly transplanting Indonesia's pluralist policies into Pakistan could backfire if local power structures, sectarian dynamics, and religious authority networks are not adequately addressed (Rose, 1993).

The Literature's Gaps

Islamic feminism and religious pluralism are becoming more popular, but there are still some gaps. For example, not many studies directly link SDG 5, women's rights, and religious pluralism. Instead of treating Pakistan and Indonesia the same, most studies treat them differently and talk about something else. There are no exact figures that show how many women are in top positions in interfaith or religious groups. Finally, not a lot of study has been done on how well government or donor programs that use different religions to support equal rights for men and women work. In order to fill in these gaps, this study places itself at the center of gender studies, religion studies, and development policy. It looks at the connection between religion, gender, and progress from different angles by combining ideas from political science, sociology, and Islamic law.

Research Methods

Research Design

In this article comparative case study design has been utilized to investigate the relationship between religious pluralism and women's empowerment under SDG 5, with a focus on Pakistan and Indonesia. A comparative approach is appropriate because it enables systematic analysis of variation between two contexts with similar religious majorities but different institutional arrangements. Although the design is mostly qualitative, it incorporates descriptive data (such as gender gap indices and representation percentages) along with quantitative data.

Justification for Case Selection

Three factors led to the selection of Indonesia and Pakistan:

- With a combined population of around 400 million Muslims, they are the top and second-largest Muslim-majority countries in the world (Pew Research Center, 2023).
- Indonesia technically accepts several religions under Pancasila, whereas Pakistan institutionalizes Islam as the national religion (Effendy, 2003).
- Both nations are having difficulty implementing SDG 5, but they are doing so in different ways, which makes them perfect for comparing and contrasting policies (British Sociological Association, 2023).

Sources of Data

Three types of data are triangulated in the study:

a) Quantitative Secondary Data

Quantitative data includes the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, 2006–2024, and the Gender Inequality Index of the UNDP. Meanwhile, national data related to the representation of women in municipal governments, the legislature, funds allotted for interfaith and educational initiatives, and places of worship have also been used.

b) Analysis of Documents

- Indonesia's 1945 Constitution and Pakistan's 1973 Constitution.
- Important laws include the Indonesian Marriage Law, the Women's Protection Acts, the Hudood
- Ordinances and the laws pertaining to gender quotas.
- Reports from civil society and NGOs (such as the Rahima Annual Reports and the Aurat Foundation).
- KUPI-issued fatwas and associated religious decrees.

c) Academic Books and Media Sources

Academic Books and Media Sources, including peer-reviewed papers from think tanks, monographs, and journals, along with news reports on interfaith efforts, KUPI, and the Aurat March.

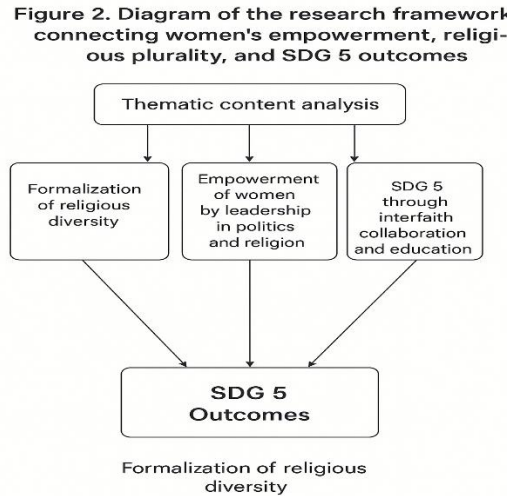
Framework for Analysis

To find trends among the three main themes, the study uses a thematic content analysis:

- The formalization of religious diversity.

- Empowerment of women by leadership in politics and religion.
- SDG 5 can be attained through interfaith collaboration and education.

Figure 2: *Diagram of the research framework connecting women's Empowerment, Religious Plurality, and SDG 5 Outcomes*



Source: Author's own illustration based on a thematic content analysis of speeches, policy documents, and reports

Inductive development and iterative refinement were used to create the coding categories. Text passages mentioning gender equality, religious plurality, and SDG-related results were coded in speeches, policy documents, and reports. Comparative charts were created by mapping descriptive statistics onto these topics.

Ethical Considerations

There are chances that sensitive information and possible political dangers can be involved while studying gender and religion in Muslim-majority settings, so direct interviews are not conducted; rather, secondary sources and publicly available data have been utilized. The study respects religious regulations and considers their societal context while analyzing them. This strategy complies with ethical standards for doing research in politically delicate settings.

Limitations

It is important to keep in mind while making a comparison that there are a few methodological flaws. There is not that much reliable data on how women are involved in religious groups, especially in Pakistan. The research finds that policies that support pluralism and gender results are linked, but not always cause each other. Because of different past paths, results may not be applicable to all countries where Muslims make up the majority. Still, the method creates a complex and policy-relevant study by combining quantitative indicators with qualitative depth.

The approach goes beyond anecdotal comparisons by operationalizing women's empowerment and religious pluralism into quantifiable metrics and comparative themes. It makes it possible to conduct a thorough analysis of the ways in which women's political engagement, interfaith education, and faith-based feminism all influence Pakistan's and Indonesia's progress toward SDGs.

Findings

- **Gender Governance and Religious Pluralism**

In addition to being a part of the constitution, religious plurality shapes women's access to resources, representation, and rights. The extent to which pluralism is institutionalized influences women's access to public life in both Indonesia and Pakistan. By contrasting the legal and policy systems of the two nations, this paragraph demonstrates how pluralist governance improves the circumstances for women's empowerment.

- **Legal and Constitutional Frameworks**

Pakistan's 1973 Constitution guarantees equality before the law, but it also declares Islam the state religion and creates the Federal Shariat Court to review laws for compliance with Islamic law (Constitution of Pakistan, 1973). The Objectives Resolution, which is now a substantive part of the Constitution, frames sovereignty as belonging to Allah, which has been used to justify restrictions on women's rights under the pretext of religious authenticity (Saigol, 2016). Changes made under the wave of islamization such as General Zia-ul-Haq's Hudood Ordinances (1979), many controversial amendments were made, including the limited weightage of women's testimony as evidence, leaving a legacy of gender-based discrimination that has persisted (Shaheed, 1994). The 2006 Women's Protection Act mitigated some of the Hudood provisions, it was still a partial reform that left core structures intact.

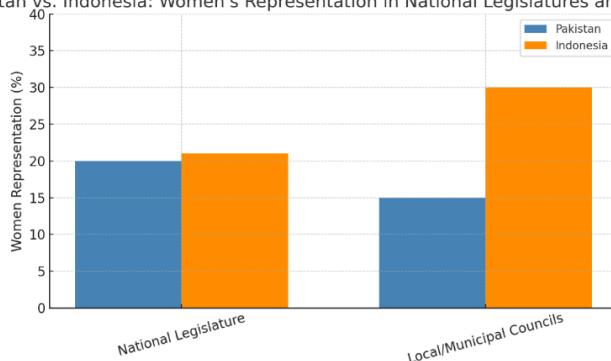
Conversely, Indonesia's 1945 Constitution and Pancasila ideology acknowledge the existence of a single God but grant equal legal standing to six religions (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism). Interfaith councils, like the Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB), mediate religious conflicts at the local level, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs oversees religious education for all faiths. These organizations offer institutional avenues for minority representation and promote a public culture that is more accepting of women's involvement in religious life (Shaheed, 1994).

- **The Political Representation of Women**

One of the most important markers of gender governance is political representation. Due to reserved quotas, women in Pakistan hold 20% of the seats in the National Assembly (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024); however, they are still underrepresented in leadership roles and religious policymaking committees. The representation of women in provincial assemblies is even lower, and patriarchal party structures frequently prevent local councils from seating women (Khattak, 2010). With a 30 percent quota for party lists and a gradual increase in women's representation, Indonesia reached roughly 21 percent in the national legislature in 2019(Blackburn, 2004). Additionally, women religious leaders serve on local interfaith councils and educational boards, giving them the ability to influence both secular and religious policy (Marcoes, 2022).

Figure 3: *Pakistan vs. Indonesia: Women's Representatives in National Legislatures and Municipal Councils*

Figure 3. Pakistan vs. Indonesia: Women's Representation in National Legislatures and Municipal Councils



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU); Election Commission of Pakistan; Komisi Pemilihan Umum Indonesia; compiled and visualized by the author

Impact of Religious Institutions by Gender

Although nearly exclusively male, religious advisory organizations like the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) have significant influence over gender policy in Pakistan (Council of Islamic Ideology, 2023). The CII has often opposed legislation that would benefit women, such as bills addressing child marriage and domestic abuse (Council of Islamic Ideology, 2023). This institutional exclusion limits the ability of women's organizations to influence religious discourse at the state level.

An alternative model is provided by Indonesia. Women’s wings, Fatayat NU and Aisyiyah, actively shape religious education and welfare programs through organizations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) (Fatayat NU, 2023). Through KUPI, the congress of women ulama, these women’s wings have successfully advocated for fatwas supporting gender justice (KUPI, 2022). Such integration ensures that religious legitimacy is not monopolized by men, making gender-sensitive policy more feasible.

Local Pluralism and Decentralization

Although it lacked robust enforcement mechanisms for women's seats and minority protections, Pakistan's devolution of power under the 18th Amendment (2010) opened up new avenues for local participation (Constitution of Pakistan, 2010). Indonesia's 2001 ‘big bang’ decentralization, despite its flaws, gave women and minorities multiple avenues to influence policy (Booth, 2013). In provinces such as Central Java and South Sulawesi, local governments have partnered with nongovernmental organizations to implement interfaith education programs and gender-responsive budgeting (MoWECP, 2024).

Table 1: Comparative Local Initiatives on Women’s Empowerment and Interfaith

Harmony

Country	Local Initiative / Policy	Focus	Impact on Women & Pluralism
Pakistan	Reserved seats for women in Union Councils under the Local Government	Local political representation.	Increased but uneven participation of women in local councils; still constrained by

	Acts (post-18th Amendment).		patriarchal practices and weak enforcement.
	Community-led peace committees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.	Interfaith dialogue and dispute resolution.	Limited inclusion of minority women in mediation but shows grassroots attempts at pluralism.
	Gender-responsive budgeting pilots in Punjab municipalities (with donor support).	Integrating gender into local fiscal planning.	Provided small but significant funds for women's health and education projects.
Indonesia	Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB) at district level.	Interfaith dialogue and mediation.	Institutionalized interfaith dialogue; includes women religious leaders and NGOs.
	Gender-Responsive Budgeting programs in Central Java and South Sulawesi.	Local budget allocation with gender sensitivity.	Strengthened women's participation in planning and budgeting; improved access to social services.
	Local by-laws promoting women's leadership in religious councils (e.g. Yogyakarta).	Religious participation.	Increased women's representation in mosque boards and local interfaith forums.

Source: Author's compilation based on local government acts, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Indonesia), Election Commission of Pakistan reports, and secondary literature on decentralization.

Three significant comparative findings:

- The empowerment of women is facilitated by institutional pluralism. Women have more opportunities to engage in policymaking when different religions are acknowledged and institutionalized.
- It is not enough to have representation without involvement. To change gender norms, quotas must be used in conjunction with institutional access to religious and policymaking authorities.

- Although it needs to be enforced, decentralization can foster creativity. Local governments could perpetuate patriarchal norms if they lack procedures to ensure minority inclusion and women's seats.

There is a difference between Indonesia's integrated pluralist approach and Pakistan's incomplete changes, which emphasizes a crucial policy transfer lesson: religious pluralism and women's empowerment must be entrenched concurrently, not consecutively.

Faith-Based Feminism and Women's Movements

Women's movements, if they are embedded into the political and legal framework, carry weight and always have enough strength to turn structures into the real time change (Aurat Foundation, 2024). Feminist and women-led groups play a significant role in promoting gender justice (Khan, 2024) in Pakistan and Indonesia using grassroots activity, religious language, and sacred authority. However, the manifestation of each movement differs from state to state, and each nation uses religious mobilization to oppose patriarchy and shape public policy.

Pakistan: Women's Ulema, Aurat March, and Hybrid Feminisms

Since 2018, the Aurat March, which takes place every year in major Pakistani cities, has emerged as the most visible example of intersectional feminism in the nation (Khan, 2024) with slogans like *Mera Jism Meri Marzi*, which translates to 'My body, my choice', the march connects Islamic concepts of justice and constitutional rights with bodily autonomy (Khan, 2024). However, the march is frequently criticized for being 'Westernized' or anti-religious. Organizers are using Islamic scriptures to support their demands and are increasingly enlisting the help of religious scholars who support gender equality in an effort to refute this narrative (Digital Rights Foundation, 2023).

New initiatives like the Women Ulema Boards in Punjab and Sindh, which train female religious leaders to provide guidance on child marriage, inheritance, and domestic violence from Islamic jurisprudence, go beyond street protest (Punjab Women Ulema Board, 2024). Although these boards are still small, they represent a significant shift from secular to hybrid feminist strategies, which align with SDG 5 by simultaneously addressing structural, cultural, and religious barriers.

By framing these rights as consistent with Islamic ethical principles, Pakistani NGOs such as Shirkat Gah, Aurat Foundation, and the Digital Rights Foundation also incorporate faith into their campaigns on reproductive health, digital safety, and harassment (Shirkat Gah, 2023). This has the effect of normalizing gender justice within a religious framework, which narrows the discursive gap between feminists and mainstream communities.

Indonesia: Women Ulema, Fatayat NU, Rahima, and KUPI

An incredibly distinct, yet complementary, model is provided by Indonesia. Hundreds of female religious scholars from all over the archipelago come together for the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) (KUPI Secretariat, 2022), also known as the Indonesian Women Ulama Congress. During its 2017 and 2022 congresses, KUPI issued fatwas on environmental justice, child marriage, and sexual violence that are based on *maqasid al-shariah*, or the higher objectives of Islamic law (Dzuhayatin, 2023). These fatwas have moral authority in local communities and have had a direct impact on Indonesia's historic Sexual Violence Eradication Law, which was passed in 2022 (Dzuhayatin, 2023).

A new cadre of women preachers (*mubalighat*) has been produced by Rahima, which was established in 2000 as a training center for gender-sensitive Islamic education (Rahima, 2024). Fatayat NU, the women's wing of the largest Muslim organization in the world, integrates interfaith dialogue, microcredit programs, and family welfare initiatives, using its large following to institutionalize women's leadership within Islamic civil society (Fatayat NU, 2023).

Indonesian women's organizations have gained more legitimacy than purely secular movements by locating gender justice within a religious, pluralist framework. Their work also influences policymaking; for instance, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, or MoWECP, frequently consults with leaders of Fatayat NU and KUPI on proposed laws.

Comparative Analysis

The following patterns are identified for comparison:

1. Faith as a Source of Legitimation.

The women's movements in both nations deliberately adopt Islamic rhetoric to refute claims of Westernization. Pakistan lacks female religious authority; it has

minimal participation in ulema boards in religious councils, in decision-making, while in the case of Indonesia, women are part of ulema boards as well, and they are playing a significant role in interfaith harmony and women's empowerment.

2. Secular and religious feminisms are hybridized.

Indonesia's KUPI is based on religious studies but speaks out for Universalist ideals. Pakistan's Aurat March, on the other hand, combines Islamic principles with secular human rights discourse. Both examples show how feminists are working to achieve SDG 5 by making the gap between religion and secularism less clear. Pakistani movements are still more oppositional and take place on the streets. In contrast, Indonesian groups can work with ministries and local governments through more or less formal routes. This limits their policy effect, even though they are very visible. Tensions are evident in both situations. In Pakistan, feminist activists face a high-risk environment due to blasphemy laws and extremist groups, and their outreach is also limited by digital harassment and security threats (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2024). In Indonesia, local Sharia by-laws in Aceh and West Java impose gender restrictions despite national reforms, demonstrating that pluralism is uneven (International Crisis Group, 2023). As a result, faith-based feminists must constantly balance state co-optation and conservative backlash.

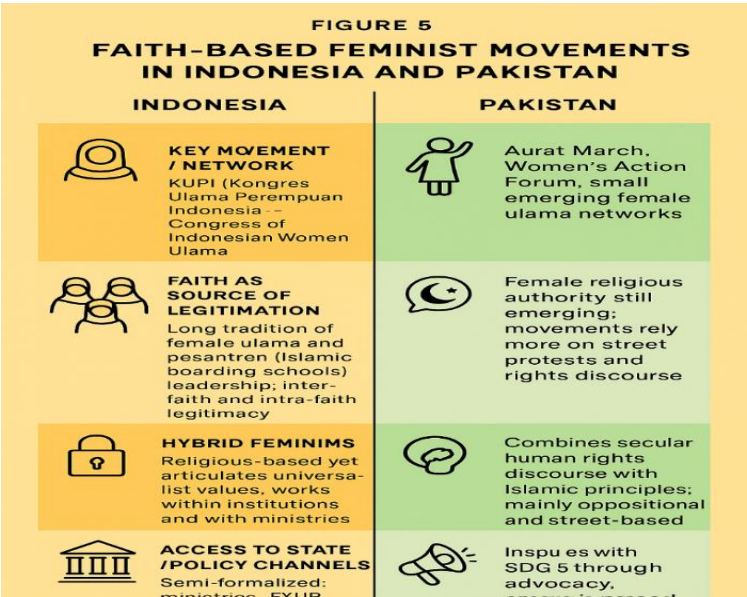
3. SDG 5 implications

Faith-based women's movements are effective means of accomplishing SDG 5 since they:

- Use language that is locally relevant to localize gender equality standards.
- Form alliances between the secular and religious spheres.
- Provide avenues for women to hold leadership positions in religious institutions.

By supporting women's religious study, creating national venues for female ulema, and guaranteeing governmental acknowledgment of their authority, Pakistan can take a cue from Indonesia. At the same time, Indonesia can learn from Pakistan's violent street demonstrations as a way to spark discussion and media attention.

Figure 3: Faith-Based Feminist Movements in Indonesia and Pakistan



Comparative Policy Lessons

Quantitative measures of religious pluralism and gender equality aid in turning theoretical discussions into verifiable facts. We can find obvious lessons for institutional architecture and policy transfer by charting how both nations perform on SDG 5 targets and associated indicators. Comparative data, charts, and tables are used in this area to highlight Indonesia's strengths and weaknesses as well as the implications for the relationship between gender and faith.

Metrics for Gender Equality

Pakistan is ranked 142nd out of 146 nations in the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Gender Gap Report, whereas Indonesia is ranked 87th (World Economic Forum, 2024). Pakistan's political empowerment scores less which is 0.17, and economically, its involvement is 0.33, while in comparison, Indonesia's scores 0.64 and 0.41, respectively (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Indicators for health and education also differ a lot. In Pakistan, maternal mortality is roughly 186 deaths per 100,000 live births, in Pakistan while in Indonesia

it is 126 (World Health Organization, 2023). In Pakistan, female literacy is only about 48%, while in comparison, in Indonesia it is 93% (Statistics Indonesia, 2024). These statistics show multiple trends that talk about not only existing inequalities in providing basic facilities and service delivery but also how gender norms, cultural practices, and religion interact to influence access to basic healthcare and education.

Indicators of Religious Pluralism

Interfaith councils, minority protections, and religious diversity indices are examples of proxies that can be used to gauge pluralism. Indonesia is ranked lower than Pakistan in terms of government limitations on religion (score of 5.0 vs. 7.5, where 10 is most restrictive), and it has a higher diversity score (5.3) than Pakistan (2.1), according to the Pew Research Center's 2023 Religious Diversity Index.

Table 2: *Selected Indicators of Religious Pluralism and Gender Governance*

(Pakistan vs. Indonesia)

Indicators	Pakistan	Indonesia
Religious Diversity Index (Pew 2023)	2.1	5.3
Government Restrictions Index (Pew 2023)	7.5	5.0
Women in National Parliament (%)	20	21
Maternal Mortality (per 100k)	186	126
Female Literacy (%)	48	93
SDG 5 Gender Equality Index (UN 2024)	0.47	0.69

Source: UN (2024) (Pew Research Center, 2023)

The gender mainstreaming initiatives and pluralist policies of Indonesia show how institutional pluralism can be turned into tangible results:

- Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), which was implemented in more than 30 provinces across Indonesia in 2009, allows local governments to set aside money for reproductive health services, interfaith education, and women's shelters.

- In addition to enhancing descriptive representation, legal quotas (30% on party lists) have promoted substantive representation on topics including child marriage and domestic abuse.
- National policy reform has been validated by women's religious authority through KUPI fatwas (Sexual Violence Law, 2022).

Similar reforms, like provincial women's development departments and women's ombudsperson offices, have been implemented in Pakistan; however, these lack funding, religious legitimacy, and integration into interfaith governance structures (Aurat Foundation, 2024). As a result, reforms frequently remain symbolic rather than structural.

Indonesian lessons for Pakistan

Several policy lessons can be drawn from the aforementioned evidence:

1. Put Interfaith Councils within Local Institutions.

Pakistan's District Peace Committees might be strengthened to carry out a comparable function with statutory authority and gender quotas, much like Indonesia's FKUB, which settles religious disputes and includes female representation.

2. Make an investment in religious scholarship for women.

Similar to Indonesia's KUPI, national platforms for female ulema would be established, allowing them to voice gender-neutral religious beliefs and have an impact on public policy.

3. Gender-responsive budgeting should be mandated.

To provide constitutional rights more weight, provincial governments might set aside money for interfaith education initiatives, legal assistance, and women's shelters.

4. Align Religious Reform with SDG 5 Indicators.

Reforms about plurality (such as interfaith education and minority quotas) must be connected to gender policy in order to ensure that both aspects advance jointly rather than separately. Transferring policies must continue while keeping in view the socioeconomic conditions of any specific society. In Indonesia, it can be analyzed that a long history of popular Islamic organizations, high literacy rates, and comparatively stable democratic institutions are the foundations of Indonesia's relative prosperity and improved indicators of gender empowerment. In the case of Pakistan, weak

democratic institutions, low literacy, ingrained sectarianism, and more serious security threats are hindering the achievement of gender parity and gender empowerment. Therefore, there is no need to copy and paste the policy inputs; rather, there is a need to infer lessons and to customize them to the needs of the Pakistani society, otherwise it could backfire if local community engagement isn't done first. However, Indonesia also provides warning stories. Decentralization can empower conservative players if it is not backed by robust national safeguards, as demonstrated by local Sharia bylaws in Aceh and West Java (International Crisis Group, 2023). Pakistan can learn to establish these safeguards early on.

The comparison data show a substantial correlation between the gender indicators increase in areas where pluralism is institutionalized. While Women's involvement in religious leadership and wider religious pluralism are closely associated with Indonesia's reduced maternal mortality, higher SDG 5 score, and female literacy. Pakistan's more centralized, male-dominated religious authority is correlated with lower scores.

This implies that a two-pronged approach is needed to achieve SDG 5 in Muslim-majority settings:

- There is a need to make overall institutions strong, and particularly the religious institutions stronger.
- At the same time, empower women in both secular and religious governance mechanisms.

Conclusion

Through this comparative case study, it is very clear that in Muslim-majority cultures, faith, governance, and gender equality are intricately linked. So, there is a need to identify the upcoming trends, particularly for empowerment and growth, and to work for them while keeping the religious values within. This study is significant as it has evaluated how each nation handles the relationship between faith, gender, and development by looking at institutional frameworks, women's movements, and quantitative trends through the lens of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) while maintaining their cultural and religious values. Primarily, multiple arrangements are identified in the study, which include pluralism within institutions. In Indonesia, this kind of pluralism is provided to women and is supported by Indonesia's pluralist state ideology of Pancasila, interfaith councils (FKUB), and constitutional acceptance of

many religions. As far as Pakistan is concerned, women's access to decision-making venues is restricted due to its highly centralized religious authority, lack of participation of female religious leaders, and weak interfaith processes.

Secondly, faith-based women's movements are more legitimate and have more sway on policy. Women's religious authority can change jurisprudence and policy from within, as shown by Indonesian groups like KUPI, Rahima, and Fatayat NU. This can lead to concrete legislative consequences like the Sexual Violence Eradication Law (2022). Although the rhetoric of Pakistani movements (such as the Women Ulema Boards and the Aurat March) is becoming more hybrid, they are still mostly street-based and do not have formalized avenues for consultation with the government.

Thirdly, these institutional disparities are consistent with quantitative developments. In terms of maternal health, female literacy, and SDG 5 metrics, Indonesia scores better than Pakistan. Additionally, it has a lower score for government restrictions on religion and a better score for religious diversity. These findings support the qualitative analysis, which found that gender equality results improve in areas with higher levels of pluralism and female leadership in faith-based organizations.

The study emphasizes how issues of religious authority and pluralism are inextricably linked to discussions about gender equality in settings with a majority of Muslims. Both local governments and international development organizations should see religion as a possible tool for gender-just change rather than as a barrier. The Women Ulema Boards in Pakistan and KUPI's fatwas in Indonesia serve as examples of how women's religious leadership can reinterpret legal and cultural standards from within religious traditions, improving legitimacy and sustainability.

This paper also illustrates the need for context-sensitive policy transfer. The accomplishments of Indonesia are the result of decades of strong democratic institutions, increased literacy, and the development of civil society. Before anticipating swift legislative victories, Pakistan must modify the teachings to fit its own political circumstances by making investments in education, grassroots religious reform, and activist security.

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