

Policy Networks Analysis in Advocacy of Indonesian Marriage Law Amendment to Raise the Minimum Marriage Age

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the revision of Indonesia's Marriage Law in 2019 by applying the policy network approach developed by David Marsh and Martin Smith, with a particular focus on how network dynamics shape policy outcomes for the minimum marriage age of women. The research contributes to the field of public policy and political communication by offering a relational perspective that moves beyond actor-centered explanations and highlights the importance of network structures, interactions, and resource distribution. Using a qualitative case study design, this research examines four analytical dimensions: network

environment, network structure, actors' interests and resources, and patterns of network interaction. Data were collected through document analysis, in-depth interviews with activists involved in the advocacy process, and various secondary data. The findings reveal that the success of the amendment was driven by a cohesive policy network built mainly by civil society coalitions providing advocacy, expertise, and public pressure. However, the study also finds that this success was strongly influenced by a favorable policy window shaped by key political events, including judicial changes and shifting elite alignments, which reduced resistance to reform. These results highlight that while policy networks are crucial in organizing and advancing advocacy efforts, their effectiveness is contingent upon broader political opportunities.

Keywords: Policy Network, Policy Advocacy, Marriage Law Amendment

1. Introduction

The 2019 revision of Indonesia's Marriage Law represents one of the most significant legal reforms in family law over the past two decades. By raising the minimum legal marriage age for women from 16 to 19 years, the reform not only addressed child marriage but also reflected a broader shift in the state's approach to gender equality and child protection. This policy reform, however, cannot be understood as having occurred solely in 2019 within the People's Representative Council of Indonesia (DPR RI). Rather, the policy advocacy process had been underway since 2015 through submissions to the Constitutional Court of Indonesia (MK), which ultimately resulted in a ruling that supported the advocacy efforts in 2017 following the second submission. What makes this reform particularly noteworthy is its success in changing a regulation that had been regarded as preferable within Islamic values. Following the Constitutional Court ruling in December 2018, the amendment was passed by parliament in less than a year, despite the long-standing political sensitivity of marriage regulation in Indonesia's religiously plural and Muslim-majority context.

Despite these circumstances, research on this issue mostly focuses on the legal aspect of the new law (Kafidhoh et al., 2024; Nasrullah et al., 2024; Rosa et al., 2024; Setyawan et al., 2023). Many more are focusing on its implications, effectiveness, and enforcement problems, especially regarding the rise of marriage dispensation as a way to circumvent the new law (Duadji & Tresiana, 2022; Ilhami, 2020; Mursyid & Yusuf, 2022; Nuruddin et al., 2023; Rismana et al., 2024; Yetta et al., 2024).

Miichi's research (2025), surprisingly, is the only Scopus-level research that focuses on the advocacy process that determined the law revision. Miichi scrutinized the advocacy process that the feminist NGO did inside the parliamentary court and focused on how a progressive movement

could succeed in a Muslim democratic country. The research found that feminists succeed in their advocacy by turning into human resources problem narratives, avoiding religious debate through the judicial and political processes, and unintentionally aligning with multiple state arenas. These findings were profoundly interesting as previous attempts to revise the Marriage Law had failed due to strong resistance from religious authorities and political elites. There are other studies that discussed the same case but were published nationally. Fadli and Subono (2023) focus on how the feminist movement succeeds in the reformation using group theory to highlight the group's interaction. Zein et al. (2025), meanwhile, focus on how civil societies group using both legal mobilization and informal means for the reform process. Another notable study is that of Eddyono (Eddyono, 2025), which finds that legislative advocacy surrounding the Law on Sexual Violence Crimes (UU TPKS), the amendment of the Marriage Law, and the Maternal and Child Welfare Bill (RUU KIA) has reinforced the ideology and vision of the organizations advocating for these reforms.

This study focuses on feminist advocacy strategies, legal mobilization, legislative advocacy, and discursive framing. While these contributions are valuable, they tend to privilege actor-centered explanations and understate the role of relational structures that shape access, influence, and bargaining power in policymaking processes. Research was one where indeed allianfeminists did discuss with other actors, but they didn't elaborate on it further and didn't analyze it with a proper advocacy theory that could explain the phenomenon. To understand the reform requires moving beyond individual strategies toward an analysis of policy networks. Policy outcomes are not produced solely by the preferences of actors but by the configuration of relationships among state institutions, civil society organizations, political elites, and religious authorities. The central research questions guiding this study are therefore: How was the policy network surrounding the Marriage Law revision structured?

To address these questions, the study adopts the policy network framework developed by Marsh and Smith. According to this approach, public policy is formed through horizontal networks of relationships between state and non-state actors who are mutually dependent in the exchange of resources, information, and legitimacy (Marsh & Smith, 2000; Rhodes, 2010). This perspective emphasizes that the influence of interest groups is exercised not only through direct lobbying but also through their strategic positions within policy networks. In the Indonesian context, advocacy networks addressing social issues, such as in the marriage law

revision, illustrate the characteristics of an issue network that is open, inclusive, and collaborative.

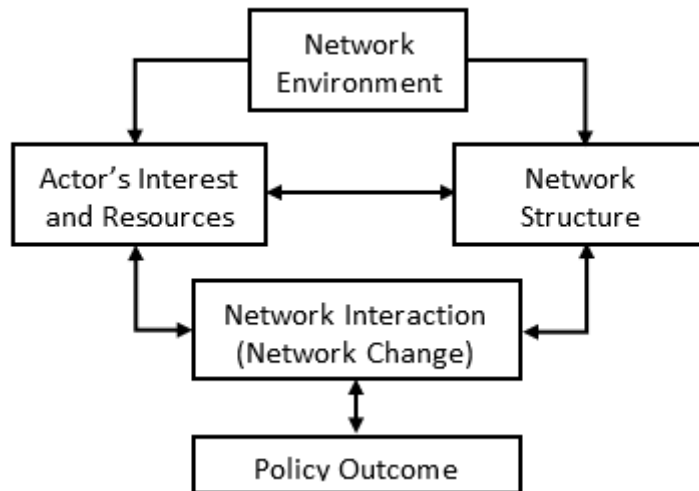


Figure 1. Policy Network Approach (Marsh & Smith, 2000; Rhodes, 2010)

Policy Network analysis selection is grounded in its analytical capacity to capture the relational and structural dimensions of policymaking that are central to the Marriage Law revision. Unlike alternative approaches that prioritize either institutional structures or individual actor preferences in isolation, this framework enables a more integrated analysis of how actors, resources, and interactions are embedded within a broader network context. Given that the reform process involved networking among state institutions, civil society organizations, and religious actors, the policy network approach is particularly suitable for examining how these relationships shaped both the trajectory and outcome of the policy process.

The study advances three main analytical expectations. First, it anticipates that the success of the 2019 reform was enabled by the emergence of a reconfigured policy network in which executive agencies and civil society coalitions occupied more central positions, while conservative religious actors became relatively peripheral. Second, it expects that strategic arena shifting, from religious discourse to constitutional and bureaucratic arenas, played a crucial role in reducing resistance and accelerating legislative consensus. Third, it posits that advocacy actors did not merely operate within existing structures but

actively reshaped the policy network by building cross-institutional alliances and exploiting political opportunities.

These findings are significant for both theory and practice. Theoretically, the study extends the application of policy network analysis to the context of Muslim democracies and religiously sensitive policy domains, where institutional pluralism and moral politics complicate conventional models of governance. Empirically, it provides insights into how legal reform can be achieved under conditions of ideological contestation. Practically, the findings offer strategic lessons for policymakers and advocacy groups seeking to promote rights-based reforms in contested political environments.

2. Method

Methodologically, the research employs a qualitative design focusing on the advocacy process leading to the 2019 revision. Data are drawn from multiple primary sources, including legal documents, court decisions, advocacy reports, and in-depth interviews with the Advocacy and Program Director of PKBI, one of the NGO involved in the advocacy process. The interviews were conducted on three occasions on 24 February 2025 and 12 March 2026 via telephone, and on 18 December 2025 through a face-to-face meeting in Semarang. While the study relies on a key informant interview, this limitation is mitigated through extensive triangulation with secondary sources, including interviews with activists, prior interview-based studies, and official documents. Nevertheless, the reliance on a single primary informant may limit the depth of insight into internal network dynamics.

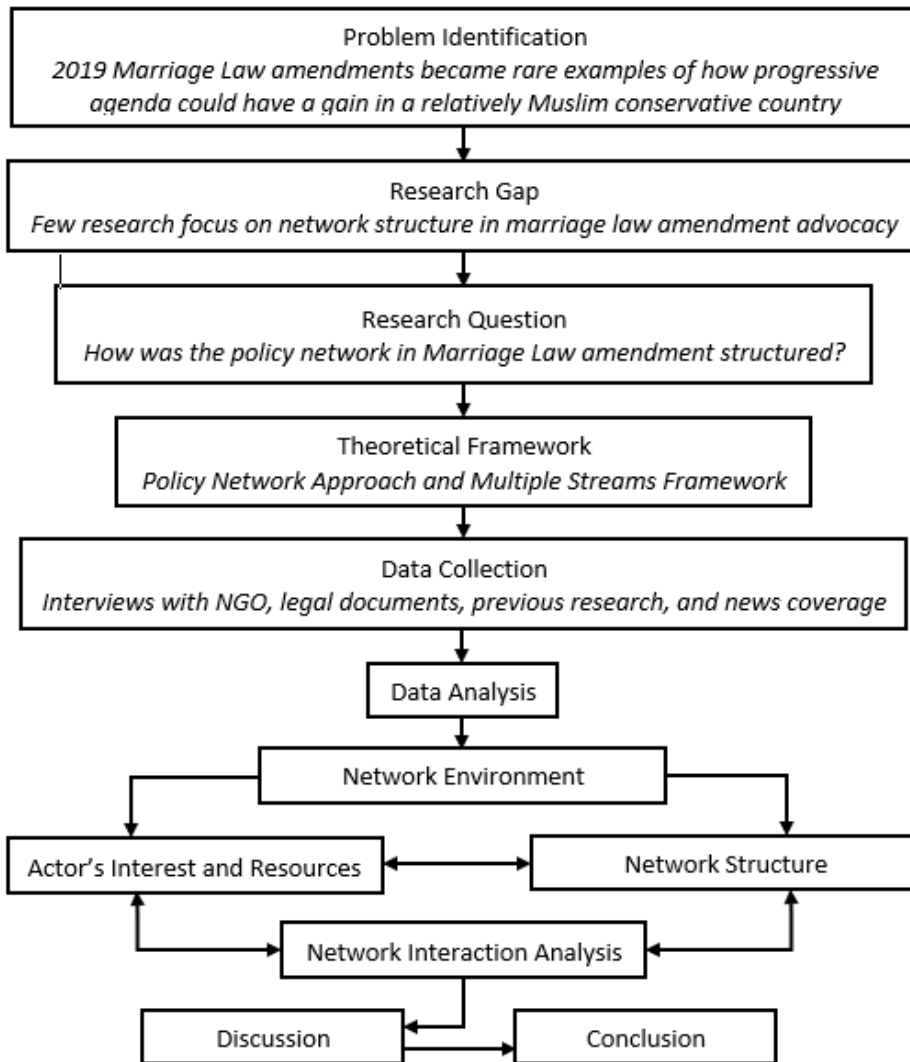


Figure 2. The Research Flowchart

The data analysis was conducted based on the policy network approach developed by David Marsh and Martin Smith. The first stage of analysis focused on the *network environment*, examining the broader social and political context of Indonesia's political system at the time the advocacy was implemented. This was followed by an analysis of the *network structure*, which traced the configuration of policy actors involved in the advocacy process. The subsequent stage involved analyzing *actors' interests and resources*, assessing the motivations and capacities of each policy actor. The final stage was *network interaction*, which examined the

patterns of interaction that emerged among actors throughout the advocacy process. This analysis traces the evolution of the policy network from advocacy in constitutional courts to the enactment of the amendment, paying particular attention to shifts in actor centrality, coalition formation, and arena selection.

Ethical considerations are also integral to this study, particularly given its reliance on qualitative data and engagement with policy actors. All interviews were conducted with informed consent, ensuring that participants were fully aware of the research purpose and their right to withdraw at any stage. In addition, this study remains attentive to the political and social sensitivity of the issue, especially in relation to child marriage and religious perspectives, by presenting findings in a balanced and non-harmful manner.

3. Results

3.1 Network Environment

The first dimension of analysis concerns the broader environment within which the policy network operated during the revision of the Marriage Law in 2019. In the policy network framework developed by Marsh and Smith, the network environment refers to the political, institutional, and socio-normative context that shapes opportunities and constraints for policy actors. In this context, in contrast to advanced democratic countries, Indonesia does not, in principle, exhibit a clear tradition of *politik aliran*. The left–right political spectrum commonly found in many democratic systems cannot be readily applied to modern Indonesian politics. Edward Aspinnall (2018) finds that, when viewed through the conventional left (progressive) and right (conservative) ideological spectrum, nearly all political parties in Indonesia are positioned in the political center.

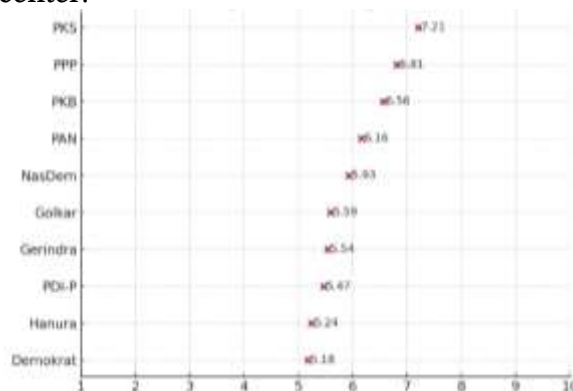


Figure 3. Indonesian Political Spectrum (Aspinnall et al., 2018)

Ufen (2008) even argues that Indonesian politics is experiencing what he describes as the “Philippinization” of its political system, characterized by the emergence of presidentialized parties, authoritarian tendencies within parties, pervasive money politics, the near absence of clear political platforms, weak party loyalty, cartelization, and the rise of new local elites. Indonesian politics has also experienced a significant rise in populism among the middle and upper classes (Fossati & Mietzner, 2019). This condition enables the emergence of unique political phenomena, such as toxic alliances, in which political parties that compete against one another during elections subsequently form governing alliances (McCargo & Wadipalapa, 2024).

Such conditions enable the formation of networks among actors that transcend ideological barriers through political communication processes such as negotiation and lobbying. What is required, according to the Multiple Streams Framework proposed by Kingdon, is the emergence of a Policy Window, which occurs when three streams, *problem stream*, *policy stream*, and *politics stream*, converge (Kingdon, 2014). The *problem stream* arises when a particular issue is successfully recognized and defined as a public problem; the *policy stream* emerges when viable solutions to that problem are developed and made available; and the *politics stream* occurs when political conditions shift in ways that support policy change.

The *problem stream* has long been present, as evidenced by the numerous studies highlighting the negative implications of child marriage, both in terms of health (B. K. Datta et al., 2024; B. Datta & Tiwari, 2023; Irani & Latifnejad Roudsari, 2018; Maharani et al., 2024) and economic consequences (Boran et al., 2013; Fang et al., 2024; Liang & Yu, 2022; Nurmila, 2013). The Problem Stream has also been reinforced by increasing international attention to the issue of child marriage. Indonesia’s commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), demonstrated by the enactment of Presidential Decree No. 59 of 2017, particularly on its target 5.3. eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (*Presidential Decree No. 59 of 2017 on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals*, 2017, Appendix 31), provided further pressure on policymakers to pursue legal reform.

The *policy stream*, meanwhile, is closely related to the availability of solutions to the problem of child marriage. In this regard, the government has actually implemented numerous initiatives aimed at limiting child marriage. These include the *Program Generasi Berencana (GenRe)*

implemented by the National Population and Family Planning Board, the *Gerakan Bersama Pencegahan Perkawinan Anak (GeBer)*, and the *Forum Anak* initiated by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, as well as the establishment of Regional Technical Implementation Units for the Protection of Women and Children (UPTD PPA) across various provinces. The problem, however, is that the solutions offered through these initiatives do not address the core issue, which is the legal permissibility of child marriage itself. The government and political parties have tended to avoid advocating for revisions to the minimum legal age of marriage due to their reluctance to confront religious leaders, which could ultimately threaten their electoral support. Progressive groups' legal advocacy in the constitutional courts in 2015 also failed due to these religious stances (*Putusan Nomor 30-74/PUU-XII/2014*, n.d.).

A sequence of points then emerged from 2017, the Progressive groups' leverage. First, Patrialis Akbar, a constitutional judge who played a role in the failure of the 2015 constitutional court submission, was arrested on corruption charges in January 2017 (VOAIndonesia, 2017). This development enabled progressive groups to secure a success in the 2017 constitutional court submission, which declared the existing provision on the minimum marriage age discriminatory against women (*Putusan Nomor 22/PUU-XV/2017*, n.d.). The final key point is the selection of Ma'ruf Amin as the vice-presidential candidate by Joko Widodo in August 2018. Although not explicitly stated, the nomination of this prominent figure from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) indirectly positioned the MUI as an ally of the president, which ultimately led them to endorse the decision of the Constitutional Court of Indonesia (CNN Indonesia, 2018). This sequence of events created a solution for the government and parliament to amend the law within a specified period without religious conservative resistance and became a powerful *policy stream* that reshaped the dynamics of the policy network.

The decision of the Constitutional Court of Indonesia appears to have also influenced the *political stream*. A strong ruling from the country's highest constitutional judicial institution, combined with the relatively limited public reaction from the time the decision was issued in 2017 until the legislative process in 2019, created political conditions that enabled the revision of the law. Interestingly, the legislative process occurred in the context of the 2019 national elections, a period in which political elites were generally cautious in addressing issues that could provoke conflict with religious constituencies. However, rather than halting reform, this sensitivity encouraged a more strategic approach among advocacy actors,

who framed the issue in terms of constitutional equality, child protection, and public health rather than religious doctrine.

Taken together, the network environment surrounding the marriage law amendment to restrict child marriage was characterized by two situations. First, the absence of strong ideological partisanship or *political ideology* at the level of the political superstructure, particularly within political parties and parliament. Second, the presence of a timely *policy window* is shaped by multiple contributing factors. These factors then shaped the configuration and approaches of actors within the policy network.

3.2 Network Structure

The second analytical dimension concerns the structure of the policy network involved in the revision of the Marriage Law. Network structure refers to the relatively stable patterns of relationships among actors participating in the policymaking process, including their relative positions, levels of access, and degrees of influence.

The policy network among the advocates of the marriage law amendment consisted of several clusters of actors. The first cluster comprised state actors, including relevant ministries, members of parliament, and judicial institutions. On the government side, the actors most directly involved were four ministries assigned by the president through Presidential Letter Number R-39/Pres/09/2019 to deliberate on the revision of the Marriage Law. These ministries included the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection led by Yohana Yembise, the Ministry of Religious Affairs led by Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, the Ministry of Health led by Nila Moeloek, and the Ministry of Law and Human Rights led by Yasonna Laoly. The key actor is Yohana Yembise, whose ministry actively promoted and engaged in discussions with parliament regarding the increase in the minimum age of marriage (detikNews, 2018).

Parliamentary actors had a more complex composition and were arguably crucial in this process. In general, nearly all parties supported the amendment of the Marriage Law, with only two factions, those of the Prosperous Justice Party and the United Development Party, appearing to provide relatively limited support (Kompas.com, 2019). Both are known as the most conservative Islamic parties in Indonesia. Ken Miichi (2025) has conducted a comprehensive examination of the processes within the People's Representative Council of Indonesia and identified two members of parliament who were most actively involved in advancing the legislative change: Eva Kusuma Sundari from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle and Rahayu Saraswati Djojohadikusumo from Gerindra Party.

These two female parliamentarians can be regarded as the key parliamentary actors who pushed for the revision of the Marriage Law.

The second cluster included civil society organizations that had long been engaged in advocacy related to child protection and gender equality. This cluster began to emerge during the Judicial Review (JR) of the law submitted to the Constitutional Court of Indonesia in 2014. At that time, the organization initiated the JR, which is Yayasan Kesehatan Perempuan (YKP) and Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia (KPI) (Fadli & Subono, 2023). They were then followed by Semerlak Cerlang Nusantara (SCN), Masyarakat untuk Keadilan Gender dan Antar Generasi, and Yayasan Pemantau Hak Anak (YPHA). This group was also supported by other progressive organizations that provided statements in support of the judicial proceedings, namely Women Research Institute (WRI), Perkumpulan Keluarga Berencana Indonesia (PKBI), Kalyanamitra, Perhimpunan Rahima, and Aliansi Remaja Independent (*Putusan Nomor 30-74/PUU-XII/2014*, n.d.). These progressive groups failed in their first attempt and later submitted another petition to the Constitutional Court of Indonesia in 2017. On this occasion, they changed their strategy and joined together under the alliance Koalisi 18+. In addition, other civil society organizations that played a significant role include Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (ICJR) that became lawyer for the judicial review process, dealing with all law documents and arguments, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography & Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT Indonesia) that working to find case and victims of child marriage in their networks, and Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) that gave moral reinforcement by giving fatwa supporting eradication of child marriage.

Outside the core advocacy coalition, two groups were particularly important: the Constitutional Court of Indonesia and authoritative Islamic organizations. The Constitutional Court of Indonesia, even not the advocates themselves, has a massive role by accepting the 2017 activists' petition and ruling that the minimum marriage age for women stipulated in the Marriage Law of Indonesia was unconstitutional. Triggering the process of revising the Marriage Law. Meanwhile, the traditional authoritative Islamic groups acted as opposition actors resisting the proposed amendment to the law. They first appeared in the 2014 judicial review process on the Constitutional Court, invited to provide testimony for the petition, and opposed the revision of the minimum marriage age for women. They were the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the Muhammadiyah, and the Nahdlatul Ulama.

Table 1. Main Actors Advocating Marriage Law Revision

No	Actors	Role
<i>State Cluster</i>		
1	Yohana Yembise, Minister of PPPA	Represented the government, reframed the debate toward child protection, and brokered collaboration between the government, parliament, and civil society actors.
2	Eva Kusuma Sundari, PDIP	Key member of parliament advocates who pushed the reform agenda, built support among legislators, and bridged cross-party political factions for the amendment
3	Rahayu Saraswati, Gerindra	
<i>Civil Societies Cluster</i>		
4	Yayasan Kesehatan Perempuan (YKP)	Feminist group actors that provide research evidence, reproductive health data, technical expertise, advocacy campaigns, strengthen advocacy networks, mobilize grassroots support, and amplify public pressure for reform
5	Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia (KPI)	
6	Perkumpulan Keluarga Berencana Indonesia (PKBI)	
7	Yayasan Pemantau Hak Anak (YPHA)	Child rights group actors that played complementary roles by providing child rights data, strengthening evidence-based advocacy, and amplifying concerns about child marriage and exploitation
8	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography & Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT Indonesia)	
9	Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (ICJR)	
10	Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI)	Reformative Law Group is an actor that provides legal analysis, constitutional arguments, and strengthens the rights-based framework Progressive's Islamic Group provides religious legitimacy for the reform by promoting progressive Islamic interpretations that support child protection and gender equality

(Eddyono, 2025; Miichi, 2025; *Putusan Nomor 30-74/PUU-XII/2014*, n.d.)

The network structure of actors involved in the process of revising the Marriage Law underwent gradual changes. During the initial attempt in

judicial review processes at the Constitutional Court of Indonesia in 2014, the civil society actors that advocate for law amendments were only five. Even though they made progress since women's rights and children's rights activists rarely cooperated on such a scale, the alliances were minuscule in number. This was later changed in 2017 when they involved much larger activist groups through the alliance Koalisi 18+. Remarkably, outside this coalition, they also involved progressive Islamic activist groups such as Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI). This indicates not merely coalition expansion, but an increase in network density and resource complementarity, where legal expertise, grassroots mobilization, and religious legitimacy became mutually reinforcing.

A different phenomenon was observed within the cluster of Islamic organizations. During the 2014 judicial review at the Constitutional Court of Indonesia, this group, namely the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah, expressed strong opposition on religious grounds, which became a major factor in the Court's rejection of the petition. Although these organizations possess different ideological platforms, particularly NU and Muhammadiyah, they were united in opposing the proposed amendment to the law (*Putusan Nomor 30-74/PUU-XII/2014*, n.d.). This solidarity, however, appeared to weaken during the subsequent judicial review process in 2017. There was no significant opposition from major Islamic organizations. On the contrary, activists received support from progressive Islamic groups such as KUPI.

The opposition from the religious group later emerged after the Constitutional Court decision in 2017. This opposition was reflected in the outcomes of the Ijtima Ulama Komisi Fatwa se-Indonesia VI, organized by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in May 2018. During this forum, the ulama explicitly urged the president not to issue a *Perppu* (government regulation in lieu of law) to amend the Marriage Law and maintained that the minimum marriage age of 16 for women remained appropriate. They further warned that revising the Marriage Law “could trigger public unrest and, if left unaddressed, may lead to instability in the political and security spheres.” (Ijtima Ulama Komisi Fatwa se-Indonesia, 2018, p. 6). This rejection, however, waned down later, and the MUI itself, not long after, adopted a more conciliatory stance and expressed support for the Constitutional Court's decision that encouraged legislative amendment (CNN Indonesia, 2018).

Ken Miichi argues that the weakening of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) was related to the fact that, during the same period, Joko Widodo appointed Ma'ruf Amin, who was serving as Chairman of the

MUI, as Vice President. As a result, Ma'ruf Amin and the MUI adopted a more accommodating stance toward the government, having effectively become part of the governing coalition (Miichi, 2025). This view should be scrutinized, however, since there was no official statement from MUI, only a personal statement from a high-ranking official of MUI.

The structure of the network during the 2019 reform displayed a relatively centralized configuration around state actors. Government institutions responsible for women's empowerment and child protection occupied particularly strategic positions due to their institutional authority and direct access to the legislative process. Members of parliament, especially those involved in legislative committees, also played key roles in shaping the deliberation and passage of the amendment.

Civil society organizations occupied an important supporting position within the network. Although they did not possess formal decision-making authority, these organizations contributed policy expertise, empirical data, and advocacy pressure that strengthened the case for reform. Through coalition-building and sustained engagement with policymakers, they were able to maintain visibility and influence within the policy process.

By contrast, some religious actors appeared to occupy relatively peripheral positions within the network during this particular reform process. While they remained influential in broader public discourse, their direct involvement in the legislative arena was more limited compared to earlier debates on family law. This shift suggests a partial reconfiguration of power relations within the policy network, in which state actors and reform-oriented coalitions gained greater centrality.

3.3 Actor's Interests and Resources

The third dimension of analysis focuses on the interests and resources possessed by actors within the policy network. According to the policy network approach, actors pursue policy objectives based on their institutional roles, normative commitments, and available resources.

State actors supporting the revision of the Marriage Law were motivated by multiple considerations. The governments have an interest in strengthening child protection policies and promoting gender equality as part of their commitment to the SDGs (*Presidential Decree No. 59 of 2017 on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals*, 2017). Minister of PPPA strengthened this intention with her statement and goals to restrict child marriage in Indonesia (Kementerian PPPA, 2016). More importantly, the need to comply with the Constitutional Court ruling created a strong institutional incentive to revise the law. The government also has a strong executive power as its resources. With this power, the government could exert more influence on other actors.

The parliament (DPR), which naturally came from many parties with mixed interests, but generally they want to keep their constituents support to ensure re-election, thus they need to brand themselves as supportive of their constituents causes. The progressive cause itself, in Indonesia, was famously carried by *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (PDIP). They are member of the Progressive Alliance (Progressive Alliances, n.d.) and already declared themselves as a progressive left party (CNN Indonesia, 2023). Their member interests, like Eva Kusuma Sundari, naturally include progressive interests, including the restriction of child marriage. Likewise, the parliament members from right conservative Islamic parties like PPP and PKS will more likely oppose the revision. Both parties indeed proposed a lower marriage age for women in the final legislation discussion (Kompas.com, 2019). The parliament's resources are legislative power and influence in their party inside parliament.

Civil society organizations were primarily driven by normative goals of their respective organizations. The feminist groups promote emancipation and gender equality, the child rights groups advocate stronger child protection policies, reform law groups advocating law and judicial reform, and lastly, the progressive Muslim movement interests are initiating a progressive interpretation of religion to be in line with modern values. Their main resources included advocacy networks, policy research, public campaigns, connections with international organizations, and, for the progressive Muslim movement, moral authority.

Conservative religious actors, on the other hand, generally view themselves as protectors of divine value. They were concerned that changes to the legal framework of marriage could challenge established interpretations of religious norms governing family life, and in the end, take religion out of marriage (Ijtima Ulama Komisi Fatwa se-Indonesia, 2018; NU Online, 2014). Their primary resources consisted of moral authority, social influence within religious communities, and the ability to shape public discourse through religious institutions.

Table 2. Interest and Resources of Marriage Law Revision Advocates

Policy Actors	Interest	Resources
Government	Meeting commitment to SDGs	Legislative and Executive power
Progressive Parliament Members	Represents the interests and needs of their constituents	Legislative power and network influence inside parliament
Feminist Groups	Promoting gender equality	Advocacy networks, policy research, public

Policy Actors	Interest	Resources
Child Right Groups	Strengthening child protection policies	campaigns, and connections with international organizations
Reform Law Groups	Advocating for law and judicial reform	Religious and moral references
Islamic Progressive Groups	Initiating progressive interpretation of religious text	

The distribution of interests and resources among these actors contributed to a complex dynamic within the policy network. While state institutions possessed formal authority over the legislative process, civil society organizations provided critical informational and advocacy resources. Religious actors, although less directly involved in the legislative arena, continued to exert influence through their broader societal legitimacy.

Network Interaction

The Indonesian political network environment, the absence of strong *political parties at the elite level, and the availability of a policy window to raise the minimum age of marriage for women affected network structure, interests, and resources*. It affected network structure by delivering numerous civil society organization and, more importantly, enabling fruitful interactions amongst thus civil societies and to other policy actors, including state actors. This democratization of the network opens many possibilities for advocacy campaigns. These eventually affected the patterns of interaction among actors within the policy network. These interactions include negotiations, coalition formation, strategic framing, and other forms of political engagement that influence the policymaking process.

In the case of the 2019 Marriage Law revision, interactions within the policy network were characterized by two patterns of networks; the first was the existing networks between progressives' civil society groups across platforms. This network coalition became more evident during the 2017 submission to the Constitutional Court of Indonesia, when the various groups consolidated under the alliance Koalisi 18+. Interviews with Frenia Nababan, former Advocacy and Program Director of PKBI, reveal these dynamics where, at that time, various organizations divided responsibilities according to their respective resources and capacities. For instance, KPI and ECPAT Indonesia, due to their extensive networks reaching local communities, were responsible for identifying victims who could serve as petitioners in the case submitted to the Constitutional Court

of Indonesia. Meanwhile, ICJR, which focuses on legal reform, was tasked with preparing the legal documents for submission to the Court. Other organizations, such as PKBI, which have extensive experience in advocacy and public campaigns, were responsible for organizing campaign activities. (F. Nababan, personal communication, March 13, 2026; *Putusan Nomor 22/PUU-XV/2017*, n.d.). Meanwhile, KUPI was involved indirectly but significantly by issuing a religious ruling (fatwa) prohibiting child marriage in 2017 (Fatwa No. 02/MK-KUPI-1/IV/2017, n.d.). Providing a moral foundation and strong arguments for the petitioners.

The 2017 submission also marked relatively the first time that women's and child rights activists collaborated effectively in an advocacy, as Nababan said, "... raising marriage age was the first time of how activists in the child rights movement united with the women's *movement* ... " (F. Nababan, personal communication, December 18, 2025). This statement was corroborated by Hening Budiawati from Setara Foundation, who said that, previously, there had been a certain awkwardness in communication between them, as women's rights activists tended to appear more serious and sensitive compared to child rights activists, who were often more informal, playful, and irreverent in their interactions. (H. Budiawati, personal communication, December 18, 2025).

The second pattern of network was cooperation between state actors and civil society organizations. Advocacy groups worked closely with government agencies and sympathetic legislators to provide research evidence, draft policy proposals, and build broader support for the amendment. The president and the relevant ministries subsequently provided prompt support for the advocacy efforts of progressive groups. This support was driven in part by the ruling of the Constitutional Court of Indonesia, as well as by the arguments advanced by progressive groups highlighting the economic and health-related harms associated with child marriage (Miichi, 2025; F. Nababan, personal communication, February 24, 2025). The president himself fully supported the amendment of the law and assigned four ministers to deliberate on the revision of the legislation in 2019 (antaranews.com, 2019).

Cooperation with legislators proved to be more challenging, as civil society organizations in fact possessed limited leverage to negotiate with them. Advocacy groups also found it difficult to collaborate with parliamentary factions and commissions due to their large and diverse membership. Consequently, the strategy adopted was to work closely with several legislators who were particularly concerned about and supportive of the issue of child marriage (F. Nababan, personal communication, March 13, 2026). This was largely carried out during the legislative

deliberation process for the revision of the law in the parliament. Eva Kusuma Sundari and Rahayu Saraswati Djojohadikusumo have been the legislators who played the most significant roles in the 2019 revision of the law (Miichi, 2025). Both come from relatively progressive parties, PDIP and Gerindra Party, respectively, and have been widely recognized as advocates of human rights. It is difficult to identify precisely what forms of resource exchange occurred between progressive groups and these legislators. However, indirectly, advocacy groups provided research data and other relevant information to the legislators, who then worked within their respective capacities to advance the revision of the law, partly with the aim of strengthening their public image as advocates for the rights of women and children to their constituents.

The collaboration established by advocacy groups with various stakeholders effectively marginalized conservative Islamist groups from the mainstream discourse surrounding the revision of the Marriage Law. In practical terms, they no longer held a significant role after the 2015 submission. Meanwhile, advocacy groups tended to avoid engaging directly with these groups that clearly opposed the revision of the law. Nevertheless, although direct exchanges between them were minimal, there are indications that negotiation and compromise still occurred. Although the amendment successfully raised the minimum marriage age to nineteen, the legal mechanism allowing courts to grant marriage dispensations was retained. This provision can be interpreted as a pragmatic compromise aimed at accommodating concerns from more conservative actors while still achieving the core objective of reform.

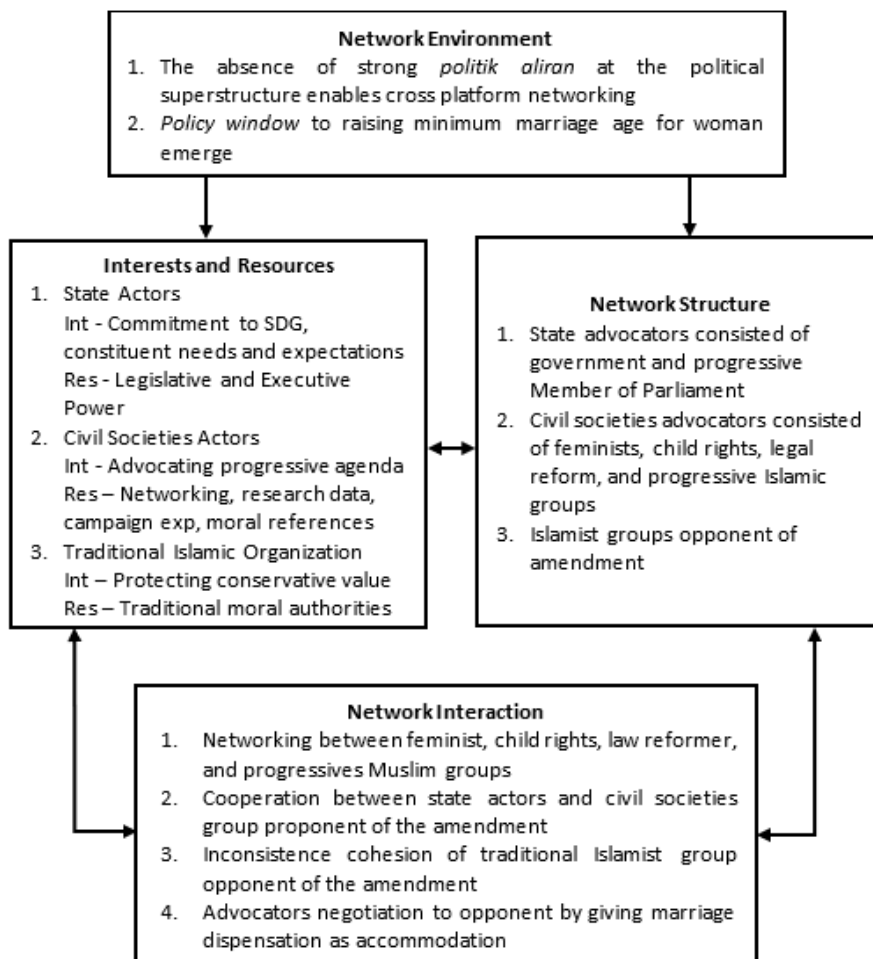


Figure 4. Policy Network Approach in Marriage Law Revision Advocacy

Overall, the patterns of interaction within the policy network suggest that policy change was not driven solely by the dominance of a single actor. Instead, the reform emerged from the strategic coordination of multiple actors who were able to form alliances, reframe the policy debate, and navigate institutional constraints within the broader policy environment.

4. Discussion

This study set out to explain the success of the 2019 Marriage Law revision through the lens of the policy network approach developed by David Marsh and Martin Smith. The findings confirm that the configuration of relationships among state actors, civil society

organizations, and selected political elites played a role in enabling policy change. The emergence of a cohesive advocacy network, supported by government institutions and progressive parliament members, collectively explains the effectiveness of the advocacy process. This supports the core proposition of the policy network approach that policy outcomes are shaped not only by actor preferences but by the structure and dynamics of their interactions.

However, while the policy network perspective provides a strong explanatory framework, the findings also reveal that network dynamics alone are insufficient to fully account for the success of the reform. The emergence of a favorable *policy window*, in the sense articulated by John Kingdon, was equally critical in enabling the network to operate effectively. Several contingent political events significantly altered the opportunity structure within which the network functioned. The arrest of Patrialis Akbar, a key conservative figure within the Constitutional Court, led to the acceptance of the 2017 petition, which in turn generated a binding legal mandate for legislative revision. In addition, the selection of Ma'ruf Amin as vice president may prompt MUI to adopt a more accommodating stance toward the reform. Together, these developments reduced ideological resistance and strengthened the position of reform-oriented actors within the policy network.

The interaction between these structural contingencies and network dynamics highlights an important theoretical implication. While the policy network approach emphasizes the relational configuration of actors, this case demonstrates that network effectiveness is highly dependent on exogenous political conditions that may not be easily reproduced. The advocacy coalition was able to capitalize on a rare convergence of judicial, political, and institutional factors that collectively opened a window of opportunity for reform. In the absence of such conditions, similar network configurations may not yield comparable outcomes. This suggests that policy networks should be understood not as stable mechanisms that consistently produce policy change, but as context-dependent arrangements whose effectiveness is contingent upon broader political developments.

In sum, this study demonstrates that the success of the 2019 Marriage Law revision was the product of both effective policy network dynamics and a uniquely favorable constellation of political events. While the policy network approach provides a powerful framework for understanding how actors coordinate and exercise influence, its explanatory power is significantly enhanced when combined with attention to temporal and contextual factors such as policy windows. This combination offers a more

comprehensive understanding of policy change in complex and contested governance environments, while also highlighting the inherent difficulty of replicating such success across different contexts.

The result of this study also shows different findings or perspectives after comparing it with other studies, especially of Miichi (2025), Eddyono (2025) Zein et al. (2025), and Fadli & Subono (2023). While these previous studies have acknowledged the importance of alliances and networking among civil society actors in advancing the Marriage Law revision, these works generally treat such relationships as supportive or descriptive elements of advocacy rather than as the primary unit of analysis. In contrast, this study departs from others by explicitly applying the Policy Network Approach of David Marsh and Martin Smith to systematically examine how relationships, resource dependencies, and actor positioning shape policy outcomes. This combined framework allows the analysis to move beyond identifying the existence of alliances toward explaining how network structure, interaction patterns, and shifts in actor centrality condition the effectiveness of advocacy strategies.

5. Conclusion

This study implies that policy advocacy could be understood as the product of dynamics within policy networks. The success, however, depends on particular situational contexts inside the political system that create a policy window that makes such progressive policy change favorable. The findings then suggest that the success observed in this case may be difficult to replicate, as it depended on a unique convergence of events. This insight has practical implications. For advocacy actors, building strong networks, forming coalitions, and strategically framing policy issues remain essential components of successful advocacy. However, these strategies must be complemented by the ability to recognize and exploit moments of political opportunity. At the same time, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The analysis is based on a single case study and relies primarily on qualitative data, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could address this limitation by conducting comparative analyses across different policy reforms or by employing mixed-method approaches to more systematically examine the interaction between network structures and political contingencies.

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