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Politicisation of Agrarian Legal Conflict as Political Capital: A *Fiqh Siyasah* Perspective

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Abstract:

Urban agrarian legal conflicts in Indonesia started to arise following state land governance policies and the acceleration of land asset certification, raising questions about land rights and legal protection for long-term residents. During the 2024 Surabaya mayoral election, tensions intensified as PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI) accelerated land-asset certification, affecting residents in several urban neighbourhoods. The dispute over the legal certainty of land rights entered the electoral arena and was politicised by political elites as a strategy to mobilise support and secure electoral victory. This article examines how agrarian legal conflict is politicised as political capital and how affected residents interpret and respond to limited political choices when their right to the city is under threat. A qualitative approach was employed through field observation, document analysis, and in-depth interviews conducted in three affected sub-districts in Surabaya: Petemon, Gundih, and Pacar Keling. The analysis integrates the theory of political representation developed by Hanna Pitkin with the perspective of *fiqh siyasah* concerning *'adl* (justice), *maslahah* (public welfare), and political legitimacy as articulated by Abu al-Hasan al-

Mawardi. The findings reveal three patterns of political responses among affected residents: political apathy due to weakened channels of representation; clientelistic co-optation through neighbourhood governance networks, such as RT/RW, accompanied by promises of compensation; and electoral resistance expressed through support for the empty-box option. Politicising agrarian legal conflict proved effective as political capital, leading to a procedural electoral victory. However, from a *fiqh siyasah* perspective, political legitimacy cannot be determined solely by electoral success but must also reflect justice and the protection of public welfare. This study contributes theoretically by employing *fiqh siyasah* as an analytical framework to evaluate the gap between procedural electoral victory and normative legitimacy in urban agrarian conflicts.

Keywords: agrarian legal conflict; political capital; electoral politics; fiqh siyasah; political representation

Introduction

Single-candidate elections have become an increasingly visible feature of local democracy in Indonesia,¹ raising concerns about political competition, accountability, and the substantive realisation of popular sovereignty.² In such elections, voters are formally given a choice between a single candidate pair and an empty box,³ yet this limited electoral configuration often weakens the representative function of elections.⁴ The problem escalates when electoral closure coincides with unresolved socio-legal conflicts. In Surabaya's 2024 mayoral election, the issue lay not only in the absence of meaningful electoral competition but also in the persistence of agrarian legal conflict involving residents whose land rights were destabilised by PT Kereta Api Indonesia's (hereinafter, PT KAI) accelerated asset certification.⁵ Under these conditions, the election cannot be understood solely as a procedural

¹ Vivin Sanjaya and Imron Rizki A, "Sole Candidate in the Local Leader Election and Its Implications on the Supervision of the Democratic Process in Indonesia," *Al-Bayyinah* 5, no. 1 (August 2021): 98–112, <https://doi.org/10.35673/al-bayyinah.v5i1.1269>.

² Muhammad Abdullahi Maigari and Kamselem Shehu, "Diasporic Participation In Homeland Democratic Processes: Democracy Beyond Border In The Internet Era," *Journal of Religion, Local Politics, and Law* 1, no. 1 (January 2025): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.64595/jrlpl.130>.

³ Syaiful Rohman, Marthen Napang, and Puspitasari Puspitasari, "Degradation of Democracy with the Existence of a Single Candidate for Regional Head Elections in Indonesia," *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik* 35, no. 2 (June 2022): 160–69, <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V35I22022.160-169>.

⁴ Ahmad Gelora Mahardika, "Fenomena Kotak Kosong Dalam Pemilukada Serta Implikasinya Dalam Sistem Ketatanegaraan Indonesia," *Jurnal Adhyasta Pemilu* 1, no. 2 (December 2021): 69–84, <https://doi.org/10.55108/jap.v1i2.9>.

⁵ Erika Zahra Fitriantanta et al., "Gen Z's Perception of the Application of the Presidential Election Result Recapitulation Information System in Surabaya," *The Journal of Society and Media* 9, no. 2 (October 2025): 479–503, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v9n2.p479-503>.



democratic event; rather, it must also be examined as a political arena shaped by legal uncertainty, unequal recognition, and struggles over urban citizenship.⁶

The Surabaya case is especially important, as it presents a concrete empirical legal issue.⁷ The contradiction between the state-backed formalisation of land claims and the socio-historical claims of residents who had long resided in, taxed, inherited, and, in some cases, legally certified the disputed land.⁸ The freezing of *sertifikat hak milik* (SHM or freehold title) status and the strengthening of PT KAI's claim through *grondkaart*-based legal arguments⁹ did not merely spark an administrative dispute.¹⁰ It created legal uncertainty over ownership, weakened residents' capacity to defend their rights, and left the affected residents who had fulfilled civic obligations with no legal protection.¹¹ This condition matters politically because when legal institutions fail to provide recognition and remedy, citizens often redirect their struggle from legal forums to electoral and extra-electoral arenas.¹² The Surabaya election, therefore, reveals how agrarian conflict may become politicised as electoral capital, even while the underlying legal grievances remain unresolved.¹³

Existing studies on single-candidate elections in Indonesia report declining democratic quality, elite domination, weak party competition, and eroded accountability.¹⁴ Some other studies on agrarian conflict focus on land dispossession, legal uncertainty, spatial exclusion, and the marginalisation of urban poor communities under state and corporate pressure.¹⁵ In addition, research on clientelism and local electoral politics explains how precarious communities are often

⁶ Ratna Riyanti, "Maintaining Direct Regional Head Elections, Solutions or Challenges?," *Journal of Governance* 7, no. 3 (September 2022), <https://doi.org/10.31506/jog.v7i3.16325>.

⁷ Hendra Wijaya, "Legal Uncertainty and Urban Land Tenure in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Legal Studies* 6, no. 2 (2021): 201–20, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jils.v6i2.46271>.

⁸ Ahmad Ridwan, "Stigma, Surveillance, and Feminized Aftermaths: An Intersectional Feminist Inquiry into the Lives of Women and Children in Former Terrorist Families in Indonesia," *Women's Studies International Forum* 117 (July 2026): 103316, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2026.103316>.

⁹ Sahati and Gunawan Djajaputra, "Grondkaart Legality as Evidence of Land Tenure Rights by Pt. Kai According to Agrarian Law," *International Journal of Educational Review, Law And Social Sciences (IJERLAS)* 3, no. 5 (June 2023): 1386–93, <https://doi.org/10.54443/ijerlas.v3i5.998>.

¹⁰ Virgia Intansari and Irene Eka Sihombing, "Analisis Grondkaart Milik Pt. Kai (Persero) Sebagai Bukti Kepemilikan Hak Atas Tanah," *Reformasi Hukum Trisakti* 3, no. 4 (November 2021): 599–607, <https://doi.org/10.25105/refor.v4i2.13606>.

¹¹ Farida Sekti Pahlevi, "Kekuatan Hukum GRONDKAART Dan Problematikanya Di Indonesia," *AL-MANHAJ: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pranata Sosial Islam* 4, no. 1 (June 2022): 69–82, <https://doi.org/10.37680/almanhaj.v4i1.1522>.

¹² Noer Fauzi Rachman, "Agrarian Politics and the Urban Poor: Land Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia," *Critical Asian Studies* 53, no. 4 (2021): 505–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2021.1923257>.

¹³ Rita Padawangi, "The Politics of Spatial Exclusion: Eviction and Resistance in Jakarta," *Cities* 112 (2021): 103118, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103118>.

¹⁴ Rohman, Napang, and Puspitasari, "Degradation of Democracy with the Existence of a Single Candidate for Regional Head Elections in Indonesia."

¹⁵ Gautam Bhan, *In the Public's Interest: Evictions, Citizenship, and Inequality in Contemporary Delhi* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvx5w8cf>.



incorporated into politics through brokerage, patronage, and pragmatic exchange rather than through substantive representation.¹⁶ While these studies are valuable, they generally examine electoral closure, agrarian conflict, and political incorporation as separate problems. They do not sufficiently explain how unresolved legal disputes over land can reshape citizens' electoral behaviour and simultaneously raise questions about the legitimacy of political authority in local democracy.¹⁷

This gap is particularly visible in the Surabaya case. Public discussion has largely treated the 2024 election either as an issue of single-candidate democracy or of campaign strategy.¹⁸ Such approaches risk narrowing the analysis to electoral mechanics and political victory, while the deeper socio-legal problem remains underdeveloped.¹⁹ The key issue is not simply whether the incumbent benefited electorally from conflict-affected areas, but how legal uncertainty regarding land rights transformed the meaning of representation, participation, and legitimacy among affected residents. In other words, the article concerns electoral strategy and how agrarian legal conflict entered the electoral arena, altering the relationship among law, citizenship, and political authority.²⁰

This article argues that the Surabaya conflict should be viewed through a socio-legal and political framework that links three dimensions.²¹ First, the conflict concerns the relationship between formal legality and lived legality: the gap between state-recognised documentary claims and residents' long-standing social, historical, and practical claims to urban land.²² Second, the conflict reveals a crisis of representation because residents most directly affected by legal uncertainty did not feel substantively represented in the electoral process.²³ Third, the case raises a question of legitimacy: can a procedurally valid electoral victory be considered fully

¹⁶ Piers Andreas Noak, "Political Clientelism in Rural Areas: Understanding the Impact on Regional Head Elections in Indonesia," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 7 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i7.4517>.

¹⁷ Edward Aspinall and Mada Sukmajati, *Electoral Dynamics in Indonesia: Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814762648>.

¹⁸ Mahardika, "Fenomena Kotak Kosong Dalam Pemilukada Serta Implikasinya Dalam Sistem Ketatanegaraan Indonesia."

¹⁹ Agus Machfud Fauzi et al., "Santri Community, Charisma, and the Contrast Political Agency: Electoral Victory and Defeat in Jombang and Mojokerto, Indonesia," *Ascarya: Journal of Islamic Science, Culture, and Social Studies* 5, no. 2 (December 2025): 224–35, <https://doi.org/10.53754/xzzh8v16>.

²⁰ Anton Lucas, *Land Disputes in Indonesia: Local History, Power and Justice* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824884308>.

²¹ Agus Machfud Fauzi, Moh Mudzakir, and Mohamed Omar Abdulrahim, "Social Conflict In Contestation Of Indonesia Election," *The Journal of Society and Media* 3, no. 2 (October 2019): 159, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v3n2.p159-177>.

²² Siti Handayani Herdiyanti et al., "2024 Election Reflections: Political Ambition and Legal Defeat," *International Journal of Scientific Multidisciplinary Research* 2, no. 8 (August 2024): 993–1002, <https://doi.org/10.55927/ijsmr.v2i8.10923>.

²³ Lutfi Effendi and Rineke Sara, "Legal Reform in Settlement of Land and Housing Disputes in Urban Areas to Achieve Legal Certainty," *International Journal of Social Service and Research* 5, no. 7 (July 2025): 781–88, <https://doi.org/10.46799/ijssr.v5i6.1258>.



legitimate when the elected authority fails to mediate conflict fairly or protect citizens facing dispossession? To address this question, the article combines Pitkin's theory of political representation with a *fiqh siyasah* perspective, especially the political thought of al-Mawardi.

The use of *fiqh siyasah* is central to this study. In this article, *fiqh siyasah* is not merely a moral afterthought or a general Islamic perspective on justice; it is employed as an analytical framework for evaluating how public authority manages competing claims, regulates communal affairs, and secures legitimacy during conflicts. In al-Mawardi's formulation, political authority is not judged solely by possession of office, but by how power is exercised in administering public affairs, preventing oppression, and protecting the interests of the governed.²⁴ This perspective is highly relevant to the Surabaya case because it allows the article to move beyond a narrow distinction between legal validity and political success. Through *fiqh siyasah*, the issue lies in whether public authority exercised *'adl* (justice), produced *maslahah* (public welfare), avoided *mafsadah* (public harm), and managed competing rights in a manner consistent with responsible governance.²⁵

This analytical move is what distinguishes the article from previous studies. Research on agrarian conflict in Indonesia has usually been dominated by legal, political economy, and social movement approaches,²⁶ while studies on elections tend to focus on party systems, clientelism, or campaign dynamics.²⁷ Much less attention has been given to the intersection between agrarian legal conflict, limited electoral choice, and the normative problem of political legitimacy.²⁸ This article contributes to the literature in two ways. Empirically, it shows how legal uncertainty over land rights shaped differing political responses among affected residents, including abstention, extra-electoral advocacy, clientelistic incorporation, and

²⁴ Abul Hasan Mawardi, *Al Ahkam As Sultaniyyah: The Laws of Islamic Governance*, trans. Asadullah Yate (California: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018).

²⁵ Syaiful Bahri, "The Construction of Indonesian Political Fiqh: Maqasid Al-Shariah Perspective and Ahmad Ar-Raisuni's Thoughts," *Justicia Islamica* 17, no. 1 (June 2020): 35–52, <https://doi.org/10.21154/justicia.v16i1.1671>.

²⁶ Abdul Muthallib, "Agrarian Conflict in Aceh: The Intersection of Corporate Interests, Farmers' Rights, and Government Governance," *Jurisprudensi: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah, Perundang-Undangan Dan Ekonomi Islam* 17, no. 1 (February 2025): 165–78, <https://doi.org/10.32505/jurisprudensi.v17i1.9884>; Ben White, Colum Graham, and Laksmi Savitri, "Agrarian Movements and Rural Populism in Indonesia," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 23, no. 1 (2023): 68–84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12506>.

²⁷ Firdaus Arifin et al., "Institutional Configuration and Competence of the Special Judiciary for Regional Election Disputes: A Comparative Study and Prospects for Implementation," *Jambura Law Review* 7, no. 2 (July 2025): 493–520, <https://doi.org/10.33756/jlr.v7i2.30949>.

²⁸ Pahrudin Hm, "The Role Of The Merangin Regency Government Through Welfare Policy In The Globalization Era," *The Journal of Society and Media* 3, no. 2 (October 2019): 216, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v3n2.p216-236>.



support for the empty box.²⁹ Theoretically, it demonstrates that *fiqh siyasah* can function as both a normative foundation and an analytical framework for examining the relationship between state authority,³⁰ citizens' rights,³¹ and the legitimacy of local electoral outcomes.³²

Based on this framework, the article intends to investigate three related questions. First, how did residents affected by PT KAI's land claim interpret and respond to the limited electoral choice in the 2024 Surabaya mayoral election? Second, how did agrarian legal conflict reshape the configuration of political representation and residents' political preferences in conflict-affected areas? Third, how can *fiqh siyasah*, particularly through al-Mawardi's conception of political authority,³³ be used to assess the gap between procedural electoral victory and substantive political legitimacy in this case? Through these questions, the article seeks to show that agrarian conflict in urban Indonesia is not limited to land administration or electoral strategy; it indicates a struggle over recognition, justice, and the rightful exercise of authority in democratic governance.³⁴

Methods

This study employs a qualitative case study design with a socio-legal approach to examine the relationship between urban agrarian legal conflict, electoral politics, and political legitimacy in Surabaya.³⁵ The dispute over land ownership involving PT KAI encompasses how legal rules, administrative practices, and institutional decisions are experienced, negotiated, and contested by residents. In this sense, the study combines an analysis of legal documents with an empirical investigation of how the law is exercised in society and how legal uncertainty shapes political behaviour.

²⁹ Pipit Kiptiyah and A. Naurah Shafa Kamila, "The Sholawat as A Form of Social Capital in The Political Contestation of Kediri Regency, Indonesia," *Journal of Southern Sociological Studies* 1, no. 2 (July 2025): 131–49, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsss.v1i2.42463>.

³⁰ Bulya Bulya and Suci Izzati, "Indonesia's Digital Literacy as a Challenge for Democracy in the Digital Age," *The Journal of Society and Media* 8, no. 2 (October 2024): 640–61, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v8n2.p640-661>.

³¹ Diva Mahkota Putri, Alessandra Decataldo, and Kenechukwu Emmanuel Nnamani, "Transactional Culture and the Reproduction of Patronage: Reading the Dawn Attack as a Socio-Political Practice in Lamongan, Indonesia," *Journal of Religion, Local Politics, and Law* 1, no. 4 (October 2025): 272–82, <https://doi.org/10.64595/jrlpl.v1n4.p289-297>.

³² Armyun Hasibuan, Miswari Miswari, and Ismail Fahmi Arrauf Nasution, "Religious And Cultural Demarcation: The Mysticism Dimension In The Pajonjong Bagas Tradition By The Batak Angkola Muslim Community." *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24, no. 2 (August 2024): 283, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i2.19585>.

³³ Mawardi, *Al Ahkam As Sultaniyyah*.

³⁴ Sukardi Sukardi, Muhammad Adib Alfarisi, and Riyani Riyani, "Systems of Government in Islamic Countries: The Dynamics of Sharia Law from the Prophetic Period to the Modern Era," *Justicia Islamica* 21, no. 2 (November 2024): 291–312, <https://doi.org/10.21154/justicia.v21i2.8465>.

³⁵ Rachman, "Agrarian Politics and the Urban Poor: Land Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia."



The research was conducted from January to July 2025 in three conflict-affected areas in Surabaya: RW 03 Sawahan Baru (Petemon), Pacar Keling, and the area around Pasar Turi (Gundih). These sites were selected purposively because they represent concentrated areas of land dispute, and the affected residents were situated within the socio-political context of the 2024 Surabaya mayoral election, which featured a single-candidate pair.³⁶ Data were collected through three techniques: document analysis, field observation, and in-depth semi-structured interviews. In total, interviews were conducted with three RW heads, five local community figures, three advocacy activists, three village officials, and six affected residents across the selected sites. Interviews lasted approximately 60 to 120 minutes and were conducted with the participants' consent.

Table 1. Overview of Participants.

No	Informants (Anonymous)	Address
1	Mr. Su	Sawahan Baru, Surabaya
2	Mr. Wa	Gundih, Surabaya
3	Mr. Ba	Sawahan Baru, Surabaya
4	Mr. Wi	Gundih, Surabaya
5	Mr. As	Pacar Keling, Surabaya
6	Mr. Ag	Pacar Keling, Surabaya

The analytical procedure was carried out in four stages. First, the legal dimension of the case was mapped through a socio-legal reading of documents and empirical evidence, focusing on the tension between formal-administrative land claims and residents' socio-historical claims to occupancy.³⁷ Second, the empirical data were coded thematically to identify major forms of residents' responses to the conflict and to support the empty box.³⁸ Third, the findings were interpreted through Pitkin's theory of political representation and Harvey-inspired concerns with spatial justice and urban inequality.³⁹ Fourth, *fiqh siyasah*, especially al-Mawardi's conception of political authority, served as an analytical framework for evaluating how public power was exercised in managing the conflict. It is used to assess *'adl* (justice), *maslahah* (public welfare), avoidance of *mafsadah* (harm), and responsible governance. Through the integration of socio-legal analysis, representation theory,

³⁶ Bhan, *In the Public's Interest: Evictions, Citizenship, and Inequality in Contemporary Delhi*.

³⁷ Adhistry Sitaresmi et al., "Legal Frameworks for Cybersecurity and Data Protection in Cloud-Based Notarial Systems in Indonesia: An Intersectional Analysis of Positive Law and Islamic Legal Principles," *Al-'Adalah* 22, no. 1 (June 2025): 29–62, <https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v22i1.26813>.

³⁸ Olle Törnquist, Neil Webster, and Kristian Stokke, *Rethinking Popular Representation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-96784-0>.

³⁹ Michael Douglass and Lily Huang, *Critical Urban Studies in Asia: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2023).



and *fiqh siyasah*,⁴⁰ this study examines the Surabaya case as a multi-layered conflict and tests it against substantive standards of justice.⁴¹

Results and Discussion

Fiqh Siyasah and State Decision after PT KAI Director Takes *Grondkaart* Document from the Netherlands

Agrarian conflict in Surabaya should not be understood merely as a technical dispute over land administration or as a by-product of electoral contestation. Rather, it is a socio-legal conflict concerning the legal recognition of land rights, the unequal exercise of state authority, and the problem of political legitimacy in the management of public affairs.⁴² In Indonesia, this issue must be viewed through the social-function principle of agrarian law, which implies that land governance cannot be assessed solely by formal administrative ownership claims; social use, settlement continuity, and the protection of people's welfare must also be taken into account. The Surabaya case, therefore, is about more than who owns the land on paper; it extends to how law, public authority, and residents' rights are negotiated in an unequal field.⁴³

This legal tension became sharper when PT KAI, supported by historical *grondkaart* claims and administrative coordination with land authorities, expedited the certification of state-linked land assets.⁴⁴ For residents who had resided on the land for decades, possessed SHM, paid taxes, and sustained neighbourhood life, this policy did not merely change bureaucratic status.⁴⁵ It triggered legal uncertainty, as their capacity to transfer, secure, or fully exercise rights over land they had long treated as their own was paralysed. The result was a conflict between formal legality and lived legality: the state reinforced its documentary claim, while residents' practical legal protection was eroded.⁴⁶ This conflict is evident in the testimony of Mr. Su, head of RW 03 Sawahan Baru, stating,

*“Our SHMs were issued in 1967, and some were issued in 1970. During the years of issuance until 2017, residents were still able to buy and sell land at the National Land Agency (BPN) and transfer ownership. After 2017 until 2025, residents' SHMs were blocked (frozen) at the request of PT KAI DAOP 8 Surabaya. So, even though residents have SHMs, they cannot use them.”*⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Mawardi, *Al Ahkam As Sultaniyyah*.

⁴¹ Hanna F. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, n.d.).

⁴² Rachman, “Agrarian Politics and the Urban Poor: Land Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia.”

⁴³ Lucas, *Land Disputes in Indonesia: Local History, Power and Justice*.

⁴⁴ Sahati and Djajaputra, “Grondkaart Legality as Evidence of Land Tenure Rights by Pt. Kai According to Agrarian Law.”

⁴⁵ Intansari and Sihombing, “Analisis Grondkaart Milik Pt. Kai (Persero) Sebagai Bukti Kepemilikan Hak Atas Tanah.”

⁴⁶ Pahlevi, “Kekuatan Hukum GRONDKAART Dan Problematikanya Di Indonesia.”

⁴⁷ Mr. Su, Personal Interview (Surabaya, May 26, 2025)



This statement shows that the conflict did not begin as a purely informal occupation dispute. Residents had documentary evidence and prior legal functionality attached to their land. The problem emerged when state-backed administrative action rendered these documents ineffective. In socio-legal terms, this produced not only uncertainty over ownership but also over citizenship, as legal recognition, residence, and public belonging became unstable simultaneously.

The same sense of legal exclusion appears in Wandoyo's account from Gundih:

"We have lived on the land and house our grandparents passed down through generations. To this day, we cannot buy or sell the land or change the name because it was unilaterally acquired by PT KAI. The SHM we hold is worthless because it has expired. Submitting to the courts has always failed, and to this day, we have not been informed what PT KAI will use our neighbourhood land for. There has been no dialogue and no official notification".⁴⁸

This quotation reveals that the issue is not merely legal documentation, but the collapse of dialogical governance. Residents experienced not only the suspension of property rights, but also the absence of explanation, participation, and remedy. This is precisely where Pitkin's notion of representation and Harvey's concept of spatial justice intersect. The conflict is not only about land control but also about who is heard, who is recognised, and whose continued presence in urban space is deemed legitimate.⁴⁹ When residents are displaced from secure tenure arrangements, they are also deprived of meaningful political recognition. At this point, *fiqh siyasah* becomes analytically important. In this article, *fiqh siyasah* is not used merely to state that justice matters. It is used to evaluate whether a public authority manages conflict in a manner consistent with just governance. Drawing from al-Mawardi, authority must be judged by how power is administered, how public affairs are regulated, and whether the ruler's actions protect the governed from oppression and public harm.⁵⁰ This means that the central question is not only whether the state has formal authority, but whether the use of that authority reflects just political stewardship.

From this perspective, the Surabaya case reflects a conflict between two claims: the state's formal administrative claim to the land and the residents' socio-historical claim based on long-term occupancy, everyday settlement continuity, fiscal contributions, and prior legal recognition. A *fiqh siyasah* reading is not intended to sugarcoat residents' claims or reject state authority altogether.⁵¹ Rather, it asks how

⁴⁸ Wa. Personal Interview (Surabaya, May 27, 2025)

⁴⁹ Evie Ariadne Shinta Dewi, Hadi S. Arifin, and Ikhsan Fuadi, "Nurturing Political Engagement: Political Communication Strategies for Generation Z in the Lead-up to the 2024 Election in West Java," *The Journal of Society and Media* 7, no. 2 (October 2023): 370–88, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v7n2.p370-388>.

⁵⁰ Mawardi, *Al Ahkam As Sultaniyyah*.

⁵¹ Bahri, "The Construction of Indonesian Political Fiqh."



public authority weighs competing claims in light of justice (*'adl*), public welfare (*masalah*), and the avoidance of harm (*mafsadah*).⁵² The problem in this case is that state authority appears to have privileged administrative consolidation without adequately mitigating residents' legal vulnerability and dependence on the land for social reproduction. The significance of the *grondkaart* issue, therefore, lies not only in evidentiary disputes under Indonesian agrarian law, but in the convergence of documentary legality, urban inequality, and political authority.⁵³ The Surabaya case shows that when a public authority relies heavily on a formal title while neglecting socio-historical entitlements and access to remedy, the law is more likely to exclude the affected residents rather than to protect them. In this sense, agrarian conflict becomes a point where legality and legitimacy visibly diverge.

Citizens' Political Preferences Amid Legal Uncertainty Over Land

The findings of this study show that residents' political preferences in conflict-affected areas were shaped less by ordinary campaign considerations than by their experience of legal uncertainty.⁵⁴ Residents in Sawahan Baru, Gundih, Pacar Keling, and Pasar Turi were not simply responding to candidate image or party competition. They were responding to a more basic question: whether the electoral system could still function as a meaningful avenue for justice when their land rights had been under threat. This condition signals that their political behaviour should be interpreted as legally conditioned political judgment rather than as routine voter preference.⁵⁵ The first pattern is abstention. In Sawahan Baru, Ba explained his refusal to vote:

*"Why should I go to the polling station? It's useless if the elected candidate can't help the residents. My coming, and not coming, won't have much of an impact on the sustainability of Surabaya's land. So, I just stayed home."*⁵⁶

This explanation shows that abstention was not caused by apathy in the ordinary sense. Basuni did not withdraw because he lacked interest in politics, but because he doubted that electoral participation could lead to legal protection. Voting lost its meaning when political office no longer seemed connected to resolving land insecurity. In other words, the abstention represented their silent resistance to a

⁵² Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Muhammad Al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah: The Laws of Islamic Governance* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd., n.d: trans. Asadullah Yate, n.d.).

⁵³ Diva Mahkota Putri, Alessandra Decataldo, and Kenechukwu Emmanuel Nnamani, "Transactional Culture and the Reproduction of Patronage: Reading the Dawn Attack as a Socio-Political Practice in Lamongan, Indonesia," *Journal of Religion, Local Politics, and Law* 1, no. 4 (October 2025): 272–82, <https://doi.org/10.64595/jrlpl.v1n4.p289-297>.

⁵⁴ Wijaya, "Legal Uncertainty and Urban Land Tenure in Indonesia."

⁵⁵ Rita Padawangi, "Housing the Urban Poor in Indonesia: A Review of Policies and Practices," *Pacific Affairs* 91, no. 3 (2018): 477–95, <https://doi.org/10.5509/2018913477>.

⁵⁶ Ba, Personal Interview (Surabaya, May 30, 2025)



political process perceived as procedurally open but substantively ineffective. A similar pattern appears in Gundih, where Wi stated,

*“Our not coming to the polling stations doesn't mean we don't care about the fate of our land, but rather it's a form of disappointment and protest against the government. They're ignoring this issue and tending to play it safe by not standing up for us”.*⁵⁷

This statement clarifies that not participating in voting should be viewed as a judgment on representation. Through Pitkin's framework, the problem is not simply low participation, but the weakness of substantive representation, in which residents no longer saw formal politics as carrying their claims into decision-making arenas. According to *fiqh siyasah*, this also points to a failure of *'adl*, which should not be reduced to abstract morality; rather, it must be treated as the fair mediation of competing claims by public authority. When residents with documentary evidence of entitlement, long-term residence, and clear social dependence on the land are left without a meaningful remedy, abstention is an indicator that public authority is no longer pro-people. The second pattern is advocacy. In Pacar Keling, resistance went beyond mere electoral withdrawal; they took organised legal and political action outside electoral channels. As explained,

*“We went to the city council with our lawyers for hearings and opinions. We've been to the council office twice, and the process is ongoing. We didn't go directly to court, as PT KAI would certainly win, as they are both state-owned entities and have been playing tricks. We always approach the council, as our leaders, to get their help in our efforts”.*⁵⁸

This shows that residents did not simply disengage from politics. Instead, they relocated their struggle from elections to contentious forms of representation. Their choice to seek hearings and legal advocacy suggests that the electoral arena was no longer trusted as a place where grievances over land conflict could be meaningfully negotiated. In socio-legal terms, this reflects a transfer of political efficacy from formal electoral participation to civil-society-based pressure. From the perspective of *fiqh siyasah*, this pattern suggests a problem in the exercise of public authority. If leadership is a trust directed toward protecting the governed, then the displacement of citizen claims from formal representation to advocacy channels indicates that this trust has not been adequately fulfilled. In other words, behind it being a legal tactic, advocacy is an indicator of legitimacy failure. Citizens remain politically active, but they no longer expect justice to come from the electoral process alone.

The third pattern is support for the empty box. Unlike abstention, this response remained within the formal electoral arena, yet used the available mechanism to express rejection. In Pasar Turi, the empty box symbolised refusal directed at

⁵⁷ Wi, Personal Interview (Surabaya, May 31, 2025)

⁵⁸ As/Ag, Personal Interview (Surabaya, June 2, 2025)



candidates perceived as unable or unwilling to address the structural problem of land insecurity. This is significant because it indicates that conflict-affected residents did not necessarily reject democracy as such. Rather, they rejected an electoral configuration that offered no meaningful alternatives.⁵⁹ The analytical value of the empty box becomes more understandable when linked to *masalah*. In this article, *masalah* is treated not as a vague moral slogan, but as a criterion for evaluating whether political arrangements protect people's welfare and interests.⁶⁰ The existence of only one candidate pair, combined with unresolved agrarian conflict, narrowed the possibility that elections could function as a mechanism for negotiating public welfare. Therefore, support for the empty box reflected a perceived deficit of electoral *masalah*: the procedure remained intact, but its capacity to generate public benefit for affected residents was highly doubted.⁶¹

Taken together, these three patterns: abstention, advocacy, and support for the empty box, demonstrate that electoral behaviour in the Surabaya case is inseparable from legal experience. Residents responded politically to the way the law functions in their lives. The freezing of SHM, the uncertainty of tenure, weak access to remedy, and the state's limited responsiveness all reshaped how they understood participation itself. This finding extends previous discussions on local democracy⁶² by showing that in agrarian conflict settings, legal uncertainty can become a decisive force in restructuring political subjectivity.⁶³ Statistical data show that the abstention rate remains high, making the election process far from satisfactory. Furthermore, for affected residents, turnout rates are low, as based on field observations and interviews. The following Table shows the overall vote count for the 2024 Surabaya regional election.

This study found that Surabaya residents displaced by the nationalisation of PT KAI assets responded to the 2024 regional elections, which featured only a single candidate, with three political preference patterns: apathy, clientelistic co-optation, and symbolic resistance through an empty box. Apathy arose because residents felt they lacked legitimate channels for political representation. This situation reinforces the finding that unequal access to legal and social justice leads to the disengagement from political participation among marginalised citizens.⁶⁴ Apathy can be interpreted in two ways among voters: those who choose not to vote and those who withdraw from the local democratic process, namely, by engaging with NGOs and advocacy.

Table 2. Overview of the 2024 Surabaya Regional Election

⁵⁹ Ken Setiawan, "Empty Ballots and Local Democracy in Indonesia," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 42, no. 1 (2023): 29–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034231152512>.

⁶⁰ Mawardi, *Al Ahkam As Sultaniyyah*.

⁶¹ Vedi R. Hadiz, *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316417842>.

⁶² Am Fauzi et al., "Maintaining Identity Political Culture In Indonesia," *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* 953 (January 2018): 012185, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/953/1/012185>.

⁶³ Rita Padawangi, "The Politics of Spatial Exclusion: Eviction and Resistance in Jakarta."

⁶⁴ A. Pratiwi and A. Tanjung, "Urban Poor and Disengagement from Local Democracy," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Politik* 23, no. 2 (2019): 101–16, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.42991>.

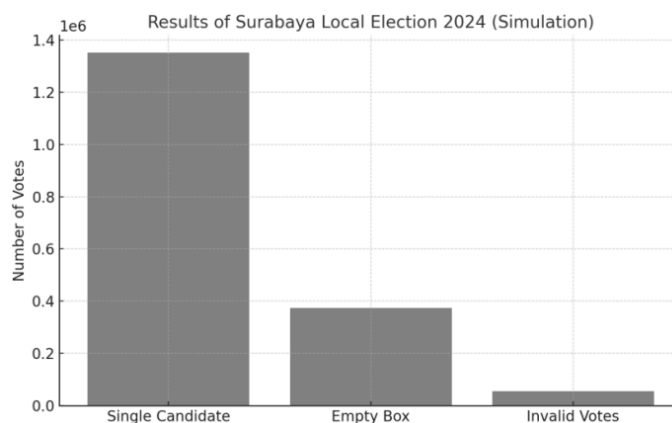


NO	Candidate	Voters	Percentage
1	Incumbent Sole Candidate (Eri Cahyadi - Armuji)	1,351,000	78.3%
2	Empty Box	374,000	21.7%
	Total Valid Votes	1,725,000	100%
	Invalid Votes	56,000	
	Number of Voter Participation	1,781,000	68.5% (of the total DPT)
	Permanent Voter List	2,600,000	100%

Source: Surabaya's KPU data

Clientelistic co-optation is evident in the involvement of the RT/RW network, which acts as a distribution channel of compensation or social assistance promises by the candidate, even though residents are aware of the minimal commitment to their legal protection. This phenomenon strengthens the patron-client political pattern in post-eviction urban spaces.⁶⁵

Figure 1. Results of the 2024 Surabaya Regional Election



Meanwhile, resistance is indicated by an increase in empty ballot boxes, particularly in polling stations (TPS) in areas affected by evictions. This indicates that residents symbolically expressed dissatisfaction with the local political configuration, consistent with findings that electoral democratic space without opposition encourages passive-aggressive expression among citizens.⁶⁶ Figure 2 shows the dominance of resigned acceptance (50%) in the public response to the legalisation of PT KAI land in Surabaya, which could benefit the incumbent in the 2024 regional elections. Open resistance (30%) presents an opportunity for the opposition, while clientelist adaptation (20%) reflects transactional practices, confirming that regional elections are inseparable from power relations and citizen adaptation strategies.⁶⁷

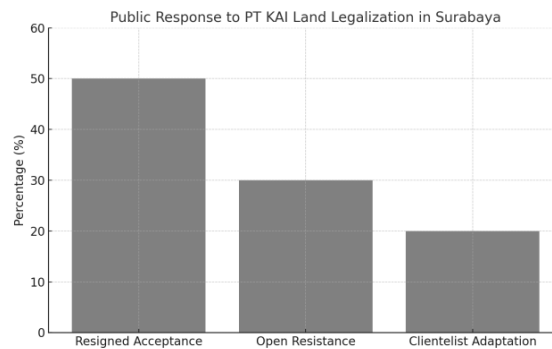
⁶⁵ Lucas, *Land Disputes in Indonesia: Local History, Power and Justice*.

⁶⁶ Rachman, "Agrarian Politics and the Urban Poor: Land Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia."

⁶⁷ Saiful Hasan and Ainur Rofiq, "Digital Campaign Strategy: TikTok Content Analysis of Candidate No. 1 Eri Armuji on Voters' Preferences in the 2024 Surabaya Regional Election," *Journal of Religion, Local Politics, and Law* 1, no. 2 (July 2025): 122–29, <https://doi.org/10.64595/jrlpl.220>.

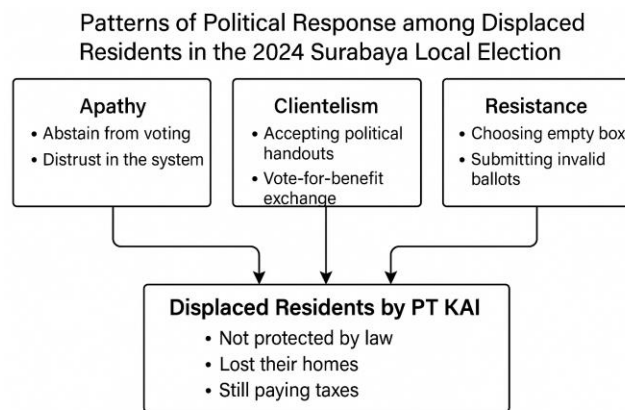


Figure 2. Public Voice on Land Acquisition by PT KAI



Meanwhile, the diagram highlights three patterns of political response among affected residents: apathy, clientelism, and resistance. In the 2024 Surabaya regional elections, structural vulnerability encouraged pragmatic choices while also creating space for symbolic resistance to policy injustice and weak state protection.

Diagram 1. Surabaya Residents’ Resistance to State Decisions



The Incumbent’s Efforts to Maintain Power amidst Agrarian Conflict

The Surabaya election also demonstrates that agrarian conflict can be transformed into political capital under conditions of limited electoral competition. The incumbent’s victory did not occur in a politically neutral environment. It took place in a context where legal uncertainty over land had already weakened public trust in formal institutions, yet no strong competing electoral alternative emerged. This condition enabled the incumbent to consolidate procedural victory while the underlying agrarian grievances remained unresolved.⁶⁸ The findings suggest that the incumbent’s political strength relied not only on personal popularity or campaign strategy, but also on structural asymmetry in the electoral field. Bureaucratic

⁶⁸ Rohman, Napang, and Puspitasari, “Degradation of Democracy with the Existence of a Single Candidate for Regional Head Elections in Indonesia.”



networks, neighbourhood intermediaries, media visibility, and digital campaign narratives all contributed to the production of a dominant political image.⁶⁹ At the same time, the core grievance of affected residents and uncertain land rights was never fully transformed into a decisive electoral counter-force. This imbalance explains how an election can produce an overwhelming formal victory while leaving many conflict-affected citizens unconvinced that justice is served.⁷⁰

This is where clientelistic co-optation becomes analytically important. In some areas, RT/RW networks appeared to function as channels through which promises of compensation or assistance circulated. Such practices should not be reduced to moral failure alone.⁷¹ In conditions of legal uncertainty, citizens often respond pragmatically to whatever channels remain available for negotiating survival. Yet this does not make the process politically neutral. Rather, it shows that access to benefits was mediated by unequal political incorporation rather than by secure legal recognition.⁷² From the standpoint of *fiqh siyasah*, this pattern can be read through *maslahah* and *tasarruf al-imam*. If authority is evaluated by how it manages public affairs for the common good, then the key question is whether political discretion was used to resolve conflict fairly or merely to stabilise support. In the Surabaya case, selective promises and neighbourhood brokerage may have generated short-term electoral accommodation, but they did not accurately address the substantive legal problem at the core of the conflict. Therefore, public benefit was distributed contingently and politically, rather than secured through just and durable policy. This indicates that the exercise of authority was more effective as electoral management than as the fair regulation of competing rights.⁷³

Digital campaigning deepened this pattern.⁷⁴ Official and supporting narratives emphasised development, urban progress, cleanliness, and youth engagement, leaving the agrarian conflict off the radar. This selective framing mattered because it shifted attention from structural legal injustice to managerial performance. In effect, the campaign represented authority as responsive and developmental, even as conflict-affected residents continued to experience legal uncertainty and weak

⁶⁹ Ambardi Kuskridho, "Democratic Alienation and Political Disengagement in Indonesia," *Jurnal Politik* 7, no. 1 (2022): 45–67, <https://doi.org/10.7454/jp.v7i1.345>.

⁷⁰ Hasan and Rofiq, "Digital Campaign Strategy."

⁷¹ D. Carpenter and S. Peña, "Clientelism and Urban Poor Adaptation in Southeast Asia," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 28, no. 3 (2020): 211–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2020.1773715>.

⁷² Aspinall and Sukmajati, *Electoral Dynamics in Indonesia: Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots*.

⁷³ Al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah: The Laws of Islamic Governance*.

⁷⁴ Mutiara Anjeli, Dwi Riswanda Imawan, and Triphanie Obligar, "Participation and Perception of Generation Z of Menganti Villages in the Regional Election Campaign on Social Media," *Journal of Religion, Local Politics, and Law* 1, no. 2 (July 2025): 84–91, <https://doi.org/10.64595/jrlpl.204>.



institutional protection.⁷⁵ The empty box result further clarifies this contradiction. Although it did not defeat the incumbent, its support in some conflict-affected areas indicates that electoral dissatisfaction had a real political form.⁷⁶ Quantitatively, however, this expression remained weaker than the incumbent's organised political machinery. The point is not simply that resistance failed, but that it operated under structurally unequal conditions. The residents marginalised in land governance also entered elections from a politically disadvantaged position. This confirms that legal marginalisation and political marginalisation were mutually reinforcing.⁷⁷

Seen through Pitkin, Harvey, and *fiqh siyasah* together, the incumbent's victory can therefore be interpreted as procedurally successful but substantively thin. Pitkin helps explain why representation was weak in the communities most affected by land insecurity.⁷⁸ Harvey clarifies that this was also a conflict over unequal urban inclusion. *Fiqh siyasah* then provides the evaluative framework for asking whether authority was exercised in a way that fulfilled justice, protected the governed, and advanced public welfare.⁷⁹ On these terms, the problem is not merely that the incumbent won, but that victory did not translate into fair conflict mediation or the restoration of residents' legal security.⁸⁰

The Need for Land Policy Reform and Mechanisms for Representing Marginalised Citizens in the Political Process: A *Fiqh Siyasah* Perspective

The empirical findings of this study indicate that agrarian conflict in Surabaya cannot be resolved solely through technical land administration or electoral continuity. A reconstruction of both land policy and political representation is required to resolve this issue. The persistence of legal uncertainty, the fragmentation of citizen responses, and the incumbent's procedurally strong but substantively limited legitimacy all point to a single conclusion: the current institutional arrangement is insufficient to ensure justice in conflict-affected urban communities.⁸¹

From a *fiqh siyasah* perspective, this conclusion must be reached through clear reasoning. First, the case reflects a conflict between the state's formal administrative claim and the residents' socio-historical claim to the land. Second, the public authority was expected to mediate these competing claims in a way that minimised harm and protected residents' welfare. Third, the findings show that this mediation

⁷⁵ Merlyna Lim, "Dis/Connection in the Age of Social Media: The Politics of Digital Populism in Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 81, no. 2 (2022): 273–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911822000054>.

⁷⁶ Andreas Schedler, *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism* (Oxford University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199680320.001.0001>.

⁷⁷ Rachman, "Agrarian Politics and the Urban Poor: Land Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia."

⁷⁸ Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*.

⁷⁹ Al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah: The Laws of Islamic Governance*.

⁸⁰ Douglass and Huang, *Critical Urban Studies in Asia: Theory and Practice*.

⁸¹ Lucas, *Land Disputes in Indonesia: Local History, Power and Justice*.



was weak, as legal uncertainty persisted, citizen trust declined, and political responses fragmented into abstention, advocacy, and symbolic resistance. On this basis, the problem is not merely that justice was absent in general terms, but that public authority did not adequately satisfy the standards of *'adl*, *maslahah*, and responsible political administration.⁸²

In this article, *'adl* functions as an analytical criterion for evaluating whether the state treated competing claims fairly and provided meaningful access to remedy. The evidence suggests that this did not occur sufficiently. Residents experienced the freezing of SHM, limited dialogue, uncertain legal pathways, and weak protection despite their long-term residence and civic contribution. Meanwhile, *maslahah* is used to assess whether the handling of the conflict produced inclusive public welfare. In this context, the result is limited,⁸³ as electoral stability was achieved, but the conflict itself remained unresolved. This means that procedural order was maintained without a corresponding restoration of substantive welfare for affected residents.⁸⁴

Legitimacy must therefore be understood more broadly. In the Surabaya case, legitimacy cannot be reduced to electoral victory or moral rhetoric. It must take into account the relation between authority, representation, public acceptance, and the actual resolution of conflict. Al-Mawardi is useful in this context, precisely because legitimacy in *siyasa* is not exhausted by possession of office. Authority becomes meaningful when it can administer public affairs, mediate competing interests, and protect citizens from oppression and harm. The weakness of this protective function explains why electoral victory did not automatically produce social acceptance in affected communities.⁸⁵ These findings imply the need for land policy reform that takes the social dimensions of agrarian rights seriously. Reform must move beyond documentary verification alone and create institutional mechanisms to recognise long-term residence, neighbourhood continuity, and citizens' lived dependency on urban land.⁸⁶ In practical terms, this involves strengthening accessible dispute-resolution mechanisms, expanding opportunities for mediation before coercive certification or eviction processes advance, and ensuring that residents do not suffer from being passive objects of land administration.⁸⁷

At the political level, mechanisms of representation also need reform. Marginalised urban residents often remain underrepresented in formal electoral and planning institutions, even when they are most directly affected by state policy. The

⁸² Mawardi, *Al Ahkam As Sultaniyyah*.

⁸³ Mawardi.

⁸⁴ Bahri, "The Construction of Indonesian Political Fiqh."

⁸⁵ Mawardi, *Al Ahkam As Sultaniyyah*.

⁸⁶ Rico J. R. Tambunan et al., "Justice, Land, and Sharia: Conceptualizing Agrarian Courts in the Settlement of Land Ownership Disputes," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 17, no. 2 (December 2025): 530–52, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v17i2.32486>.

⁸⁷ Padawangi, "Housing the Urban Poor in Indonesia: A Review of Policies and Practices."



findings suggest that procedural democracy becomes fragile when conflict-affected citizens no longer see formal politics as capable of protecting basic rights.⁸⁸ For this reason, more participatory and accountable channels are needed, whether through strengthened hearings, citizen forums, stronger legal-aid linkages, or other mechanisms that enable vulnerable communities to engage in decision-making processes before conflict hardens into dispossession.⁸⁹

From a *fiqh siyasah* perspective, such reforms are not peripheral additions. They are part of the proper exercise of public authority. If the task of government is to regulate communal affairs in ways that uphold justice and secure welfare, then land governance and political representation must be reconstructed together. Otherwise, agrarian conflict will continue to be managed administratively and exploited electorally, leaving its legal and social injuries unresolved.⁹⁰ From the above analysis, the broader contribution of this discussion is twofold. First, it shows that agrarian conflict, electoral behaviour, and political legitimacy must be viewed as interconnected processes rather than separate domains. Second, it demonstrates that *fiqh siyasah* can function as an analytical framework for examining this relationship⁹¹ by enabling a structured evaluation of how authority manages conflicts of right, how public welfare is distributed, and how legitimacy depends not only on procedure but also on the just exercise of power.⁹² In this way, the Surabaya case offers an important lesson: where land insecurity persists, democracy cannot be assessed only by electoral victory. It must also be assessed by whether political authority remains capable of protecting citizens, mediating conflict fairly, and sustaining trust in the justice of governance.⁹³

Conclusion

The article demonstrates that the politicisation of agrarian conflict influenced electoral behaviour not simply through campaign strategy, but through the weakening of residents' trust that formal political institutions could secure justice and recognition. The Surabaya case demonstrates a gap between procedural electoral legitimacy and substantive political legitimacy: the incumbent achieved formal victory, yet the underlying agrarian grievances and demands for recognition remained unresolved. The main contribution of this article lies in the empirical and theoretical domains. Empirically, it demonstrates that agrarian legal conflict in urban Indonesia can reshape political participation and produce differing responses among

⁸⁸ Mochamad Arif Affandi, Kacung Marijan, and Dwi Windyastuti, "Participatory Budgeting in Indonesia: From the Policy Innovation to the Democracy Innovation," *The Journal of Society and Media* 6, no. 2 (March 2023): 527–65, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v6n2.p527-565>.

⁸⁹ Törnquist, Webster, and Stokke, *Rethinking Popular Representation*.

⁹⁰ Mawardi, *Al Ahkam As Sultaniyyah*.

⁹¹ Mawardi.

⁹² Rachman, "Agrarian Politics and the Urban Poor: Land Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia."

⁹³ Setiawan, "Empty Ballots and Local Democracy in Indonesia."



affected citizens in the context of constrained local democracy. Theoretically, it shows that *fiqh siyasah* can function not merely as a normative supplement, but as an analytical framework for evaluating how public authority manages competing rights, distributes welfare, and sustains legitimacy in conflict settings.

This study also carries practical implications. For policymakers and local governance actors, the findings suggest that urban agrarian conflicts should not be handled only through documentary verification and administrative land certification. More accessible mediation mechanisms, stronger protection for long-term residents, and participatory forums for conflict-affected communities are necessary to prevent legal uncertainty from deepening democratic alienation. For legal practitioners, the findings highlight the importance of approaches that recognise not only formal title but also socio-historical occupancy and the unequal power relations embedded in land disputes. For local governments, the study indicates that electoral legitimacy will remain fragile as long as conflict-affected citizens perceive that their rights are politically useful during campaigns but institutionally neglected after elections. Overall, this article shows that urban agrarian conflict is not only a matter of land administration, but also a question of electoral strategy. Democracy in such contexts must be evaluated not only by procedure but also by whether governance protects citizens, mediates conflict fairly, and sustains public trust in justice.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

We, the research team, have no conflict of interest with any party involved in this research. This research is presented solely to highlight the strategies of prospective leaders to develop effective ways to convince voters.

Declaration of the use of AI

The authors declare that no AI-assisted technologies were used predominantly at any stage in the preparation of this article. AI was utilised in a small portion and only as a tool to create a research framework, particularly to make comparisons between sub-themes.

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