



ISLAM AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP: AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE 2024 EAST JAVA REGIONAL HEAD ELECTION

Siti Mufarochah^{1*}, M. Ganda Abdi Wibowo², Dini Amalia³

Institut Al Azhar Menganti Gresik¹²

IAI Tarbiyatut Tholabah Lamongan³

mufarochah@istaz.ac.id

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Abstract

Women have the equal role to men, as demonstrated by their involvement in various professions such as education, healthcare, information technology, and political law. As Islam upholds the equality of men and women in spirituality, social responsibility, and intellect, women are not confined merely to domestic roles. They can actively contribute to public and political spheres when equipped with the necessary competence and commitment. The research problem addressed in this study is: what are societal perceptions regarding women serving as public leaders within the social and cultural context of East Java? The primary goal of this research is to investigate public views and islam on the role of women as public leaders in the context of 2024 East Java Regional Head Election, considering the prevailing social and cultural frameworks. This study applies a qualitative approach. The data collection involves three informants from diverse backgrounds: a community leader, a political activist, and a representative of a social community group. The results of this research reveal that the phenomenon of gender equality in regional leadership has affected more women to fearlessly advocate for gender equality. Moreover, women are expected to capably balance their professional careers with their familial responsibilities. Women support each other through women's communities, religious organizations, and gender advocacy groups in order to to advocate for public policies related to various fields to achieve gender equality in addressing societal needs. Circles within islam and social community perspectives emphasize the need for women to enhance their skills to achieve parity in education and empowerment, despite the enduring strength of patriarchal norms in East Java.

Keywords: Gender Equality; Public Leadership; Regional Head Election

Abstrak

Perempuan memiliki peran yang setara dengan laki-laki, sebagaimana terlihat dari keterlibatan mereka dalam berbagai profesi, termasuk pendidikan, kesehatan, teknologi informasi, serta hukum dan politik. Islam menegaskan kesetaraan laki-laki dan perempuan dalam aspek spiritualitas, tanggung jawab sosial, dan intelegualitas, sehingga perempuan tidak terbatas pada peran domestik semata. Perempuan dapat berkontribusi secara aktif dalam ranah publik dan politik sepanjang mereka memiliki kompetensi dan komitmen yang memadai. Permasalahan penelitian yang diangkat dalam studi ini adalah: bagaimana persepsi masyarakat terhadap perempuan yang berperan sebagai pemimpin publik dalam konteks sosial dan budaya Jawa Timur? Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji pandangan masyarakat dan perspektif Islam mengenai peran perempuan sebagai pemimpin publik pada Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Jawa Timur 2024, dengan mempertimbangkan kerangka sosial dan budaya yang berkembang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Pengumpulan data melibatkan tiga informan dengan latar belakang yang beragam: seorang tokoh masyarakat, seorang aktivis politik, dan seorang perwakilan komunitas sosial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa fenomena kesetaraan gender dalam kepemimpinan daerah telah mendorong semakin banyak perempuan untuk berani memperjuangkan kesetaraan gender. Selain itu, perempuan diharapkan mampu menyeimbangkan karier profesional dan tanggung jawab keluarga. Perempuan saling memberikan dukungan melalui komunitas perempuan, organisasi keagamaan, dan kelompok advokasi gender untuk mendorong kebijakan publik di berbagai bidang guna mencapai kesetaraan gender dalam pemenuhan kebutuhan masyarakat. Pandangan dari kalangan Islam maupun komunitas sosial menekankan pentingnya peningkatan kapasitas perempuan agar mampu mencapai kesetaraan dalam pendidikan dan pemberdayaan, meskipun norma-norma patriarkal masih memiliki pengaruh yang kuat di Jawa Timur.

Kata Kunci : Kesetaraan Gender; Kepemimpinan Publik; Pemilihan Kepala Daerah

INTRODUCTION

In 1955, women had already developed political awareness, as evidenced by their active participation in elections and their exercise of political rights, both as voters and candidates. In Indonesia, it has been clearly recognized that men and women possess equal rights. This is explicitly stated in Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights, particularly in Article 6, which asserts that the electoral system, political parties, members of the legislature, as well as the executive and judiciary sectors, must ensure women's representation in accordance with specific requirements (Mukarom, 2008, hlm. 257-258).

Cultural transformation has significantly influenced the representation of women in various sectors. If women do not have equal rights as men, the democratic integrity of a country may be questioned. However, gender parity appeared unclear in the 20th century, with many women abstaining from voting in elections. Female victories in the political sphere were exceptions to traditional norms that varied from one culture to another. Although women were granted voting rights as early as 1920, it wasn't until after World War II that they began to break through barriers to political leadership. Even so, women's roles in politics remained largely excluded until recent decades due to their underrepresentation in parliament and the cabinet (Inglehart dkk., 2003, hlm. 2-3).

Women's representation in formal political institutions remains significantly lower than that of men. This is evident from the small number of female representatives compared to the overall female population. Gender equality has been advocated since 1899 by Raden Ajeng Kartini. Her fight for women's emancipation became a foundational milestone for the freedom of women in Indonesia, especially in gaining access to education equal to that of men. Raden Ajeng Kartini made various efforts to realize this ideal, which have allowed women today to enjoy a level of equality with men (Sulistiyowati, 2021, hlm. 2-3).

The definition of gender is often debated, but essentially, gender refers to the human perspective on men and women, not based on inherent biological differences. Gender is interpreted as sex or more broadly, the visible distinctions between men and women in terms of evaluation and behavior. It is a cultural concept that affects roles, behaviors, mentalities, and emotional characteristics of men and women in society. According to Hillary M., gender is a set of cultural expectations for men and women, aligning with feminist views that regard all societal constructs around male and female roles as part of the gender discourse (Hermawati, 2007, hlm. 19-20).

The large number of women running for public office in the East Java regional elections forms the foundation of this study. Notably, all three candidates for the position of East Java governor are women, highlighting the increasing role of gender in

politics. These three candidates are Luluk Nur Hamidah–Lukmanul Khakim, Khofifah Indar–Emil Elestianto, and Tri Rismaharini–Zahrul Azhar Asumta.

Women's involvement in the political domain, as part of the public sphere, is also emphasized in the Qur'an, *Surah At-Taubah* verse 71

...وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

"And the believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong..." (*QS. At-Taubah: 71*)

This verse highlights that both men and women share equal roles in upholding social and religious values through *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil). This explanation opens up the possibility for women to take on roles as protectors, guides, and even leaders within their communities, as long as these roles are within the framework of Islamic values. The verse implies that women are not merely objects of policy but are active subjects in driving social transformation

A similar explanation can also be found in *Surah An-Nahl* verse 97

...مَنْ عَمِلْ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاتًا طَيِّبَةً

"Whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer, we will surely grant them a good life..." (*QS. An-Nahl: 97*)

This verse emphasizes that the worthiness of an individual to attain a good life in this world and the hereafter depends on their faith and deeds, not their gender. It establishes a clear foundation that women can actively participate in leadership and public spheres because their contributions hold equal spiritual value in the eyes of Allah

These two verses affirm that active roles in society, including social and political leadership, are not the exclusive domain of men. Islam provides space for women to take on leadership roles, as long as they uphold the principles of faith, righteous conduct, justice, and public benefit. Thus, these verses offer an inclusive foundation for gender equality in contributing to the development of society.

The research problem addressed in this study is to investigate the public perceptions of women's role serving as public leaders in the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election, within the prevailing social and cultural context. Hence, the objective of this research is to explore and understand the various public perspectives regarding the role of women as public leaders in the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election, taking into account the existing social and cultural dynamics.

There are several previous studies investigating the similar issue. The first is "*Women's Political Participation in the 2024 Regional Elections in Lampung Province*" by Suci Lestari and Kiki Fitriani Ali Zein. This study aimed to analyze women's political participation and representation in the 2024 regional elections in Lampung Province. Using a descriptive qualitative methodology, the study found that women's representation in Lampung remains stagnant and falls significantly short of the

national quota target. Hindering factors include socio-cultural norms, limited access to education and political information, and the male-dominated structure of political parties (Lestari dan Fitriani, 2024, hlm. 47-59).

Another relevant study is *"Analysis of Women's Representation in Parliament in Indonesia Using Robust Regression Estimation-S"* by I Gede Dewangga Jati Suma and Titik Harsanti. This research employed a quantitative approach to analyze the factors influencing women's representation in the Indonesian parliament in 2022, using data from 509 districts/municipalities (Suma dan Harsanti, 2024, Article. 3). Unlike the previous studies, this research focuses specifically on the phenomenon of gender equality in public leadership in East Java, with an emphasis on the unprecedented situation in which all gubernatorial candidates in the 2024 election are women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender equality emphasizes aspects of masculinity or femininity within individuals. The relationship between gender roles does not solely concern identity and the various characteristics of men and women but also includes physiological differences and socio-cultural values that are often associated. It can also be interpreted as sexual equality, based on the belief that men and women should receive the same rights and not be discriminated against based on gender, except in cases justified by biological differences for certain activities (Qomariah, 2019, hlm. 54).

Gender itself refers to one's perspective or perception of men and women, beyond mere biological distinctions. It is a cultural concept that shapes the differences in roles, behaviors, mentality, and emotional characteristics between men and women in society (Efendy, 2014, hlm. 144). Gender is a social attribute assigned to men and women. For example, men are often perceived as strong, muscular, assertive, rational, and dominant, while women are viewed as gentle, polite, emotional, and delicate. These perceptions are shaped by one's environment, such as school, family, and media influences (Hermawati, 2007, hlm. 21).

Gender discussions often center around the social positioning of men and women in society. Rather than being a natural or biological aspect, gender is a social construct that reflects how society views the roles of men and women. This leads to what is known as gender discrimination, which has existed historically and remains a global issue today. The unequal status of men and women has triggered efforts to minimize social inequality caused by these perceptions (Fakultas Hukum Universitas Padjadjaran & Judiasih, 2022, hlm. 285).

From the various views on gender equality, the author defines it as a balanced role between men and women in society. In terms of responsibilities, women are capable of doing various jobs that men do, although certain biological limitations may apply. Legally, women are permitted to undertake the same roles as men. Gender equality within society is closely linked to patterns of public leadership, whether by men or women. Public leadership requires organizational structure to function effectively, and the success of such leadership can be evaluated through the organization it leads. Thus, public leadership cannot be separated from public organizations. Leadership and organization are inseparable. The professional leaders will enhance organizational effectiveness and productivity, whereas unskilled leaders may cause the organization to stagnate or regress (Fanani dkk., 2020, hlm. 85).

Leadership is not only about an individual figure but also about how leadership activities are carried out. Simply put, leadership refers to the style or technique used by an individual in carrying out leadership responsibilities. Public leadership,

therefore, can be understood as the style or method used by a leader to direct, organize, and guide their team to achieve collective goals that serve the wider public interest. Adaptability and a continuous commitment to learning are crucial in contemporary and future public leadership, as organizational challenges are increasingly complex. These elements are necessary for enhancing character and competence within the organization (Rony Sandra Yofa Zebua Dkk, 2023, hlm. 5).

The role of women in public leadership is increasingly significant, as reflected in the rising number of women daring to run for regional leadership positions, particularly in East Java. In the 2024 gubernatorial election, all three candidates for governor are women. The candidate pairs are Luluk Nur Hamidah – Lukmanul Khakim, Khofifah Indar Parawansa – Emil Elestianto Dardak, and Tri Rismaharini – HK. Zahrul Azhar Asumta. This unique phenomenon has inspired the researcher to conduct a deeper study on how this is perceived by the public, specifically in East Java.

Figure 1. List of Gubernatorial Candidate Pairs



Source: East Java Provincial General Election Commission (KPU), 2024

METHOD

This research, conducted in mid-November 2024, employed a qualitative method to obtain in-depth results. Three informants were selected from different backgrounds: the first informant was a member of the community from the Gresik area, the second was a political activist from Surabaya, and the third came from a social community in Lamongan. The data collection techniques used included interviews, observation, and documentation. Both structured and unstructured interviews were conducted to ensure the findings would be valid and comprehensive. Furthermore, data analysis was carried out using triangulation to enhance the accuracy and credibility of the research (Rusandi & Muhammad Rusli, 2021, hlm. 1–2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore public perceptions regarding women's roles in public leadership ahead of the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election, within the region's sociocultural context. East Java, known for its strong religious and patriarchal cultural values, now faces an intriguing phenomenon, that is the emergence of three female candidates in the gubernatorial race.

In Islamic teachings, the values of justice and equality in social responsibility are held in high esteem. As reflected in the verses of *QS. At-Taubah: 71* and *QS. An-Nahl: 97*, both men and women are seen as capable of engaging in righteous deeds and social responsibilities. Leadership, including in the political domain, is regarded as a public trust (*al-mas'uliyah al-'ammah*) that may be held by anyone who meets the necessary

qualifications of competence and integrity, regardless of gender. Thus, women's participation in politics should not be a matter of controversy but should be appreciated as a sign of social progress.

This study involved three informants from different backgrounds to gather a broad perspective. The first informant, a housewife from Gresik, stated that women have great potential in public leadership. She emphasized the importance of women's capacity-building through community-based programs such as the Family Welfare Movement (PKK), School for Outstanding Parents (SOTH), village initiatives, and religious activities. Although cultural norms still often favor male leadership, opportunities for women's self-actualization are gradually expanding (Titik Indrawati, 2024).

The second informant, a female political activist from Surabaya, viewed the all-female gubernatorial lineup as an encouraging sign. She noted that it could inspire other women to voice their aspirations and demonstrate the possibility of balancing public careers with domestic responsibilities. She believes that women leaders can foster more gender-sensitive public policies (Hj. Lilik Hendarwati, 2024).

Meanwhile, the third informant, an activist from a women's community operating across Lamongan, Gresik, and Surabaya, stressed the importance of solidarity among women. She argued that women must support each other across organizations, religious groups, and gender-based advocacy networks to ensure that public policies reflect gender equity. She further highlighted the need for women to be independent and to access leadership roles in government, education, and business sectors (Khosiah, 2024).

Furthermore, the emergence of three female candidates in the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election is a significant indicator that women are breaking through the male-dominated political sphere. The first candidate, **Luluk Nur Hamidah** was born in Jombang on June 25, 1971. Luluk is a PKB politician with a background in social welfare, environmental advocacy, and women's empowerment. She previously served as the Chairwoman of KOPRI PB PMII (1997-2000) and as a Member of the Indonesian Parliament (2019-2024). She currently serves as Chair of the PKB's National Board (Sri Dewi Larasati, 2024).

The second candidate is **Khofifah Indar Parawansa**. She was born in Surabaya on May 19, 1965. Khofifah is a nationally recognized figure who has served as Minister of Social Affairs and as Chairwoman of Muslimat NU. With her extensive political experience, she is running for a second gubernatorial term to continue her development agenda in East Java (viva.co.id, 2022).

As the last candidate, **Tri Rismaharini** who was born on November 20, 1961, in Surabaya, began her career as a civil servant and gained national recognition as the first female Mayor of Surabaya (2010-2020). Under her leadership, the city saw significant progress in green spaces and flood management. She later served as Minister of Social Affairs (Nindy, 2021).

The increasing political participation of women in East Java reflects a growing awareness of gender equality. Women's involvement in politics is not merely symbolic but represents their roles as active agents of social transformation. Despite cultural and structural barriers, such as entrenched patriarchy, limited political party support, and misinterpretations of religious texts, the current political landscape signals a pivotal moment toward inclusive governance.

From an Islamic legal standpoint, contemporary scholars like Muhammad Abduh, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and Amina Wadud affirm that leadership is a social function based on merit, not a privilege limited by gender. Thus, women's involvement in political leadership aligns with the Islamic objective of preserving public welfare (*maslahah 'ammah*).

Female leaders often exhibit higher responsiveness to marginalized groups due to lived experiences and a stronger sense of social empathy. This aligns with the Islamic ideal of *rahmatan lil alamin* which means that leadership that is compassionate, inclusive, and just, particularly toward vulnerable populations.

In conclusion, there is no theological barrier in Islam that prohibits women from engaging in politics or running in regional elections such as the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election. The main challenge lies in dismantling patriarchal structures and fostering a contextual understanding of Islamic leadership. Islam calls for leadership that is trustworthy, just, and oriented toward the common good. Those criteria apply to both men and women equally, indeed.

CONCLUSION

Public perceptions of women's roles as public leaders in the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election indicate a growing impact on the number of women who are courageous in voicing gender equality. Moreover, it is believed that women should be able to balance their careers with their roles in the family. Another perspective highlights the importance of mutual support among women, whether from women's communities, religious organizations, or gender activists, as they can collectively oversee public policies across various sectors to ensure gender equality that addresses the needs of society. Lastly, women must continue to improve their capabilities to achieve equality in education and empowerment, despite the strong influence of patriarchal culture that persists in East Javanese society.

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