



Karsa: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture
ISSN: 2442-3289 (p); 2442-8285 (e)
Vol. 30 No.1, June 2022, pp. 184-207

The Patriarchal Interpretation and the Political Participation of Rural Women in Bondowoso East Java

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Abstract

This study aims to oversee the practice of gender injustice that affects rural women's lack of substantive political participation in Bondowoso



Received: 22 Apr 2022, Accepted: 15 May 2022, Published: 28 Jun 2022

DOI: 10.19105/karsa.v30i1.5179

Regency. During the Legislative General Election in 2014-2019 and 2019-2024, women's political participation was complimentary for the registration and administrative requirements rather than substantial involvement. This situation continues to happen even after the release of regulations that require the fulfillment of a quota of 30 percent of women's representation in a political party. This study uses a qualitative approach. Furthermore, this study also uses a feminist approach. By using that feminist approach, this study aims to discover (1) how rural women in Bondowoso respond to political engagement and (2) how religious arguments are interpreted concerning the role of women in political engagement. This study found that (1) women's involvement in politics is high in quantity rather than quality. Women's political participation does not directly guarantee their active role in the political world. Instead of making a maximum contribution to the development of politics, women's participation is stigmatized. (2) One circumstance that hinders women's participation relates to the misogynistic interpretation of religious teachings in Bondowoso's rural society. It refers to patriarchal domination in understanding the concept of leadership in Islam that eventually stigmatizes women's involvement in politics.

[Kajian ini dilaksanakan untuk mengetahui praktik ketimpangan gender yang memengaruhi rendahnya partisipasi politik substantif wanita pedesaan di wilayah Bondowoso. Hal tersebut terlihat dalam ajang pemilihan umum legislatif 2014-2019 dan 2019-2024, yakni partisipasi politik perempuan cenderung menjadi pelengkap proses administrasi pendaftaran daripada ekspektasi tinggi yang secara substansial bias dilakukan dalam posisi politik yang diraihinya. Ironisnya, hal ini masih terjadi ketika katup partisipasi perempuan dalam politik terbuka lebar setelah munculnya regulasi yang menyaratkan terpenuhinya kuota 30 persen representasi perempuan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Lebih lanjut, kajian ini juga menggunakan pendekatan feminisme. Berdasarkan penggunaan pendekatan feminis tersebut, tujuan studi ini yaitu untuk memperjelas ideologi patriarki yang membingkai relasi sosial laki-laki dan perempuan. Karena di dalam sistem patriarkis, gejala dominasi pria atas perempuan, termasuk dalam aktivitas politik dapat dilihat. Kajian ini menemukan bahwa (1) perempuan merespon aktivitas di ruang publik, terutama politik, secara nominal daripada substansial. Pembentukan tindakan afirmatif bagi partisipasi politik perempuan tidak secara langsung menjamin munculnya peran aktifnya dalam dunia politik. Alih-alih menciptakan kontribusi maksimal terhadap proses pembangunan, partisipasi perempuan membentuk stigma miring tentang kemampuannya. (2) Salah satu keadaan yang memengaruhi



tidak efektifnya peran perempuan berkaitan dengan dalil-dalil agama yang ditafsirkan secara misoginis pada masyarakat pedesaan Bondowoso. Dominasi patriarkis tersebut mewarnai bagaimana dalil-dalil kepemimpinan Islam ditafsirkan secara misoginis terkait citra perempuan yang terlibat dalam kepemimpinan politik].

Keywords: *misogyny*; patriarchy; quality; political participation

Introduction

The word patriarchy has a literal meaning of the father's role in the household or patriarch. The word was initially used to describe domestic life, which is dominated by the role of the husband or father as the head of the household. Nevertheless, in its development, the word patriarchy developed not only in the domestic sphere.

According to Bhassin, patriarchy “refers to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in several ways.”¹ The term patriarchy refers to the process of embodiment and institutionalization of male domination over women. The institutionalization of male domination over women gains legitimacy from the cultural values and behaviors of the community that are passed down from generation to generation. Patriarchs believe that men have more power than women.

Patriarchal ideology puts biological differences between men and women as an indicator of men's domination over women. In this ideology, men are always in a superordinate and dominant power with roles that determine women's position. How this patriarchal ideology and culture survive is largely determined by the institutionalization process through education, family, and religion.²

¹ Kamla Bhasin, *What is Patriarchy* (New Delhi: Woman Unlimited, 2006), 3.

² Pierre Bourdieu, *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* (London: Routledge, 1973), 42.



The preservation of this patriarchal ideology will ultimately create subordination of women. Subordination here means a condition where the position of women is considered inferior and always depends on men.³ It mostly happens in the patriarchal society.⁴ Patriarchy is evident in all aspects of power within human life, including politics in which women are marginalized, and some researchers argue the interconnection between patriarchal attitudes and religious belief.⁵

Although religious affiliation continues to evolve over time.⁶ It still plays an essential role in perpetuating patriarchy. Dominant religions such as Islam, Catholicism, and Hinduism have lower female labor force participation.⁷ In some Muslim countries in sub-Saharan Africa that apply Shariah, women have limited access to land tenure, business, and access to education.⁸

This patriarchal system results in a misogynistic worldview that marginalizes the role of women and leads to many forms of woman repression, from discrimination to sexual harassment and violence.⁹

³ See Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Illinois: University Illinois Press, 2000).

⁴ Md. Sohrab Hossen, "Patriarchy Practice and Women's Subordination in the Society of Bangladesh: An Analytical Review," *Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no.3 (2020): 51-60, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3670335>.

⁵ See Millett, *Sexual Politics*; Gabriel A. Acevedo and Sarah Shah, "Sectarian Affiliation and Gender Traditionalism," *Sociology of Islam* 3, no.1-2 (2015): 1-29, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-00301001>; See: Stephanie Seguino, "Help or hindrance? Religion's impact on gender inequality in attitudes and outcomes," *World Development* 39, no.8 (2011): 1308, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2010.12.004>.

⁶ Francisco Perales and Gary Bouma, "Religion, religiosity and patriarchal gender beliefs: Understanding the Australian experience," *Journal of Sociology* 55, no.2 (2019): 326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318791755>.

⁷ George Psacharopoulos and Zafiris Tzannatos, "Female Labor Force Participation: An International Perspective," *The World Bank Research Observer, World Bank Group* 4, no.2 (1989): 187-201, <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/4.2.187>.

⁸ Mina Baliaoune Lutz, "Globalisation and Gender Inequality: Is Africa Different?," *Journal of African Economies* 16, no.2 (2007): 301-348. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/ejl037>.

⁹ Kalpana Srivastava et al., "Misogyny, Feminism, and Sexual Harassment," *Industrial Psychiatry Journal* 26, no.2 (2017): 111. https://doi.org/10.4103/ipj.ipj_3218.



Moreover, this violence happens in offline and online spaces within a digitally mediated world.¹⁰

Those with religious authority at some point have dominant factors in shaping gender attitudes.¹¹ It is because they have the power to access and control canonical religious sources that enable them to prolong the status quo.¹² It happens for many reasons; one is because the patriarchal culture has been transformed into a power system and constantly strengthened from time to time. This power is exercised through a series of ideological efforts and, consciously or not, accepted by society. In short, society is in the grip of hegemony.¹³

Men-women division of labor and gender distinctions in some societies are usually based on the belief in women's central position in child-caring and maternal instinct. On the contrary, men are considered stronger than women.¹⁴ Therefore, women's involvement in public spaces, such as politics, is considered taboo.

However, women's involvement in public spaces has been evident throughout history. Their presence brought changes in the socio-political structure and generated positive energy to strengthen their role in the public sphere. For instance, women's religious

¹⁰ Brigid McCarthy, "Who Unlocked the Kitchen?": Online Misogyny, YouTube Comments, and Women's Professional Street Skateboarding," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 57, no.3 (2021): 362, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902211021509>; See: and Kim Barker and Olga Jurasz, "Online Misogyny: a Challenge for Digital Feminism?," *Journal of International Affairs* 72, no.2 (2019): 95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26760834>.

¹¹ Clair Barrus, "Religious Authority, Sexuality and Gender Roles of the Elect Ladies of the Early Republic: Jemima Wilkinson, Ann Lee, and Emma Smith." *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 38, no. 2 (2018): 112, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26614538>.

¹² Seguino, *Help or Hindrance*, 1309.

¹³ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

¹⁴ Barbara Rogers, *The Domestication of Woman: Discrimination in Developing Societies* (London: Routledge, 2005), 7.



organizations were essential in the Islamic revival space.¹⁵ They become an essential part of civil society in advocating abortion and pornography that is publicly recognized.

Regarding Indonesian political situations, the reformation era witnessed government concerns and efforts to encourage women's participation in the political arena. Through regulation number 12, the year 2003, chapter 65 (1), the government required a minimum of 30 percent of women representation in political parties. This regulation then implies fulfilling a 30 % target quote of any party to participate in general elections.

On the one hand, a study shows an increase of 100 % in women's representation in the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) in Nusa Tenggara Timur by 2014 compared to the previous period in 2009.¹⁶ On the other hand, several studies highlight the lack of women's participation in politics in Indonesia, especially due to the patriarchal culture¹⁷ and traditional political system factors that affect women's subordination in political participation.¹⁸

¹⁵ Rachel Anne Rinaldo, "Envisioning the Nation: Women Activists, Religion and the Public Sphere in Indonesia," *Social Forces* 86, no.4 (2008):1781, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20430828>.

¹⁶ Audra Jovani, "Women's Representation in Politics: Case Study of Women Legislative Member in Regional of Representatives Nusa Tenggara Timur Period of 2014-2019," *KnE Social Sciences* 4, no.10 (2020): 367, <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v4i10.7426>

¹⁷ See: Elizabeth Rhoads, "Women's Political Participation in Indonesia: Decentralisation, Money Politics and Collective Memory in Bali," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 31, no.2 (2012): 35–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341203100202>; Akhlaq Ahmad et al., "Women in Democracy: The Political Participation of Women," *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik* 32 (2019): 114-122. <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V32I22019.114-122> and Edward Aspinall et al., "Women's Political Representation in Indonesia: Who Wins and How?," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 40, no.1 (2021): 3–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103421989720>.

¹⁸ Shahid Habib and Yeni Rosilawati, "Women Political Participation and Decision Making in Local Governance in Developing Countries: Evidence from Indonesia & Pakistan," *PJAE* 17, no.8 (2020): 909-918, <https://archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/view/5922>. See: Vinny Flaviana Hyunanda et al., "State *Ibuis*m and Women's Empowerment in Indonesia: Governmentality and Political *Subjectification* of



However, a different case is found in Bondowoso, East Java, where women's involvement and participation in the political arena are rarely found. Thus, regulatory changes do not necessarily imply changes in women's political involvement in Bondowoso Regency. A cultural and religious system may strongly influence women's involvement in politics. There is a living tradition and worldview that domesticate women and limit their involvement in public activities.

Based on the previous background, this article aims to disclose women's involvement in politics in Bondowoso. Moreover, Bondowoso is considered one of the cities with a *santri* tradition that prolongs patriarchal tradition and positions religious leaders or *Kiai* as central figures with authority to interpret Islamic canonical sources.¹⁹ Consequently, how they see the world represents how their *Kiai* do in some manner. This article also aims to discover how this power relation influences the perspective of the community in Bondowoso regarding women's involvement in politics. By clarifying this phenomenon, efforts to improve the quality of women's participation in politics can be carried out appropriately and optimally.

This study utilizes the concept of participation and misogynistic interpretation to discover the woman's participation in the patriarchal society of Bondowoso, which provide an understanding for the reader and articulate how these concepts are operationalized in this research.

The growing demand for democratization in various parts of the world has dramatically influenced the dynamics of relations between the state and society. In a society under an authoritarian government, the relationship between the people and the state is characterized by a strong and weak society. On the other hand, in a democratic society, the

Chinese *Benteng* Women,” *Sustainability* 13, no. 6 (2021): 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063559>.

¹⁹ Dodik Harnadi et al., “Pesantren and the Preservation of Traditional Religious Authority in the Digital Age,” *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik* 34, no.3 (2021): 272-280, <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V34I32021.272-280>.



DOI: 10.19105/karsa.v30i1.5179

opposite phenomenon appears, where community participation is strengthened and, in some cases, the state's role is weakened.²⁰

The word participation has a plural meaning. Therefore, it takes work to define the concept of participation. However, some limitations are given by many experts to provide a better understanding of the use of the term. Abildgaard et al., for instance, explain the term participation in four dimensions. They are participation as content, process, directness, and goal.²¹

Oakley explains the term with two emphases; the first is participation as a tool. Second is participation as a goal or end.²² According to the first emphasis, participation is intended as an instrument used to achieve specific goals or targets. In this sense, the word participation implies a process requiring several participants' involvement to achieve the desired goal.

On the other hand, the word participation is intended as a goal or end. Thus, participation activities are placed as a goal to be achieved; therefore, the desired result of this understanding is participation, which indicates community solidarity. Meanwhile, Nwachi identifies the term participation concerning social inclusion. The two terms mutually influence each other. On the one hand, participation leads to social inclusion, while on the other hand, social inclusion also leads to meaningful participation. Therefore, each term can be defined in two ways; as a mean and as a result.²³

Furthermore, participation implies an active engagement of people in terms of state development. As to active engagement, we need

²⁰ See Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Society and Weak States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

²¹ Johan Simonsen Abildgaard et al., "Forms of Participation: The Development and Application of a Conceptual Model of participation in Work Environment Interventions," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 41, no.3 (2020): 748, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X17743576>.

²² Saber Ahmed Chowdhury, "Participation in Social Forestry: The Role of Patron Client Relationship in Ensuring People's Participation in The Social Forestry Policy of Bangladesh," *Journal of Asian Profile* 37 (June 2009): 270.

²³ Louis Nwachi, "Relationship between Participation and Social Inclusion," *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 9, no.10 (October 2021): 47, <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2021.910004>.



to educate them to be a progressive society.²⁴ Women's political participation, for instance, requires the active involvement of women in political mechanisms that encourage and guarantee the fulfillment of rights of subordinate groups, such as women who live under the domination of patriarchal culture. Participation, in this sense, is seen as a process rather than a goal.

Participation that emphasizes the quantity of women's mobilization and overrides their active involvement will only result in the instrumentalization of women's participation in strengthening the domination of men's power. For this reason, the large quantity of women's participation in politics does not necessarily indicate a substantial strengthening of democratization.

“Electoral politics are important in a democracy, especially for subordinate, under-organized and numerically dispersed groups (such as women) ... Electoral participation is an important measure of the extent to which individuals can exercise their citizenship rights.”²⁵

Thus, as a process, community participation in the context of democratization must be placed in a more substantial manner rather than an instrumental one. Instrumental participation measures its success through quantity. The more the number of community participation, the better. No matter if this number actively involves in this democratic process or not. On the other hand, substantial participation emphasizes the empowerment and encouragement of community participation and contribution in this process. The distinguishes two forms of participation lies in the interpretation of

²⁴ Chen Hao et al., “Enhancing Public Participation in Governance for Sustainable Development: Evidence From Bungoma County, Kenya,” *SAGE Open* 12, no.1 (March 2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221088855>.

²⁵ Shireen Hassim, “From Presence to Power: Women's Citizenship in a New Democracy,” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 40 (1999): 8, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4066012>.



participation as a process that requires the empowerment of the participant.²⁶ In Islam, the woman's role in public space relates to the misogynistic interpretation of Islamic thought.

The word misogyny comes from the Greek language and consists of two syllables: *miso* and *gyne*. The first syllable means hate, while the second means woman. The term misogyny thus refers to behaviors and actions that show displeasure towards women.²⁷ In terms of Islamic tradition, misogyny was first used by Fatimah Mernissi, who saw the subordination of women in understanding and interpreting the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.²⁸ Furthermore, misogyny is also attached to the interpretation of the Quran (*tafsir*), marginalizes women, and ignores their experiences. It posits women as 'others' neither their voices are essential in understanding Quran and Hadith nor their existences.

As an epistemological concept, misogynistic interpretations of both the Quran and Hadith are primarily determined by cultural and socio-historical settings of society. In other words, misogynistic interpretations of religious teachings cannot be separated from the patriarchal culture in which men hold superordinate power and women are the opposite. Ironically, religion is commodified to legitimize and perpetuate this patriarchal power.

Islam positions men and women equally; however, patriarchal traditions that dominate the Islamic world influence the interpretation of Islamic canonical sources. Moreover, this tradition not only marginalizes women's experiences but also closes any chance and authority for women to engage in the process.

This patriarchal interpretation is natural when referring to Holland's view, which states that the whole of history is nothing but an expression of masculinity incarnated in the form of patriarchal stories based on the domination of men over women.²⁹ For this reason, what is

²⁶ Chowdhury, "Participation in Social Forestry," 270.

²⁷ Srivastava, "Misogyny, Feminism," 111–113.

²⁸ Fatima Mernissi, *Woman and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1991), 49.

²⁹ Janet Holland, *Gender and Class: Adolescent Conceptions of the Divisions of Labour* (London: University of London, 1985), 254.



referred to as misogynistic verses in religion are interpretations (*tafsir*) and people's limited understanding of religious texts.

The process of interpreting religious texts relates to the history of language struggles. According to Zaid, the language struggle that marks the interpretation of religious texts culminates in the victory of conventional-cultural authorities in determining the meaning of language. Since language is a product of social conventions, cultural dimension strongly influences the production of meaning.

Here, language is a tool to express knowledge and know oneself and his environment. How language is used and what meaning is produced will be an essential tool for humans in ruling the world.³⁰ In terms of gendered interpretation of religious texts within a patriarchal society, language is controlled by men. The domination of men in producing and reproducing the meaning of religious text relates closely to the patriarchal culture, which has been rooted for so long in every human history.

Methods

This research uses the qualitative method by conducting observations as the primary tool and in-depth interviews in collecting data. To give a more critical view, it also utilizes a feminist approach that encourages “documenting women’s lives, experiences, and concerns, illuminating gender-based stereotypes and biases, and unearthing women’s subjugated knowledge. Feminist research challenges the basic structures and ideologies that oppress women.”³¹ Therefore, using this approach, this research will verify women’s experiences and perspectives on political involvement in Bondowoso. It will also challenge the social structure and ideologies that hinder women from playing their role in the political arena in Bondowoso.

³⁰ See Nasr H.A. Zaid, *Text, Authority, Truth* (al-Naṣṣ, al-Sulṭah, al-Haqīqah) (Beirut: Casablanca, 1997)

³¹ Abigail Brooks and Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, *Feminist Research Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2007), 4, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984270>.



The feminist approach does not stop at capturing how society constructs social reality as in the interpretive approach but rather presents a critical approach based on the defense of women. It is directed to carry out a more egalitarian and emancipatory social transformation of their rights.³²

Result

The Central Position of Religious Leaders in Bondowoso

For the Muslim community in Bondowoso, religion is vital in everyday life. For them, religion is the primary source of their worldviews which is always referred to in worship rituals such as prayer, fasting, and daily activities. Therefore, it is common in the local community traditions to look for solutions to their social problems through religious perspectives.

In order to keep their daily life and behavior in line with Islamic teachings, religious knowledge occupies a very central position. This central position is evident through hundreds of Islamic boarding schools in this regency. *Rabitah Ma'ahid Islamiyah* (Association of Islamic Boarding Schools), affiliated to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Bondowoso, recorded that no less than 209 Islamic boarding schools spread over twenty-three sub-districts in Bondowoso.³³

Besides Islamic boarding schools, there are also many Islamic-based formal educational institutions in Bondowoso. There are 105 Madrasahs at an elementary level (*ibtida'iyah*), 106 Madrasahs at the middle level (*tsanawiyah*), and 60 Madrasahs at the secondary level (Aliyah). This large number of Islamic-based educational institutions shows the great attention of the Bondowoso community to the development of their religious knowledge capacity.

The more religious knowledge they gain, the higher social appreciations and positions they get. Consequently, they become local religious leaders. Gaining this position means being a 'referee' to whom

³² W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2013), 133.

³³ Based on Pesantren Census conducted by RMI NU on 2015.



the community asks and looking for solutions to their daily problems. Generally, they look for religious perspectives on a particular issue from these qualified and authoritative persons. This authority is strengthened when those local religious leaders have a relationship with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), either structurally or culturally.

According to the tradition of NU or pesantren, the authority to understand and interpret both Quran and Hadith is exclusive. Only those with specific criteria as a *Mujtahid* are given authority to investigate and evaluate Islamic law from Quran and Hadith.³⁴ Consequently, those who do not have this capacity are required to practice *taqlid*, which means following the opinions of the *Mujtahids*.

Almost all recognized *Mujtahids* in Islam recorded their ideas, explanations, and interpretations of Islamic canonical sources. These records are then codified in books called *kutubmu'tabarah* (literally recognized books). These books vary from the extensive ones with lengthy explanations in volumes to the simplest ones in the form of *nadhom* (Arabic poem). These books are known among traditional Indonesian Muslims (NU) and *pesantren* as *kitab kuning* (literally means yellow book) or *kitab gundul* (literally means bare/bald book).

One of the distinctive educational materials in *pesantren* is teaching the yellow book to the *santri*, students of *pesantren*.³⁵ An institution needs to teach the yellow book to be called a pesantren. Regarding NU tradition, considering the yellow book as an authoritative source of Islamic teachings is a must.

The yellow books, written a hundred years ago, have been the primary references in NU and *pesantren* traditions when dealing with any issue requiring religious legitimacy. In its development, *pesantren* become the prominent institutions that play a significant role in preserving this tradition.

³⁴ Wael B. Hallaq, "On the Origins of the Controversy about the Existence of Mujtahids and the Gate of Ijtihad," *Studia Islamica*, no. 63 (1986): 129–41, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595569>.

³⁵ See: Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Pesantren Tradition* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1999).



Moreover, since understanding the yellow book requires the Arabic language as not only a tool but also *sanad*³⁶ connection, not all Muslims who can speak Arabic have the authority to understand these books comprehensively. *Sanad* is a critical inquiry. Since then, only those who have studied the yellow book in *pesantren* and have *sanad* can understand the contents.

Women Leadership in Bondowoso

Women's leadership is one of the controversial issues within Islamic tradition. A lengthy debate regarding this matter polarizes Muslims' alignment towards two primary schools of thought: textualist and contextualist. In this era of freedom that guarantees human rights, public political participation is one of the prerequisites for forming a healthy democratic climate. For this reason, various efforts have been made by the Indonesian government to ensure the participation of both men and women in political activities.

To ensure women's political participation, the Indonesian government established Law number 10 in 2008 concerning General Elections, which requires the fulfillment of a 30 percent quota for women's representation. This regulation was further refined with the enactment of Law number 7 in 2017. This guarantee of women's participation in politics, no doubt, influenced and even shocked several communities, including the Bondowoso community, which were previously less appreciative of women's role in the public sphere.

For this reason, many questions arise regarding women's participation and involvement in politics from religious perspectives. The role of religious leaders, who are considered to have the ability and authority to answer these questions, is challenged. This study found that

³⁶ A chain of authoritative teachers who have transmitted Islamic knowledge throughout history. This chain is connected to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Understanding Islam should be under direct tutorship and supervision of authoritative teachers. See Lutfan Muntaqo, "Ijazah Sanad Tradition in Pesantren, an Effort to Maintain the Authenticity of Islamic Teachings (Study in Pesantren Maslakul Huda, Kajen, Pati, Central Java)," *Manarul Qur'an* 18, no. 1 (2018): 31, <https://doi.org/10.32699/mq.v18i1.930>.



the fatwa and explanation of religious leaders such as *Kiai*, religious teachers, and *ustad* are influential in determining women's political participation in Bondowoso.

One of the informants indicated that negative images regarding women's involvement in politics are dominant. The 36-year-old Quran teacher at Cermee, a village in Bondowoso, stated that it is not suitable for women to be involved in political activities.

“Involvement in politics is legal; however, women's involvement in it bothers me since they have to leave the house and be active in public activities. That is not easy for a man. For me, this is an obstacle.”³⁷

He thinks Islam does not support women's political leadership. According to him, Islam has decided on distinctive roles for men and women in public and domestic spaces, respectively. In his view, Quran has regulated the position of men and women. According to him, the leadership of men over women is explained in several Islamic canonical sources.

In line with him, several religious figures in Bondowoso also insist on male leadership over women. According to some informants, Islam glorifies women. The prohibition of women from becoming leaders in public arenas is based on the spirit of maintaining women's honor. In addition, physically, men are considered more appropriate to bear responsibility as leaders who face many significant problems. This argument is based on the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, who said: 'people would not be lucky if a woman leads them.'

For this reason, in the belief of some Bondowoso people, Islam is considered patriarchal and unfriendly to women's involvement in politics. This view is then shared not only by men but also by the majority of rural women in Bondowoso. Most of them still think that political issues are men's business. Their participation is often based on their husband's political choices.

³⁷ Interview with Ghazali (anonym) in Cermee, Bondowoso, 15 Mei 2020



One of the informants stated that political choices were left entirely to the husband's voice. Other informants stated that in the end, women had to return to their domestic world by caring for the kitchen and husband affairs.

“It has never been different. Yes, if that is my husband's choice, I will follow. Yes, if there is a woman (involved), it is okay, (but) I am just going with my husband's opinion.”³⁸

Another informant explained her opinion:

“During the 2014 and 2019 elections, there were two interesting facts: firstly, finding women willing to become legislative candidates was difficult. Secondly, women's involvement (if any) was only used to meet the quota of woman representation in each political party.”³⁹

During the East Java governor election in 2013, some voters gave their voice to choosing Soekarwo over Khafifah for the simple reason that Khafifah is a woman. This gender-biased view continued until the 2018 gubernatorial election, even though this time, Khafifah managed to win the chance.

Another 25-year-old informant, a candidate for the legislative election in 2014 from a small party, shared her experience when she was registered as a legislative candidate. At that time, this woman did not make any effort like other male candidates who were seriously campaigning for themselves. Instead of trying to convey her vision and mission and convince the public, a single sticker has never been made to promote her name.

³⁸ Interview with Lehati (45 years old) in Sukosari Kidul, Sumberwringin, Bondowoso, August 9, 2021.

³⁹ Interview with Oong (anonym) on September 20, 2020. She is a woman candidate in the 2014-2019 general election from a small party—interview with Nurul, a sub-district manager of an Islamic Party in 2018.



“I was asked because the party needs more candidates. There are only a few female candidates. Yes, I want no fees. I am not serious either.”⁴⁰

According to her, her choice to run as a legislative candidate was merely to fulfill administrative requirements so that her party would pass the verification regarding the requirement of a 30 percent quota of women’s representation. She admitted that she was still not ready to accept the negative stigma from the community because she was running as a legislative candidate.

Evidently, in terms of quantity, all parties passed the administrative requirements by fulfilling the 30 percent quota of women representation. Data submitted by the commissioner of KPU Bondowoso stated that all of the 12 registered parties met the quota requirement of 30 percent of women representation. Thus, nearly 180 women were registered as legislative candidates and spread over five electoral districts in Bondowoso. Of these candidates, 45 were selected as the legislative members for the 2014-2019 period, with only two being female. Another two legislative members were recorded in the 2019-2024 election.⁴¹

Discussion

Women’s Political Participation: The Lack of Quality

In terms of quantity, women’s political participation in Bondowoso experienced a significant change. It is evident in two leading indicators. First, women’s vote in several political events is increasing. As shown in the study results above, women were among the voters who abstained in several general election events.

⁴⁰ Interview with Jazila Rahmania (anonym) in her house, Pujer, Bondowoso, on September 20, 2020.

⁴¹ Interview with Saifullah, a former member of KPUD Bondowoso, May 15, 2020, in Tapen, Bondowoso.



Second, fulfilling the 30 percent quota of women's representation is also an essential indicator of the increasing involvement of women in political activities. Political laws that encourage and even require the involvement of women in political contestation have influenced the increase of women's involvement in political activities. However, women's political participation is a mere quantity and has not represented substantial participation, which is the democratization process's fundamental agenda.

Women's high involvement in political activities was based on the influence of men on them. Even though they came into polling stations or TPS, their arrival was more mechanistic and driven by the wishes of their husbands. Their political choices are an extension of the husband's political voices.

Whoever the prospective leader choose is based on something other than their capacity and capability. Regardless of the background and capability of the candidates, women will choose who is considered reasonable by their husbands.

In addition, the large number of female legislative candidates also does not mean their active and significant contribution to the development and democratic process. Moreover, their low intention to actively participate in political activities can be seen from the small number of women who have succeeded in becoming elected legislative members in Bondowoso. The number of candidates who ran for candidacy reached 180 candidates, and two of them were elected, or about 6% of all elected legislature members in 2014-2019.

Therefore, apart from the increasing quantity of women's participation in politics, such participation is more instrumental than substantial. They still consider politics as a foreign and masculine area. Only their husbands have the right to determine the political choices they have to make.

Women's political leadership is still considered to be taboo. For this reason, their political participation did not bring about an essential contribution to the development process. This kind of participation still needs to be strengthened and empower the quality of participants required in a substantial participation process.



Political Participation under the Domination of Misogynistic Interpretations

Their religious culture strongly influences the quality of women's political participation in Bondowoso. As a prototype of a strongly Islamic society, the legitimacy of political activities and political leadership are challenged through their understanding of Islamic teachings. It also goes to the role of women in politics and their leadership status.

The living patriarchal tradition in Bondowoso influences the local religious leaders in interpreting Islamic canonical sources. Islam is then interpreted as a male-oriented religion that positions men and women unequally. Leadership, in many ways, is considered legitimate only for men. Women are domesticated and positioned as *makmum* (*followers*) who must obey the voice of their leader, namely their husbands.

For this reason, religious teachings are interpreted as misogynistic, aiming to perpetuate men's power over women. Such misogynistic interpretation is strengthened in line with the roots of patriarchal culture in Bondowoso society.

Women's leadership in Islam is debatable. Moslems' positions toward this issue depend on their perspectives on understanding Islamic canonical sources and texts. Therefore, any favorable position for some communities is not the final voice of Islam. Some other versions and interpretations may differ from their choice. In a patriarchal society like Bondowoso, a misogynistic interpretation is favorable since it will prolong the status quo and perpetuate the living patriarchal culture.

To sum up, preserving misogynistic interpretations of women's political leadership is merely a process of institutionalizing male domination over women. This institutionalization will maintain the *status quo* in domesticating and subordinating women. In addition, this will continue to position women as dependent on their husbands rather than free human beings with their rights and obligations.



Conclusion

Based on the previous analysis, we can formulate two main conclusions in this study. First, women's political participation in Bondowoso is ultimately very low and is instrumental rather than substantial. Some people still stigmatize women's involvement in political activities. Moreover, women are utilized as an extension of men's interests, namely husbands, rather than encouraged to be active agents with a solid intention to play their roles in the decision-making process that leads to the defense of the rights of subordinated groups, including women.

Second, misogynistic interpretation is still dominant in understanding the message of Islamic canonical sources. Consequently, this interpretation influences the understanding of the local community of Bondowoso in perceiving women's involvement in politics. Since then, both living patriarchal tradition and misogynistic interpretations have supported each other in maintaining male domination over women.

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