

The Political Phenomenon of Women's Participation in the East Kalimantan Governor Election

Ida Wahyuni Iskandar ^{1*}

¹Faculty of Social and Politics Sciences, Mulawarman University, Samarinda, Indonesia
Corresponding Author's e-mail : idaharsono77@yahoo.com



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Abstract: Historically, women were deliberately excluded from political power and participation in democracies. Various studies have revealed the women's participation in various countries, the results of which, the equality of women's participation in politics is of the concern to many countries. Studies found that there are still inequalities in political participation between women and men. The strong tradition of most community members who discredit women by regarding women as second persons. Meanwhile, political reform which occurred in Indonesia has certainly given great opportunity to women to participate. In addition, the globalization era has brought about the changes in the development, so do in women. Local Government Election, specifically in East Kalimantan was taken as a case study in this study. The study employed a qualitative approach as well as interviews with relevant key informants. The study analyzed political participation opportunities of women activists in the governor election in the term of voting, campaign, political discussion and contacting perspective. The regional head elections in East Kalimantan especially, Indonesia in general still found challenges regarding the lack of women's political participation. Especially political discussion and contacting still limited to access by women activist. Women often face numerous constraints for increasing their political participation.

Keywords : Gender; Political; Participation; Pilkada.

Abstract : Secara historis, perempuan sengaja disingkirkan dari kekuasaan politik dan partisipasi dalam demokrasi. Berbagai studi mengenai partisipasi perempuan di berbagai negara menunjukkan bahwa kesetaraan partisipasi perempuan dalam politik menjadi perhatian banyak negara. Studi-studi tersebut menemukan masih adanya ketimpangan partisipasi politik antara perempuan dan laki-laki, yang dipengaruhi oleh kuatnya tradisi di sebagian besar masyarakat yang memandang rendah perempuan dan menganggap mereka sebagai warga kelas dua. Di sisi lain, reformasi politik di Indonesia telah membuka peluang besar bagi perempuan untuk berpartisipasi. Selain itu, era globalisasi telah membawa perubahan dalam berbagai aspek pembangunan, termasuk bagi perempuan. Penelitian ini mengambil Pemilihan Kepala Daerah (Pilkada), khususnya di Kalimantan Timur, sebagai studi kasus. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif serta melakukan wawancara dengan informan kunci yang relevan. Analisis difokuskan pada peluang partisipasi politik aktivis perempuan dalam pemilihan gubernur, yang ditinjau dari aspek pemberian suara, kampanye, diskusi politik, dan aktivitas menjalin kontak (kontak politik). Pemilihan kepala daerah di Kalimantan Timur—dan Indonesia pada umumnya—masih menghadapi tantangan terkait rendahnya partisipasi politik perempuan; akses aktivis perempuan terhadap kegiatan diskusi politik dan kontak politik, khususnya, masih terbatas. Perempuan sering kali menghadapi berbagai hambatan dalam upaya meningkatkan partisipasi politik mereka.

Keywords : Jenis Kelamin; Politik; Partisipasi; Pilkada.

INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in the political sphere is no longer merely supplementary, but rather a key pillar in realising an inclusive and representative democracy (Singh, 2024). In the local

context, the East Kalimantan gubernatorial election (Pilgub) serves as a crucial arena demonstrating how gender dynamics are transforming within a heterogeneous society (Goyal, 2024). As a province with abundant natural resources and a strategic location directly adjacent to the Capital City of Nusantara (IKN), East Kalimantan faces complex development challenges. These challenges require a gender-responsive leadership perspective to ensure that the policies produced serve the interests of all sections of society (Kim, 2019).

The phenomenon of women's involvement in the East Kalimantan Governor Election is measured not only by the percentage of women present at polling stations as voters, but also by their courage in taking on strategic roles as candidates, campaign team members and election organisers (Lwamba et al., 2022). Although national regulations have mandated quotas for women's representation, the path to executive power at the regional level is still considered fraught with challenges due to patriarchal culture, limited political capital, and institutional barriers (Fellegi et al., 2023). It is therefore crucial to analyse the political phenomenon of women's participation in this contest in order to assess the extent to which these barriers can be overcome and to understand the tangible contribution women make in shaping the future direction of leadership in East Kalimantan (Rahim, 2024).

Women's participation in the political sphere is no longer merely supplementary, but rather a key pillar in realising an inclusive and representative democracy. In the local context, the East Kalimantan gubernatorial election (Pilgub) serves as a crucial arena demonstrating how gender dynamics are transforming within a heterogeneous society (Goetz, 2002). As a province with abundant natural resources and a strategic location directly bordering the Capital City of Nusantara (IKN), East Kalimantan faces complex development challenges. These challenges require a gender-responsive leadership perspective to ensure that the policies produced serve the interests of all sections of society (Huq, 2025).

Although national regulations have mandated a minimum quota of 30 per cent for women's representation, the reality on the ground reveals a wide gap between regulation and implementation. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of East Kalimantan Province shows that the province's Gender Empowerment Index (IDG) has fallen significantly by 10.95 per cent to 61.41 points (Pratama, 2024). This sharp decline was driven by the low level of women's participation in practical politics in East Kalimantan, which stands at only around 12 to 17 per cent – far short of the national affirmative action target. On the other hand, during the simultaneous regional elections, the General Election Commission (KPU) of East Kalimantan Province recorded that overall voter turnout reached 69.18 percent. This indicates that whilst women's role as voters at polling stations (TPS) holds great potential, their representation at the executive policy-making level – such as in the races for Governor and Deputy Governor remains dominated by male figures (Vikalista et al., 2023).

This phenomenon of the lack of women's representation in the East Kalimantan gubernatorial election can be analysed using Kevin Phillips and Samuel Huntington's Theory of Political Participation, which divides participation into autonomous forms (self-awareness) and mobilization (Wardani & Subekti, 2021). Furthermore, Rational Choice Theory helps to explain how women in East Kalimantan weigh up the political costs and benefits amidst a patriarchal cultural structure and limited social capital. Through a Standpoint Feminism perspective, this research observes that structural barriers—such as the domestic double burden and the masculine recruitment patterns of political parties—mean that women's involvement in the gubernatorial election is often confined to administrative formalities, rather than holding substantive authority. Therefore, analysing the political phenomenon of women's participation in the East Kalimantan gubernatorial election is crucial for identifying political barriers and promoting genuine gender mainstreaming (Saputra et al., 2026).

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Democracy today is facing many challenges: escalating political inequality, the decline of widespread political participation, voter incompetence, etc. . Democracy embodies that decisions which affect the whole society must be taken by all members. Each member must have the same rights in decision making process. Considering the need for strong participation from the community to be directly involved in the election of their leaders, the election of regional heads becomes the most important democratic momentum in the life of the Indonesian nation and state. As a manifestation of the implementation of democracy, the election also philosophically wanting to achieve sustainable democratic values, namely developing participation and responsiveness and accountability as a whole Women's political participation is a meaningful manifestation of the involvement of women in the decision-making process in public institutions and legal entities (Prihatini et al., 2024).

Historically, women were deliberately excluded from political power and participation in democracies, and differentials in participation have often persisted even with the removal of formal barriers to voting and holding office . In recent years, parties and parliaments have responded to growing national and international pressure to increase women’s political presence by introducing reform measures, such as gender quotas, aimed at increasing the selection and election of female candidates . According to Dreze & Sen, increased citizen participation can be especially challenging for women, who often face numerous constraints (e.g. social costs for speaking in public, limited access to information, and a weak sense of political efficacy) to voicing their preferences in such forums . Women always demonstrate a lower level of engagement in (visible and invisible) political activities, even under favorable conditions, such as those without time-demanding family roles .

In a number of previous studies, it was revealed that women's participation in politics is still seen from the quota which has not met 30% participation (Rosen, 2017). This participation is important at the level, especially considering the large number of female voters in Indonesia. In addition to the legislative elections, women's participation is also important to be accommodated in regional head elections. In 2008, the East Kalimantan General Election Commission held the first direct General Election of the Regional Head (governor), during which, there were 4 (four) pairs of candidates nominated as regional heads, including Awang Farouk Ishak and Fariz Wazdy, Nusyirwan Ismail and Heru Bambang, Achmad Amin and Hadi Mulyadi, Yusuf SK and Luther Kombong. In 2013, the second governor election was held with 3 (three) pairs of candidates, nominating regional head, including Awang Faroek Ishak (incumbent) and Mukmin Faisyal, Farid Wadjdy and Sofyan Alex, and a pair of independent candidate nominated, i.e. Imdaad Hamid and Ipong Muchlissoni. The third consecutive governor election in 2018 had four candidates nominated as regional head, including Isran Noor and Hadi Mulyadi, Andi Sofyan Hasdam and Rizal Effendi, Rasmadi Wongso and Syafaruddin, Syaharie Jaang and

Women have political participation opportunities in the East Kalimantan Governor Election through various types of participation, such as voting, campaigns, political discussions. However, women's political participation still needs to be improved. Women still face various challenges in optimizing their political participation, for example, until now there is no female regional head candidate in East Kalimantan.

From the above discussion, the research questions for this study can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the forms and levels of women’s political participation—whether as voters, campaign team members or policy-makers—in the East Kalimantan gubernatorial election?
2. What structural, cultural and institutional factors act as barriers and drivers of the low representation of women in the leadership race of the East Kalimantan gubernatorial election?

3. To what extent are Rational Choice Theory and Political Participation Theory relevant in explaining the voting behaviour and strategies of female actors in the East Kalimantan gubernatorial election?

RESEARCH METHOD

The research approach used is a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen to explore information more deeply. A qualitative approach is used in this study to obtain in-depth and accurate data that is adapted to conditions in the field.

Primary data were obtained through resource persons by conducting direct question and answer questions and guided through interviews. The informants were chosen if they were qualified and satisfy several criteria which had been established in this study. The criteria for the resource persons:

1. Key-informants are people who master the problem, have information and are willing to provide information.
2. Key informants are well educated persons and have sufficient knowledge in their respective fields.
3. Informants were women who were registered in the Permanent Voters List.
4. The informants were actively involved in women organizing political activities, and community organization.
5. The informants were playing the roles as women activists in political areas and communities-related activities in East Kalimantan.

Key informants were determined using purposive sampling method. The informants were chosen based on the information needs they wanted to obtain and were deemed to have good competencies according to the research needs. In-depth interviews were conducted with semi-structured interview instruments. The interviews were carried out with selected key informants with total number 14 persons.

Secondary data obtained through literature study from several sources of information include documents that are the object of research, and scientific books, research results that are relevant to this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Vote casting the most basic of political participation which women are already involved in general election to vote for governor of East Kalimantan. They have realized that their vote determines the future of their region. However, there is still a matter in question that women involvement in political process, i.e. governor election, is still in the simplest form and passive realization. They went to vote station only for voting and giving their voice to their preference. On the other hand, there is aspiration from activists women that they should be engaged in active political process for the sake of right equality, i.e. as candidates for governor election in East Kalimantan. It is due to the fact that there are a number of gender issues related to women needs, children welfare and protection, and other domestic issues which need to be formulated by women's roles. In fighting for their rights through political participation there are opportunities and challenges faced by women.

a. Opportunities in Women's Political Participation

Individuals who are interested in politics often start out voting. In addition to personal awareness, the community organization supports to use voting rights in the elections. Based on data from the National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas), conducted in September 2018 by BPS (Indonesia Statistics Agency) of East Kalimantan, the most member-having organizations were engaged in the religious sector (40.52%) and the social sector (21.43%). Meanwhile, the areas of the least attended organizational activity by the population were the economic, political and environmental sectors with a percentage of 2.62%, 3.51%, and 3.52%, respectively. Religious organizations were mostly followed by the people of East Kalimantan in both urban and rural areas

since these organizations can play an important role to encourage their members to participate in politics at least by casting vote in elections.

Voting is a process whereby a member in a group participates in determining the consensus among group members regarding an official and the decisions taken. The involvement of every community member is very important in voting to determine the elected regional head. Women have the same rights in electing regional heads in East Kalimantan. One of the NU Muslimat organizers said two reasons women need to be involved in voting regional heads. First, women have the same voting rights as men. So there is no difference between the rights of men and women in voting regions. Political rights in voting should be used by women. Second, all the policies that will be issued by the elected regional head seem not only to men but also women.

The number of female voters for the regional heads of East Kalimantan is not much different. The total number of the voters reached 2,349,862 set by the General Election Commission of East Kalimantan Province, consisting of 1,274,932 male voters and 1,074,932 female voters. In 2013, the governor election experienced an increase in the number of voters to 2,794,297 consisting of 1,478,885 male voters and 1,315,412 female voters. In 2018, governor election there were 2,439,438 voters consisting of 1,263,257 male voters and 1,176,181 female voters.

The active role of the organization to invite their members to participate in voting can help increase the turnout rate in elections. Especially if the organization has branches in various regency. Based on data from the National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas), conducted in September 2018 by BPS (Indonesia Statistics Agency) of East Kalimantan, the organizations most followed by the people of East Kalimantan are religious organizations. Aisyiah and NU Muslimat can have an important role in socializing their members to participate in regional head elections without directing support for one candidate. As stated by the administrators of Aisyiah and NU Muslimat, they give their members the freedom to choose candidates based on their respective choices.

Open campaigns have more opportunities in gathering more mass. One indicator of a successful campaign is the number of masses coming to the campaign. Community leader plays important role to influence their members to come to political campaign. There were also activists who became campaign committees. Women were more active than men since they are more easily invited to participate in campaigns due to having more free time.

The success team cooperate with community organizations in finding the masses or campaign participants. There is a community organization that is neutral but still encourages its members to participate in the PILKADA. For religious organizations, for example, Aisyiah did not officially announce support to one of the candidate governors. However, personally if there is an invitation to the socialization event from the candidate governor members can still be approved.

In 2018, it was found that in East Kalimantan, men were using the internet relatively more frequent than women. However, the difference between the two was insignificant, both for the rural and urban areas. The number of men accessing the internet in East Kalimantan was as much as 59.46%, a slightly different with women reaching 56.83%. It proves that women also needed to access information as much as their counterpart. Based on the results of the September 2018 National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) released by the National Statistics Agency of East Kalimantan, the reason the most individuals in East Kalimantan accessed the internet was to have social media (45.59%), to get news/information (39.57%) and entertainment (38.09%). Along with the progress of the times, the introduction of vision and mission is also not only through direct campaigns. Providing political participations and carrying out political campaigns are not only applicable for the public; statesmen can also easily carry out their works through social media. The election activities of the parties, election campaigns announcements and all kinds of actions for the public are presented on social media accounts. The internet, social media in particular, can be a potential and effective campaign tool. Therefore, political campaign through social media can be an option in order that more people recognize the candidates and their vision, mission and programs. In addition, social media is also relatively inexpensive; thus, campaign costs can be more effective than printed media/tools, such as brochures, etc.

b. Challenges in Women's Political Participation

The data from the results of the National Social Economic Survey (Susenas) in September 2018 released by BPS (Indonesian Statistics Agency) of East Kalimantan revealed that there is a gender gap in the participation of meeting activities in the residential area which is quite high between men and women. The percentage of male population participating in activities meetings were much higher than that of women (32.5% compared to 12.5%). The finding confirms that the patrilineal culture which is adopted by the people of East Kalimantan still strongly exists. In such a culture, men are considered more entitled to play a role in decision making and more people are encouraged to participate in the meeting activities. This culture also influences women's political participation, including in political meetings or discussions.

Since the enactment of the government regulation concerning the direct election of regional heads as regulated in Law No. 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government Article 56 Jo Article 119 and Government Regulation (PP) No. 6 of 2005 concerning Procedures for Election, Endorsement, Appointment and Dismissal of Regions and Deputy Regional Heads, then based on the observation of the election of regional heads and deputy regional head (Pilkada) 2008-2018, it turns out there was no representation of women to be nominated as governor and vice governor of East Kalimantan. Much of the literature on stereotypes and candidate sex raises concerns that the presence of gender stereotypes could mean that people would fail to see women candidates as having the right set of skills or policy interests to be viable leaders [8]. Without outside encouragement and support for a candidacy, women will be less likely than men with comparable backgrounds to emerge in the electoral arena .

Exclusion based on religion or gender in politics has led to the fact that leader roles and decision-making bodies have historically excluded women. Yet, women can also be involved in politics, as long as they often fill non-strategic roles, or implementation positions distinct from decision-making positions. In addition, due to stereotype, when women are in leadership positions in party committees, they are often assigned positions which is deemed suitable for them. For instance, they are assigned to occupy the position of a consumption division in charge of the committee responsible for food and drink for events and meetings. It is not surprising that consumption director and women's director are leadership roles most often filled by women.

Political resources are also the crucial factor which hinder women's active political participation in governor election in East Kalimantan. For instance, women have various limitations in nominating themselves as candidates for regional head of East Kalimantan, such as lack of financial support. Women activists active in various organizations had the potential to jump into practical politics. However, many women had a dirty image of politics. They prefer to criticize the government indirectly.

Political parties have an important role in bringing up female regional leader candidates in the PILKADA. Parties themselves critically influence the recruitment and emergence of women candidates. Party leaders may discriminate in favour of candidates that possess the same characteristics as they have including, most often, maleness or believe that women candidates are less likely to win certain districts . Party officials in East Kalimantan are still dominated by men. Massive and real support for female candidates has yet to be seen, only small support.

For female activists involved in politics, formal political discussions held by regional head candidates or political parties are still rare. The success team of regional head candidates is still dominated by men. Formal political discussion participation is still considered to be limited to certain groups, for example people who are active in supporting parties for the regional head candidates. Informal political discussions such as discussions with friends, rather than attending formal political discussions held by parties or regional head candidate. Lack of confidence in women is a barrier in political discussions. Women often succumb to maintaining their aspirations in the debate. The lack of involvement of women in political discussion was caused by a lack of opportunity. Fear of politics is also an obstacle to women's involvement since politics still has a frightening stigma for women.

Not all people can express their aspirations directly to prospective regional heads. From the interviews, not many activists were able to express their aspirations directly to the governor

candidates. Activists who are active in political parties or become successful teams have the opportunity to contact prospective regional heads.

Women perceive that political arena is dirty and attributed to men only. This led to misconception that women are not suitable to jump into politics. Hence, they hesitate to be involved into practical politics, such as having roles in political parties for the strategic positions, decision making process, etc.

The other explanations for minimum women's participation in politics is related to culture of patriarchy which still has strong influence in East Kalimantan, in particular, and Indonesia in general. In addition, it is also found that passive women's political involvement is reasoned by several theories underlying the people's motives. These motivations include sexism, social role theory, stereotype content model, group status threat, and system justification theory.

CONCLUSION

Opportunities women's participation in East Kalimantan is generally in the form of voting and open campaign. Many women also participate in the campaign because they tend to have free time and are easy to invite with their community. By involving women can increase the mass so that the campaign looks crowded. However, the opportunity to express ideas in campaigns for women is still lacking. Access to political participation that influences policies that will be carried out by regional heads, for example through political discussions and contacting, is still limited. Political discussions held by regional head candidates or political parties are still rare for female activists involved because lack of opportunity dan fear of politics. Not all activist can express their aspirations directly to prospective regional heads. Women can also be involved in politics, as long as they often fill non-strategic roles. No women candidates for regional heads in East Kalimantan because some reasons. First, lack of financial resource, figure, and knowledge. A lack of funding had been identified as an important deferent to women who were considering entering politics. In addition to a strong financial source, the figure of the regional head candidate also needs to be widely known by the people of East Kalimantan. Prospective regional heads must also have good knowledge to be able to develop East Kalimantan. Second, female regional head candidates in East Kalimantan are still considered taboo. Third, not does the family all support women to be active in politics. Forth, the female head of the regional head in the eyes of the community is not important.

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