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## Dynamics of Power and Public Participation Regional Elections in Jombang

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### **Abstract**

The 2024 Election Jingle "Choosing for Indonesia" is used by the Surabaya City General Election Commission (KPU) as a means of communication to support the Election's spirit. This study aims to understand the construction of the jingle playback in the internal environment of the Surabaya City KPU through a phenomenological approach and Peter L. Berger's social construction theory. The study examines three main stages— externalization, objectification, and internalization—regarding how a jingle is a communication and motivational tool. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation from four informants at the Surabaya City KPU. The jingle playback illustrates a social construction process, with regular playbacks promoting democratic values similar to religious teachings. Objectification occurs as the jingle integrates into organizational culture, symbolizing collective identity and shared values, much like religious symbols in people's lives. Internalization is reflected in individuals' varying interpretations of the jingle, inspiring some to conform to its message while others engage differently. This process highlights how values of fairness and participation are embedded in personal and organizational identities. Regularly playing the jingle at 10 am and 3 pm boosts enthusiasm, awareness of democratic principles, and solidarity among KPU employees, similar to how religious rituals reinforce commitment to moral values.

**Keyword:** Power, Community Participation, Local Election, Jombang

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## Introduction

The selection of regional heads (pilkada) is one of the key elements in the democratic system of Indonesia, particularly in the context of political desentralization (Syarif Hidayat, 2025). The election not only serves as a mechanism for selecting local leaders, but also as an arena for various political and social actors who have different interests and influences. In practice, it reflects the complex dynamics of power that involves the interference between the political elite, religious figures, and society as voters (Haqqullah & Fauziah, 2025).

Power dynamics in the jombang reveal a pattern of political regeneration that is often dominated by certain elites, such as political families, business leaders, and religious leaders. This dominance not only created an organized power structure among the elite but also encouraged loyalty between the roots of the community's grasses (Suryaningsih et al., 2025). As distinctive loyalty stems from social interaction built through networks of social, economic and religious relationships. Meanwhile, the political party played a key role as an agency that gave legitimacy to prospective heads of territory (Tirda Firdaus & Hasbullah, 2025). Coalitions between parties often served as a strategy to strengthen a candidate's position, even though behind the scenes there was a complex array of competing interests.

Citizen participation in the jombang election is also an interesting variation. The level of political involvement of people is affected by various factors, such as political awareness, economic conditions, culture, and mobilization strategies of the candidates (Tubagus & Muhtarom, 2022). Some societies actively participate based on rational considerations for the program and vision of the candidate, while others are pragmatic through transactional practice. In this regard, social and religious activities such as lectures, charities, and social aid are often used as tools of political mobilization to build closeness with the voter.

The influence of boarding schools and religious leaders in jombang adds a typical dimension. That's the dynamics of pilkada. Boarding schools, which served not only as a center of religious education but also as a source of political power, played a key role in mobilizing public support (Erika Zahra Fitriantanta et al., 2025). The support of the kiai (islamic scholars) and the local clergy is often a key factor in the selection of a candidate (Azizah, 2023). In this context, power is not only politically understood but also includes its morals and social legitimacy granted by religious figures to certain candidates.

In addition, developmental digital technologies can influence the dynamics of pilkada in jombang. Social media is an important tool used in the spread of political information, in the denial of public opinion, and in the growing popularity of candidates, especially among young voters. Political narratives built through digital media that not only enhance the image of the candidate but also potentially influence people's perception of the competitor (Hm & Senjaya, 2021). Therefore, society's political participation in the context of pilkada cannot be unleashed from the influence of a

constantly growing digital ecosystem.

A number of previous studies have examined the dynamics of pilkada in Indonesia from various perspectives. (R. Ramadhani, 2024) highlights the role of a religious figure in building political support at the local level, while (Samsuar Saleh, 2023) discusses the political participation of rural communities. (M. M. Ramadhani, 2022) that discuss the impact of social media on voting involvement, and (Raufan Syiddik & Hsb, 2025) emphasizes the importance of religious and based mobilization strategies. (Athaya Syifa Nadira Kusuma & Putri Rohmaning, 2025) also examined the coalition dynamics of the political party in pilkada. Furthermore, (Putri et al., 2025) in his work democracy for sale revealed the relevant political practice of money and patronage in understanding the power dynamics of indonesia. However, studies that specifically integrate analysis of power and community participation in blockage contexts such as the single are still limited (Auparai et al., 2025).

Based on this, the study offers clarity by integrating the perspective of the theory of power michel foucault and the theory of political participation of verba and nie to analyze the relationship between the dynamics of power and the participation of the people in the jombang district. The study not only focused on how power is run by elites, but also placed communities as active subjects in the political process. Thus, it is hoped that it can contribute both theoretical and empirical to understanding the interaction of power and political participation in the context of local democracy occurring in Indonesia.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of power and community participation in the regional head elections (Pilkada) in Jombang Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides an opportunity to explore complex social and political phenomena, including how power is exercised by political elites and how citizens engage in the political process. According to (Creswell, n.d.), qualitative research aims to uncover the meanings derived from social experiences and interactions among individuals within a specific context. Therefore, this approach is relevant for explaining the dynamic interactions between political elites, religious leaders, and the community in Jombang's Pilkada.

This research adopts a case study design to analyze the specific phenomenon of Pilkada in Jombang. The case study method enables the researcher to focus on a particular context and gain a comprehensive understanding of the events under investigation. In this study, the Jombang Pilkada is examined as a unique case encompassing power dynamics between political actors and the community, as well as patterns of community participation influenced by various social, economic, and cultural factors. The research site is Jombang Regency, East Java, selected due to its distinctive social and political characteristics, such as the strong influence of pesantren (Islamic boarding

schools) and religious leaders in political processes, along with a relatively high level of community participation in local elections.

The research subjects consist of several key groups: political elites (regional heads, candidates, and campaign teams), religious figures (kiai, ulama, and pesantren leaders), the general public (voters from diverse backgrounds, including students of pesantren, farmers, youth, and women's groups), and local political activists involved in voter mobilization and campaigning. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Semi-structured were carried out explore the perspectives, experiences, and strategies used by political actors, as well as citizens' perceptions of political participation in Pilkada. Participant observation was conducted to record patterns of social interaction during political campaigns, including mobilization strategies employed by candidates. Documentation such as Pilkada reports, media coverage, and academic publications was used to complement primary data and provide additional context.

This study is grounded in two main theoretical frameworks. First, Michel Foucault's theory of power is used to analyze how political elites in Jombang exercise and sustain power. (Michel Foucault, 1980) explains that power is not merely repressive but also productive, operating through social relations and creating mechanisms of control within society. This framework helps to understand how political elites utilize social, cultural, and religious networks to mobilize support. Theory of political participation is applied to explore patterns of community involvement in Pilkada. This theory posits that political participation is influenced by individual factors such as education, social status, and access to information as well as social contexts, including political mobilization and the influence of community leaders.

The data analysis technique employed in this study is thematic analysis, which involves data reduction, categorization, and interpretation. Data reduction was conducted by selecting relevant information from interviews, observations, and documentation. The selected data were then categorized according to major themes, such as elite power strategies, the influence of religious figures, and community participation patterns. Subsequently, the data were interpreted to address the research questions within the theoretical framework.

To ensure data validity, this research applies triangulation, comparing data from multiple sources (interviews, observations, and documentation) to confirm consistency of findings. Additionally, member checking was conducted by asking participants to verify the accuracy of interview results. Through these methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of power and community participation in Jombang's Pilkada, while contributing to the broader literature on local democracy in Indonesia.

## Result and Discussion

### Dynamic Power in The Jombang Regional Elections

Power dynamics in the election of county chief (pilkada) shows a relatively strong pattern of dominance by the local political elite. This elite group is primarily made up of political, business leaders, and religious leaders who have significant influence in the social and economic structures of society (Ayunda et al., 2025). Based on research findings, the process of political regeneration in the jombang tends to take place in a limited environment, where actors who already have strong social, economic, and cultural capital have greater access to power. This indicates that political competition is not entirely open but rather influenced by established power structures.

The phenomenon is consistent with the perspective of Michel Foucault's theory of power, which states that power is not only repressive but also productive and widespread in the various social practices that underlie society (Foucault, 1980). In the context of pilkada jombang, power is exercised not only through formal institutions like the political party, but also through social relations formed between the elite and the public (Sudrajat et al., 2021). The relation creates nonformal forms of legitimacy, but it is also symbolic and cultural as the influence of religious leaders and message networks in shaping the political preferences of people.

Furthermore, the role of the political party in the election cannot be overlooked as an institution that gives formal legitimacy to the local chief candidates. The political party functioned as a political vehicle that enabled the candidate to obtain extensive electoral support. Nevertheless, the internal dynamics of the party as well as the relationship between parties were often colored by complex negotiations. The formation of an interparty coalition became a common strategy used to strengthen the candidates' position especially in the face of tight political competition.

The political coalitions formed in the election are not always based on ideological similarities but more on ideological considerations. It harmonizes with Wibowo's findings (2021) stating that the political party coalition in the election is often built on short-term interests to be able to win a political essay. In its own practice, the coalition reflects an exchange of interest between the political elite in both political support and the distribution of power resources after elections (Hadi et al., 2026). Thus, pilkada became not only the current open-air competition arena but also the negotiation room involving various public interests.

On the other hand, the role of the religious icon as part of the political elite gives a dimension of its own in the power dynamic of jombang. Support from kiai or clerics has significant influence in shaping the political preferences of society, given their position as authoritative figures in social and religious life. The legitimacy of religious leaders is not only moral; it also has political implications for determining voter support (Marlina et al., 2023). Thus, power in the election is produced not only by formal political mechanisms but also by symbolic authority of religious figures.

### **The Influence of Boarding Schools and Religious Figures**

Boarding schools and religious figures have significant influence in the election of regional leaders in the Jombang district. Studies have shown that the support of kiai and local clergy is often the factor in increasing electability (Lutfiyah et al., 2024). These conditions suggest that this political preference becomes a way that shapes rational judgment, but also by moral authority and symbolic character. This finding coincides with Hasan (2020) who noted that religious leaders have a strategic role in building and directing political support at the local level.

In addition, boarding schools not only function as religious institutions of education but also serve as a base of social and political power (Ramdana, 2024). The existence of this boarding school could form a large, solid social network that could be mobilised for certain political interests. In the context of Pilkada Jombang, boarding schools become strategic spaces in the consolidation support process, both through personal relationships between kiai and santri and through alumni networks scattered across the various levels of society.

Religion-based mobilization is usually done through various social and religious activities, such as community outreach, charity, and social relief programs. It creates social legitimacy based on religious values and increases the emotional connection between candidates and communities. (Arsalim et al., 2025) notes that social and religious mobilization strategies are crucial to increasing customer participation, especially in areas such as the Jombang with strong religious traditions.

Further, the role of religious figures in the election demonstrates the relationship between religious and political power. When a kiai or a scholar gives support, it is usually regarded as an elected representative of society in general, not just a personal choice. This strengthened the position of the candidates who had received the blessing because they had gained moral, cultural, and political legitimacy (Shoa & Gizaw, 2021). The relation between religion and politics in Jombang, therefore, indicates an interdependent, unbreakable quality.

Rather, a complex dynamic is created by the participation of religious figures and cheerleaders in local politics (Aminulloh et al., 2025). On the one hand, these engagements can enhance political participation and encourage people to actively participate in the democratic process. On the other hand, if there is a difference in religious affiliation, this too can cause polarization in communities. Therefore, it is important to understand the role of a religious figure in the election not only as the force of mobilization but also as a component that can influence social stability and cohesion in society.

### **Citizen Participation in the Jombang Election**

In the Jombang county, the pattern of civic participation in the election of regional leaders (Pilkada) shows a diverse and complex pattern. This type of political participation is either active

or passive. In this regard, studies show that some communities are actively involved in considering the vision, mission, and program that candidates offer. These groups tend to have higher political consciousness and use *pilkada* as a logical way to convey their aspirations (Sander et al., 2025).

However, there are societies that participate passively or pragmatically that are more affected by money and short-term needs (Prayer, 2025). Such participation is usually associated with transactional politics, where political decisions are based on material incentives given by the winning candidate or team (Muhram & Arsalim, 2025). The phenomenon suggests that political participation not always reflects the ideal democratic consciousness but the socioeconomic conditions of society also influence political participation.

This results in line with research from (Dinda Mirtanty & Agus Machfud Fauz, 2023), which suggests that the economy and strong patron-client connections often define the political participation of people in rural areas. The patron-client relationship is reflected in the interactions of the candidates and communities in the jombang pile-up. Candidates use social and economic networks to provide voting support (Arianto et al., 2021). They have both political and social aspects and cultural aspects, which increase society's reliance on certain actors.

### **Social Media Influence in the Election**

With the advent of information technology, the *prefechal* election dynamic (*pilkada*) in the jombang district has undergone a significant change (Samudra et al., 2026). Social media has grown to be an important tool in today's political campaigns, especially in spreading information and shaping public opinion (Zabrina et al., 2026). The study found that social media can play a strategic role in increasing visibility of candidates, especially among young voters who use online platforms more frequently for information (Alya Meida Pristiani & Arief Affandi, 2026). There is evidence that political narratives created through social media have the ability to influence public perception of both its candidates and its political competitors.

(Kurniawansyah & Alqadri, 2021) claim that social media plays an important role in increasing voter involvement during the election. In the case of the jombang, the candidates and campaign teams use platforms such as facebook, tiktok, and whatsapp actively to promote programs, create political image, and gain public support (Budiono et al., 2025). Social media allows more direct interaction between voters and candidates, which results in more open and participative political communication Spaces (Asri et al., 2025).

However, there is some problem with the use of social media in the election. Social media is often used in addition to disseminating information, as well as in spreading hoaks, disinformation, and political propaganda that can influence voters' honesty (Riani, 2021). Unverified information distribution can adversely affect public opinion and create differences in society. Digital literacy,

therefore, is crucial to helping people select accurate and reliable information (Christian & Laksana, 2025). Instead, the level of use of social media during the election indicates a shift in political communication styles from conventional to digital and networked. This expands the scope of the campaign and changes the way the candidate gets political support (Hindiawati et al., 2025). Candidates who are able to use social media effectively tend to have more opportunities to increase their popularity and to connect with voters.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study indicate that the dynamics of power in Jombang's Pilkada are dominated by interactions among political elites, religious leaders, and deeply rooted social networks within society. This dominance is evident not only in the ability of political elites to manage resources and form strategic coalitions but also in the symbolic and moral influence exercised by religious leaders in shaping public support. Pesantren, as both social and religious institutions, play a dual role—as centers of moral education and as arenas of political mobilization—bridging the relationship between political authority and social legitimacy.

Community participation in Jombang's Pilkada also reveals a complex dynamic. Civic engagement is not solely driven by rational political awareness but is also influenced by economic, cultural, and social network factors that shape particular forms of political loyalty. Transactional politics remains a persistent practice, especially in rural communities that maintain economic dependencies on local elites. However, there are also emerging groups—particularly young and educated voters—who demonstrate active and critical participation, signaling the rise of new political consciousness at the grassroots level.

In the modern context, social media has become a crucial element in the political campaign process in Jombang. Digital platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp are utilized not only to disseminate political messages and construct candidate images but also to expand the reach of political mobilization quickly and efficiently. Nonetheless, the use of social media also presents new challenges, including the spread of disinformation, hoaxes, and propaganda that can manipulate public opinion. This phenomenon reflects that the digital sphere has now become a new arena for power contestation and the construction of local political discourse.

Therefore, this study underscores the importance of enhancing political awareness among citizens as a fundamental component in strengthening local democracy. The public must be equipped with political and digital literacy to critically assess information, evaluate the political actions of elites, and participate rationally in electoral processes. Strengthening civil society capacity and expanding inclusive spaces for participation are essential steps toward ensuring that regional elections in Jombang are

conducted in a more transparent, accountable, and equitable manner.

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