

Analysis of Legal Culture and the Existence of Women in Village Head Election Contests in Sumenep Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the legal culture and the existence of women in grassroots democratic contestations in Sumenep Regency. Legal culture refers to the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of the community toward prevailing laws, which are often influenced by social, cultural, and historical factors. The existence of women in grassroots democratic contestations is crucial, as women play a vital role in social and political development at the local level. This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document studies. The findings reveal that, despite growing awareness of the importance of women's participation in grassroots democracy, structural and cultural barriers still constrain their roles. Key obstacles include a strong patriarchal culture, limited access to education and information, and a lack of support from the social environment.

Nonetheless, there are local initiatives striving to strengthen women's roles through various empowerment and legal education programs. Efforts to enhance women's participation in grassroots democracy in Sumenep Regency must adopt a holistic and sustainable approach, focusing not only on legal aspects but also on social and cultural transformation. Based on the research findings, it is recommended that local governments strengthen affirmative policies supporting women's involvement, expand access to political and legal education, and promote cross-sectoral collaboration in creating inclusive and gender-responsive participatory spaces. The active role of civil society organizations is also crucial in fostering legal culture change and enhancing women's leadership capacity at the local level.

Keywords: *Legal culture, women's existence, grassroots democracy, Sumenep Regency, political participation.*

INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership brings a unique perspective and capability that not only enriches the decision-making process in government but also contributes significantly to creating inclusive diversity at both the national and local levels (Xu & Yubin, 2024). This role involves a more empathetic, collaborative, and often innovative approach to addressing social, economic, and political challenges. However, society's view of the presence of women in

leadership positions still shows diversity and is often based on deeply rooted traditional norms (Syuhada & Hatati, 2020). Most people still believe that male dominance in politics is more appropriate and is seen as the ideal representation, even though empirical evidence shows that women in leadership positions can make significant contributions, both in the form of policies with wide-ranging impacts and a more humane approach to solving public problems (Benchakhan & Kulachai, 2023). This shows that the presence of women in politics is not only relevant but also crucial to bring a balanced perspective and create positive changes in various areas of government.

On a global scale, women play a strategic role in maintaining world peace. They are not only involved in mediating peace negotiations but also contribute to ensuring the security of local communities, especially in conflict-affected areas. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2538, an initiative by Indonesia, serves as an important foundation that highlights the urgency of gender equality in international peace missions. This resolution strengthens the global commitment to increasing women's participation in maintaining global stability and security while recognizing their crucial role in creating sustainable peace (Ilmi et al., 2023). Indonesia and New Zealand, both of which have been led by female heads of state, demonstrate women's capability to hold the highest political positions. However, challenges in achieving gender equality in politics remain, such as the persistence of stereotypes and socio-cultural barriers that prevent women from having equal opportunities as men in the political arena.

In the professional context, leadership styles shaped by gender perspectives exhibit certain distinctive characteristics. However, these differences are more often determined by individual traits and the demands of the job rather than by gender itself (Nofrima et al., 2021). Female leaders tend to build a strong organizational culture by setting a clear vision, instilling positive values, and creating harmonious and transparent working relationships with their teams (Muslimah, 2021). Nevertheless, gender inequality still poses barriers that limit women's access to strategic roles in organizations, ultimately slowing the pace of their career advancement (Siregar & Wardi, 2023). The underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions hinders the creation of more inclusive and gender-friendly policies (Firdaus & Wulandari, 2023).

At the village level, this is reflected in the efforts of female leaders to build trust, increase citizen participation, and produce more inclusive policies that are relevant to the needs of the local community (Fitriyah et al., 2019). A concrete example of this is Siti Naisa, the Head of Batang-Batang Daya Village. With high optimism, she is committed to continuously providing the best service to the community while continuing various development programs that have been initiated. Siti Naisa stated that the main focus of her leadership is the sustainability of village development, including strengthening basic infrastructure and improving access to better public services for the community. During her tenure, she successfully implemented several development projects evenly across the village, such as improving the quality of village roads, renovating public facilities, and building other infrastructures, including clean water networks, drainage systems, and green open spaces. All these initiatives are aimed at creating a healthier, safer, and more prosperous life for the villagers (Ali, 2024).

Women's participation in grassroots democracy plays a crucial role in achieving inclusive governance and development. However, the facts show that the representation of women in politics, particularly at the local level, is still minimal, despite their significant contribution to economic development in rural areas (Marwah, 2019). This low representation is caused by various barriers, including patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and a lack of support from political parties (Baharudin, 2024).

At the national level, the Indonesian government has implemented a 30% quota policy for women in legislative bodies as an effort to increase their political representation. However, recent data shows that women's representation in the parliament is only about 21.04%, or 120 out of 575 members in 2024. This figure indicates a significant gap due to various structural and cultural challenges. Despite the affirmative policy of the 30% quota, women still face post-election challenges, such as a lack of support from political parties, limiting social norms, and skepticism from women themselves (Sulastri, 2020). To address these challenges, synergy between women, society, political parties, and the state is necessary so that women's political rights can be optimally fulfilled (Muslimat, 2020).

In Sumenep Regency, the number of members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in 2023 and for the period 2024-2029 remains at 50 members, with a composition that reflects a significant gender representation imbalance, namely 46 male

members (92%) and only 4 female members (8%). This imbalance illustrates the entrenched barriers in increasing women's political participation. Meanwhile, data from 2018 shows that out of a total of 8,268 village heads in East Java, 7,456 were male, while only 812 were female, resulting in a striking ratio of 9:1. These figures further emphasize the dominance of men in village leadership structures, while also indicating that gender inequality in local governance is still very apparent. Although women have made significant progress in various fields, this data serves as a reminder that the efforts to achieve gender equality, particularly in governance and political leadership, still face significant challenges.

Previous research on female village heads in Indonesia is still relatively scarce, with studies often focusing on issues related to households led by women or village governance. The political and social dimensions of the role of female village heads often receive less attention. In the context of local democracy in Indonesia, women still face structural and cultural barriers rooted in the strong influence of patriarchy. Research by Wismala et al. (2022) shows that the representation of women in village deliberation bodies tends to be symbolic, merely fulfilling a representation quota without exerting real influence in decision-making processes.

Female leadership has shown the ability to adapt, create positive impacts, and promote sustainable development (Hilmiana & Alviani, 2023). However, women's progress in politics is often influenced by familial relationships. The "neo-maternalism" phenomenon described by Kabullah & Fajri (2021) demonstrates how wives of regional leaders in West Sumatra can win elections by leveraging their husbands' political resources, while emphasizing traditional gender roles (Ichsan Kabullah & Fajri, 2021). Furthermore, nearly half of the female candidates who succeeded in securing seats in the Indonesian House of Representatives in 2019 came from political dynasties, benefiting from access to financial resources and networks (Wardani & Subekti, 2021). While this trend increases female representation, it may marginalize female candidates outside political dynasties who possess quality and reinforce gender stereotypes in political parties.

Various studies explain the role of cultural perceptions and structural barriers in the leadership landscape. For instance, research shows that traditional cultural norms often limit women's leadership opportunities, perpetuating a cycle where men are more frequently seen as leaders (Hideg & Shen, 2019). This phenomenon aligns with the challenges faced by

women in leadership roles in other contexts, such as in Zimbabwe, which highlights similar societal expectations (Shava et al., 2019). In both cases, structural barriers and social expectations create an environment where women's contributions are undervalued. Qualitative analyses reveal that women in leadership roles often report feelings of isolation and a constant struggle against stereotypes that portray them as less capable than their male counterparts (Moyo et al., 2020; Mahbuba & Rabeya, 2023).

Furthermore, the intersection of psychology and social support plays a crucial role in fostering effective female leadership. Studies emphasize the importance of support from peers and family in developing leadership skills among women (Gill & Khokhar, 2024). This concept is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where family and community networks can either facilitate or hinder women's advancement into leadership roles. The presence of mentorship and supportive relationships has been shown to correlate positively with women's leadership effectiveness; however, societal attitudes often create resistance (Mate et al., 2019).

In essence, the underrepresentation of women in leadership in Indonesia is not solely a function of their capabilities but reflects broader social and cultural barriers that need to be addressed. Transformational leadership frameworks advocate for gender-equitable practices that prioritize merit over gender (Yan, 2022). However, these frameworks must be adapted to suit the Indonesian context, addressing local cultural dynamics and systemic barriers to enable genuine progress toward gender equality in leadership.

The novelty of this research lies in its in-depth attempt to explore how the role of women in grassroots democracy can be transformed through an approach that is more intersectional with local cultural, social, and economic aspects, while also considering the symbolic elements of their representation. Unlike previous studies that emphasize the challenges of patriarchy and the lack of substantive equality, this research will examine how women, though often viewed as symbolic, can build legitimacy and a strategic role through key sectors such as agriculture and the local economy. Additionally, this research will explore empowerment mechanisms that can equip women to become agents of change in substantive democracy, with a particular focus on the economic potential as a foundation for increasing their confidence and political involvement in rural areas.

Based on this framework, the primary objective of this study is to identify and analyze the factors that influence women's participation, particularly in the context of village head elections in Sumenep Regency. The research focuses on how local cultural norms, socio-economic conditions, and symbolic representation shape both the opportunities and barriers for women's involvement in grassroots political processes. Furthermore, this study explores how women—often perceived as symbolic actors—can build legitimacy and assume strategic roles through active participation in key sectors such as agriculture and the local economy. To achieve these objectives, the study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews with female candidates, community leaders, and local stakeholders; participant observation of village-level political dynamics; and document analysis of relevant policies and regulations. The research will focus on selected villages in Sumenep Regency that exhibit strong cultural traditions and political contestation, aiming to capture the complexity of local contexts in a comprehensive manner.

DISCUSSION

Socio-Cultural Context of Women's Political Participation in Sumenep

Grassroots democracy plays a crucial role in building the democratic system in Indonesia. Values such as tolerance and openness inherent in local communities make them key drivers of transformation toward a more inclusive democratic life (Wahyono, 2015). Ideally, the democratic process begins at the community level, where each individual has the opportunity to monitor and shape norms and activities within their social environment (Idris, 2014). The principle of popular sovereignty affirms that the people, as the rightful owners of the state, hold the authority to exercise state power—albeit within the framework of a constitutionally agreed order.

The implementation of local democracy supports improved democratic governance and strengthens government responsiveness to community needs (Sinaga & Ivanna, 2024). This form of democracy expands public participation, serves as a platform for community aspirations, and enables oversight of local government performance. However, in practice, local democracy faces a range of obstacles, including the central government's skepticism toward regional autonomy, driven by concerns about the implications of decentralization (Siregar & Wardi, 2023). Moreover, local cultural practices, such as the "Tabua Het Tafekan

Lasi" tradition in East Nusa Tenggara, influence democratic mechanisms, particularly in the context of village head elections (Silva et al., 2023). The success of local democracy largely depends on the application of accountable, transparent, and community-responsive governance principles. Thus, strengthening local democracy remains a crucial agenda in realizing the ideals of a democratic society.

Within this context, the role of women in grassroots democracy is no less strategic. Strong networks of female leaders and the dynamics of local partisan competition significantly shape the likelihood of women running for office and winning elections. These conditions offer space for women to navigate political challenges and obtain the support needed to attain leadership positions (Crowder-Meyer & Smith, 2015). Furthermore, local party associations play a significant role in shaping women's political trajectories. Parties led by women and those that conduct early and sustained candidate recruitment are generally more inclusive in nominating female candidates compared to those that do not (Cross & Pruyzers, 2019).

The recruitment methods employed by party leaders also influence gender representation in politics. Leaders who utilize broad, open networks tend to recruit more women, in contrast to those relying on closed networks that often limit women's political opportunities (Crowder-Meyer & Smith, 2015). These networking patterns also differ between parties—such as Democrats and Republicans—and between male and female party leaders, ultimately influencing who is selected to run and who receives sufficient political backing to compete effectively.

Interviews with key informants across several villages in Sumenep Regency revealed that local cultural values still heavily shape public perceptions regarding women's roles in politics—particularly in the village head elections. For many community members, the role of village leader is still seen as a male domain, associated with traits such as firmness, authority, and the symbolic responsibility to “protect” the community.

A religious leader from Village A, KH. M (62 years old), stated:

“Women are better suited for the home, supporting their husbands and taking care of children. If they become village heads, how will they handle late-night meetings or angry people? That’s not a woman’s place.” (Interview, April 12, 2024)

This statement highlights how traditional gender constructs continue to restrict women from accessing political spaces on equal footing. Similar sentiments were echoed by a hamlet

head in Village B, who said that although there are no formal restrictions, the community remains "reluctant to vote for women because they are considered not assertive enough."

On the other hand, several women who had previously run for village head encountered subtle and overt forms of social rejection. A former candidate from Village C, Mrs. S (43 years old), shared:

"I was not seen as a leader, but more as 'an overly ambitious woman.' Many people asked, 'Why not just support your husband instead?' Even though I had organizational experience and wanted to serve the community." (Interview, April 18, 2024)

Field observations during a village meeting in Village D showed that the majority of attendees were men, with women seated at the back and not contributing to the discussion. When one woman attempted to speak, male participants responded dismissively. One man was even heard whispering, "It's a waste of time to hear women talk about village development."

Nevertheless, there are variations in community dynamics. In some villages, especially those with active women's organizations (such as PKK or women's cooperatives), awareness of the importance of women's participation is beginning to grow. A village official in Village E noted:

"In our village, women are often involved in neighborhood meetings. But they haven't yet taken part in village head elections. There's still a sense of hesitation among them to step forward." (Interview, April 20, 2024)

These findings reinforce the notion that women's participation in village politics is not solely limited by formal regulations, but more profoundly by social norms and cultural constructs that legitimize male dominance. Women who attempt to enter public spaces frequently face identity dilemmas and social pressures to conform to traditional domestic roles.

Interviews with community leaders, village officials, and female candidates in Sumenep confirm that deeply entrenched patriarchal cultural values and social norms play a significant role in shaping perceptions of women's political involvement. Women are often viewed as the guardians of family honor, expected to conform to domestic roles rather than emerge as active political actors. During village deliberations, the researcher observed that most women were present only as passive listeners, while key decisions remained dominated by men.

This phenomenon is not limited to the local context but also reflects a global pattern in the limitations of women's political participation. Despite various efforts to enhance women's involvement, their participation in politics remains constrained. Some progress has been made, such as the increased number of women voters in India (Rai, 2017) and the active participation of women in certain political parties (Fernandez et al., 2022). However, the gender gap in grassroots party activism persists in many countries (Ponce et al., 2020), indicating that greater female representation in parliaments does not necessarily translate into gender equality at the local level.

Interviews conducted in Sumenep also revealed that the main barriers for women to engage in politics are the lack of family support and the social pressure to prioritize domestic roles. This aligns with previous research showing that women face the double burden of responsibilities, making it difficult for them to compete in the political sphere (Inayatillah, 2023). Even in the United States, women's political participation reaches parity with men only in areas deemed to be more woman-friendly (Pyeatt & Yanus, 2017).

In the context of participatory democracy, women in some regions, such as Tanzania and Malawi, experience marginalization in decision-making processes (Killian & Hyle, 2020; Hussein, 2021). This mirrors the situation in Sumenep, where women are often excluded from important village forums. Male dominance in social and political structures is further reinforced by conservative religious and customary norms.

Nevertheless, there is potential that can be developed. Some women involved in local economic activities, such as village cooperatives and farmers' groups, have demonstrated strong leadership capacities. This supports Goyal's (2024) findings that female politicians are more likely to recruit women as grassroots party activists, which can positively impact women's political participation.

In addition, the interviews also highlighted the significant role of women's organizations such as PKK in creating informal discussion spaces that help raise gender awareness. Through regular meetings and training activities, PKK serves as an informal platform introducing women to deliberative practices. This corresponds with the findings of Kusuma Fadhillah et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of leadership training and gender awareness campaigns in encouraging women's involvement in decision-making processes.

However, structural barriers remain strong. Several respondents indicated that political parties provide minimal support for the development of female cadres. This situation is exacerbated by the “queen bee” phenomenon, in which successful female politicians are reluctant to create opportunities for other women to rise (Elizabeth et al., 2023). This highlights internal challenges among women themselves in strengthening gender political solidarity.

Patriarchal culture in Sumenep further reinforces discrimination against women, as reflected in social practices such as the continued performance of female circumcision and the limited access to education for girls in coastal areas (Rosyidah & Jamilah, 2022; Sudarso et al., 2019). These norms are reinforced by religious dogma interpretations that place women in subordinate roles. Even in terms of property ownership, women are often excluded (Supraptiningsih et al., 2023), limiting their economic independence and ability to build political legitimacy.

According to Kandiyoti's (1988) article "*Bargaining with Patriarchy*" published in *Gender & Society*, women are compelled to negotiate with patriarchal structures that govern their lives. This indicates that gender inequality is rooted in social structures and reinforced by cultural and religious norms that limit women's autonomy (Balint, 2024).

Mahmood's (2005) study in her book *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* reveals that although some women appear to accept their subordinate roles in the name of religiosity, such acceptance is actually a product of discursive structures that shape women's agency within a religious-patriarchal framework (Olwanda et al., 2023). Compliance with traditional roles is not a sign of freedom; instead, it reflects the internalization of values that uphold male dominance.

Existing literature shows that patriarchal culture exerts a dominant influence in shaping social and political relations, positioning women as subordinate both in domestic and public spheres (Olwanda et al., 2023). Patriarchal norms are reproduced through social and educational institutions and are legitimized through often misogynistic religious interpretations (Balint, 2024). In many cases, religious norms are used to restrict women's roles and participation in the name of morality and honor, thereby limiting their access to decision-making spaces.

These references also highlight the complex relationship between women's agency and their compliance with traditional roles. Although some women seem to accept their

subordinate positions, this is often the result of internalizing patriarchal values and developing agency within a religious-patriarchal structure (Olwanda et al., 2023). Nevertheless, women's agency is not entirely constrained; they may find creative ways to express their sexual agency and pursue personal projects to improve their quality of life, even within unequal power relations (Herz & Rozmarin, 2023; Hoskins, 2022).

Furthermore, these references suggest that women's empowerment and autonomy are crucial for improving their access to reproductive health services and decision-making power within households (Tasha et al., 2023). Supportive relationships, along with broader social, cultural, and institutional influences, can enhance women's agency and empowerment, while oppressive relationships and structures can restrict their ability to make decisions and voice their opinions (Olwanda et al., 2024).

Although legal reforms have opened up space for the elimination of gender discrimination (Kania, 2015), the outcomes have not significantly improved women's representation in the legislature. The electoral system has yet to fully ensure equal representation for all citizens (Surbakti & Supriyanto, 2013). This reinforces the argument that both structural and cultural changes are essential prerequisites for building a political ecosystem that is inclusive of women at the village level.

Therefore, a holistic approach is needed—one that includes the implementation of quotas, local policy reform, leadership training, and the mobilization of women through social and economic organizations—to meaningfully expand their political participation.

Women in the Village Head Election Contestation in Sumenep

The population of Sumenep Regency in 2023 was recorded at 1.14 million people, a significant demographic figure for the region. With this large population, Sumenep has a population density of 546 people per km², indicating a relatively high concentration of residents in the area. Moreover, the sex ratio in Sumenep in 2023 was recorded at 93.32, meaning that for every 100 females, there were around 93 to 94 males. This figure shows a slight gender imbalance, with females outnumbering males (Santoso, 2024).

According to data from the Human Resources and Personnel Development Agency of Sumenep Regency, the number of civil servants in the region totals 7,141. Of this number, 4,341 are male and 2,800 are female. This indicates that male civil servants are almost twice as many as female ones. In percentage terms, males constitute around 60.8% of the total civil

servants, while females make up only 39.2%. This disparity reflects a significant gender gap in the public sector, potentially influenced by social, cultural, or policy-related factors in the region (Santoso, 2024).

Data from the Secretariat of the Sumenep Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) show that the number of council members in 2023 was 50, consisting of 46 men and only 4 women. This means that 92% of the legislative body is male, while only 8% is female. This stark gender imbalance highlights the underrepresentation of women in local politics. Cultural patriarchy, limited access to education and political opportunities, and persistent social and political barriers are likely contributors to this situation. The number remained unchanged for the 2024–2029 period, indicating a stagnant level of female representation in the legislative body. Despite various efforts to improve women's political participation, their role in the Sumenep DPRD remains limited, underscoring the ongoing struggle for gender equality in politics.

In 2018, the total number of village heads in East Java was recorded at 8,268. Of this total, 7,456 were male and only 812 were female. The 9:1 ratio clearly illustrates the male dominance in village leadership positions. Despite progress made by women in various sectors, the gender gap in village government remains significant.

This disparity is not just statistical but reflects the systemic barriers women face in accessing leadership roles at the village level. One major factor is the persistence of gender stereotypes that portray women as less capable of leadership or political decision-making. Additionally, limited educational access for women in certain regions contributes to their underrepresentation in political candidacy (Nofrima et al., 2021), including for village head positions.

Moreover, women's political participation is often constrained by social and cultural norms that prioritize their domestic roles (Oryza & Fahadayna, 2024). These factors hinder the recognition of women's capacity and potential to lead. While policies and programs promoting gender equality in local politics can open opportunities for women, addressing these gaps requires sustained and multifaceted efforts (Kholifah, 2024).

In the village governance structure of Sumenep Regency, out of 331 total village heads, there is a significant gender imbalance: 274 are male, and only 57 are female. This means that women comprise only about 17% of village heads, while men make up the remaining 83%. This disparity reflects the lack of equal opportunity for women to participate in village-level

leadership, contrary to the ideals of gender equality in governance. It also underscores Sumenep's struggle to provide an equitable political space for women in local decision-making.

This imbalance stems not only from structural challenges within village governance but also from broader societal issues, particularly in rural and conservative areas. Patriarchal cultural norms and entrenched gender stereotypes continue to limit women's access to leadership roles, despite their important contributions to village social and economic life.

This study involved 10 primary respondents, consisting of four women who had run for village head, three community leaders (both male and female), and three village officials involved in the election process. The female respondents were between 30 and 50 years old and came from diverse backgrounds, including micro-entrepreneurs in agriculture and grassroots women's rights activists.

Based on interviews and observations, women's participation in village head elections in Sumenep remains relatively low but has increased in the past five years. One female respondent and village head candidate said:

"At first, I faced a lot of doubt from my family and community, but after becoming active in farmer groups and entrepreneurship training, they began to support my candidacy." (R3, Village Head Candidate)

Female voter turnout has also shown growth, especially following awareness campaigns by local women's organizations and village governments. Observations during the campaign period revealed that women actively attended religious gatherings and community meetings, which served as platforms for political education.

The main barriers faced by women include strong patriarchal cultural norms, limited access to economic capital, and societal perceptions that view women as mere complements in village leadership. One community leader explained:

"Here, female village heads are still seen as less assertive and unable to make big decisions, so most people prefer male candidates." (R7, Community Leader)

However, opportunities arise from women's involvement in the local economy, especially in agriculture and micro-enterprises. Economic independence has boosted women's confidence to engage in political contests. A female micro-entrepreneur and village head candidate stated:

"Joining a business group helped me learn management and communication, which became very useful when engaging with the community and stakeholders." (R1, Village Head Candidate)

These social and economic activities not only build networks but also strengthen women's bargaining power in village politics. Field observations noted that community support, especially from women's groups and family members, serves as a critical form of social capital enabling women to participate in political contestation.

The presence of female village heads can create opportunities to advance gender equality across sectors, including education, healthcare, and economic empowerment. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage more women to engage in strategic positions. This can be achieved through raising awareness of women's legal and political rights, promoting inclusive education, and implementing supportive policies that empower women at the village level. Gender-responsive policies that enable women to access leadership roles should be part of broader efforts to reduce gender inequality and ensure women have an equal role in decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities.

The presence of female village heads can create opportunities to promote gender equality across various sectors, including education, healthcare services, and economic empowerment (Alfiyah & Rika Tini, 2021; Purwanti et al., 2019). Encouraging more women to engage in strategic positions is crucial. This can be achieved through raising awareness of women's legal and political rights, promoting inclusive education, and implementing policies that support women's empowerment at the village level (Pujiningsih, 2019).

Gender-responsive policies that ensure women's access to leadership roles must be part of a broader effort to reduce gender disparities and guarantee women's equal involvement in decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities (Purwanti et al., 2019; Pujiningsih, 2019). The election of a female village head in Lembung Timur Village serves as a concrete example of growing public understanding of gender equality in leadership and decision-making at the village level (Alfiyah & Tini, 2021).

Village heads, regardless of gender, play a significant role in society as they lead local decision-making forums within the village (Akbar et al., 2021). They can leverage their influence to drive positive change and promote gender equality (Hsu, 2017). Research shows that village heads in Taiwan are trusted by their constituents and facilitate personal communication, reinforcing their roles as community leaders.

Disparities in joint decision-making in forest-sharing villages highlight the importance of co-governance structures that include clear rules, effective monitoring mechanisms, and robust conflict resolution processes (Rusana et al., 2024). Village development must involve all relevant stakeholders, including the government and the community, to reflect a collaborative approach (Pujiningsih, 2019).

Active community participation is key to effective and sustainable village development and ensures alignment with residents' needs and aspirations (Rohman Kusmayad et al., 2024). Participation in Village Deliberation Forums and Village Development Planning Forums underscores the importance of community involvement in decision-making, benefit sharing, and evaluation, thereby improving accountability, transparency, and development quality.

Promoting village democracy must be accompanied by improvements in various aspects that enhance the accountability of local officials, such as transparent access to village affairs and institutionalized participation in democratic decision-making (Weihua & Wang, 2018). Agricultural cooperatives, through collective decision-making mechanisms, institutional constraints, and internal oversight, can facilitate the integration of resources needed for collective farmer action while encouraging fair risk and benefit sharing (Zhu & Wang, 2024).

In Sumenep Regency, among 327 village secretaries, 314 are male and only 13 are female. This means that male village secretaries account for approximately 96%, while females represent just 4%. This indicates a significant gender gap in administrative village positions, which may be driven by cultural, structural, and social factors that hinder women's participation in village-level governance.

The deeply rooted patriarchal culture in Indonesian society, particularly in the Madura region, has significant implications for restricting women's rights and opportunities across various aspects of life. Patriarchy in this context is not merely a social order that places men at the center of power, but a system that is reproduced across generations through social, cultural, and religious institutions, thereby normalizing women's subordinate status. In Madura, women are often positioned as complements to men, both in domestic and public spheres. This results in structural challenges for women in accessing leadership positions, obtaining equal education, and having control over economic resources.

One concrete manifestation of patriarchal hegemony is the continued practice of female circumcision in Sumenep Regency, Madura. This practice not only reflects societal

control over women's bodies but also symbolizes the reinforcement of unequal gender norms (Hamdy & Hudri, 2022; Rosyidah & Jamilah, 2022). Through this practice, the female body is framed within the context of morality and obedience, which further entrenches inequality and undermines women's autonomy from an early age.

Moreover, coastal women in Madura face systemic discrimination in education. A combination of cultural pressures, religious dogma, and lack of structural support makes it difficult for women to access equal education (Sudarso et al., 2019). Yet education is a key element in enhancing women's critical awareness and leadership capacity. This inequality is exacerbated by the reality that many Madurese women lack access to land ownership and other economic resources, limiting their independence and opportunities to build a better future (Supraptiningsih et al., 2023).

Patriarchal culture also directly affects women's involvement in politics and local leadership. In the context of village head elections, for example, women are often deemed unfit or inappropriate for public office. This stems from social constructions that associate leadership with male figures-linked to authority and rationality-while women are stereotyped as emotional and indecisive (Oktaviani et al., 2021; Sufiyanto et al., 2022).

The patriarchal system in Madura is also closely tied to religious norms and local cultural values. Adherence to traditional values acts as a barrier for women attempting to challenge the structures that oppress them. In many cases, women who resist or attempt to break away from patriarchal norms face stigma or even social exclusion (Ummiroh et al., 2022; Hariyanto et al., 2024). The dominance of these values makes social transformation difficult without transformative and gender-sensitive interventions.

Analyses from various international studies show that similar patterns also occur in other Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan and Jordan, where patriarchal norms similarly hinder women's empowerment and participation in public leadership (Koburtay et al., 2022; Brion & Ampah-Mensah, 2021; Shohel et al., 2021). This indicates that patriarchy is not just a local issue but part of a broader global structural problem that must be addressed through systemic and intersectional approaches.

Therefore, the patriarchal culture in Madura not only reproduces gender inequality but also limits women's mobility in all areas of life. Meaningful change can only be achieved through cross-sectoral approaches that integrate gender perspectives into education policy, leadership, economic access, and reform of socio-cultural institutions.

In addition, coastal women in Madura face systemic discrimination in education due to a combination of cultural and structural pressures. Patriarchal norms, often reinforced by religious dogma, create substantial barriers to equal educational access for women (Sudarso et al., 2019). These limitations also extend to property rights, with most women lacking land ownership. This reduces their independence and limits their ability to build a better future (Supraptiningsih et al., 2023). Consequently, patriarchy continues to exacerbate gender disparities and constrain women's mobility in Madura.

To address these challenges, continuous efforts are needed to increase women's political participation at the village level. One strategic step is emphasizing grassroots education and community empowerment, which are foundational for building substantive democracy in Indonesia. Gender-responsive education is essential to fostering inclusive learning environments and promoting gender awareness across all social layers.

Furthermore, revising policies that restrict women's public roles must be prioritized to eliminate structural barriers. Equally important is reinterpreting religious doctrines often perceived as limiting women's political rights. Such efforts aim to construct more inclusive narratives and empower women with the legitimacy to contribute actively in politics. Combined, these strategies can open broader opportunities for women to engage in decision-making processes, leading to a more just and representative democracy.

CONCLUSION

Although awareness of the importance of women's participation in grassroots democracy in Sumenep Regency continues to grow, in reality, women still face various structural and cultural barriers. A strong patriarchal culture, limited access to education and political information, and a lack of social support are the main factors hindering women's active roles in village leadership. Nevertheless, several local initiatives focusing on women's empowerment and legal education have begun to show positive impacts in expanding participation opportunities for women. Therefore, to sustainably enhance women's involvement, a holistic approach is needed—one that addresses legal, social, and cultural dimensions, and involves synergistic support from the government, civil society organizations, and local communities to create a more inclusive and gender-just village democracy.

As a recommendation, local governments should strengthen policies and provide leadership training for women at the village level. Additionally, it is essential to implement gender-responsive education programs to improve women's access to information and awareness of their political rights. Civil society organizations are also expected to be more active in advocacy and campaigns that challenge patriarchal norms. Furthermore, cross-sectoral dialogue involving religious leaders, traditional authorities, and community members should be encouraged to reinterpret cultural values that restrict women's roles. Lastly, strengthening women's networks at the village level is key to building solidarity and collective capacity to promote more inclusive political participation.

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