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Female Candidates, Islamic Women's Organisations, and Clientelism in the 2019 Indonesian Elections

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Abstract

This article analyses the factors leading to the success of women candidates in the 2019 elections in Central Java. Recent scholarship on women's representation in Indonesia has highlighted the role that dynastic ties and relationships with local political elites play in getting women elected in an environment increasingly dominated by money politics and clientelism. Our case study of women candidates in Central Java belonging to the elite of the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU)-affiliated women's religious organisations Muslimat and Fatayat shows that strong women candidates with grassroots support can nonetheless win office. Using the concepts of social capital and gender issue ownership, and clientelism, we argue that women candidates can gain a strategic advantage when they "run as women." By harnessing women's networks and focusing on gender issues to target women voters, they are able to overcome cultural, institutional, and structural barriers to achieve electoral success even though they lack resources and political connections.

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Keywords
Indonesia, social capital, gender issue ownership, women's organisations, Islam and politics, clientelism

Introduction

In line with developments in other democratic countries, the representation of women in the Indonesian parliament has risen over the past two decades, up from 9.6 per cent in 1999 (Hillman, 2017: 41) to 20.9 per cent in 2019 (White and Aspinall, 2019). This increase in women's representation has seen the development of a mainstream discourse attributing the election of many women to the support of oligarchic structures (Puskapol, 2014) coupled with the use of dynastic politics, whereby successful female candidates use their kinship ties with local political leaders when mobilising political support (Dewi, 2015; Prihatini, 2018; Putri, 2017). Similar dynamics are found in other Asian nations, where women candidates are successful in gaining seats in parliament through the support of kinship networks and/or political dynasties.

In India, for example, a study by Chandra (2016: 5) advances an institutional theory regarding the relationship between dynastic and democratic politics, arguing that political dynasties are the systemic product of modern democratic institutions, namely the state and political parties. Women in India gain an electoral advantage from parties that develop from dynastic systems because there are major obstacles to women's participation in political parties arising from community organisations and social movements (see also Basu, 2016). Other studies, including those in Indonesia, indicate that use of political patronage and/or money politics are dominant strategies in electoral contests and provide strategic advantage to candidates, including women, able to pursue this option (Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019; Aspinall and Sukmajati, 2016; Weiss, 2014).

In short, much literature suggests that women candidates who want to successfully compete for public office in a country like Indonesia are significantly advantaged if they come from a political dynasty, have a large and effective kinship network, or use political patronage or money politics. We argue, however, that these studies underplay the fact that women lacking these connections and strategies still win electoral contests. How do we account for this outcome? There is a body of literature that explains that women candidates obtain a strategic advantage when they use female attributes and feminine stereotypes (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Larson, 2001), focus on women's issues, and target women voters in their campaigns (Herrnson et al., 2003). However, most studies informing this literature have been undertaken in the USA, and very little has been written on these issues in Southeast Asia, let alone Indonesia.

The aim of this article is thus twofold: it provides an alternative explanation to account for the rise in women's representation, and it contributes to literature on women "running as women" in a context largely untouched by the comparative literature, namely Indonesia, the world's third-largest democracy, and its largest majority-Muslim nation. Using the concepts of social capital, gender issue ownership, and clientelism as the framework of analysis, we explore the electoral success of five women candidates who in 2019 ran for seats in the

Regional People's Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*, DPRD) in the province of Central Java. Research for this article was conducted during and immediately following the 2019 election campaign and consisted of in-depth interviews and participant observation involving candidate shadowing of five women candidates and ten members of their "success teams" (*tim sukses*, the Indonesian term for campaign team). The candidates all had backgrounds as activists from the organisations Muslimat and Fatayat, the women's and young women's wings, respectively, of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia (Bush, 2009).

Our experience in Central Java leads us to contend that for women to be successful in electoral contests in contemporary Indonesia, women candidates do not have to originate from political dynasties already in control of the organs of the local state, receive the support of oligarchic structures, or prioritise money politics (vote buying) as a campaign strategy. Instead, the key to success for women candidates we studied was having access to a large network in women's organisations that were willing and able to provide the social capital candidates needed, and that could be used as a campaigning machine to support their campaigns. In addition, it was important that women candidates campaigned primarily on women's issues and positioned their gender as an asset and not a weakness so as to receive support from women voters. Here, it must be pointed out that under Indonesia's proportional representation electoral system, women candidates do not have to win a majority of votes in an electoral district to gain a seat; as a result, targeting the support of women voters is a feasible strategy.

We present our discussion in five sections. First, we briefly explore the concepts of social capital, gender issue ownership, and clientelism used as the framework of analysis in this article. Second, we explore the extent to which several women candidates belonging to NU used the various women's organisations associated with the Islamic organisation, notably Muslimat and Fatayat, in order to build the social capital they needed to win seats. Third, we explore the women's and gender issues raised by the candidates during their campaigns and analyse how women candidates were able to harness women's networks and women's issues to target women voters. In the fourth section, we map the practice of clientelism used by a small number of women candidates to attract voters primarily outside of NU circles. In our final section, we discuss the lessons learnt from our study that can be used by women politicians to develop campaign strategies that avoid becoming entrapped in money politics and instead prioritise democratic practices.

Theoretical Framework: Social Capital, Gender Issue Ownership and Clientelism

In this article, we argue that the electoral success of the women candidates we interviewed in Central Java can be explained by the fact that in the Indonesian context, women have a good chance of winning office if they possess strong social capital provided by membership of women's organisations, use gender issues in their campaigns, and target women voters. In the 2019 election, many of the women who won seats were members of the elite of Muslimat and Fatayat, meaning that they held core leadership positions in these organisations. They

achieved electoral success by harnessing the women's networks under the umbrella of NU. By exploiting NU women's organisations structurally and culturally, many candidates were able to develop political linkages with women voters. In their campaigns, they predominantly raised women's issues, along with religious issues, to gain these voters' sympathy and support.

Given the above, the key concepts we use as a framework to analyse the electoral success of the five women candidates who in 2019 ran for a seat in the DPRD in the province of Central Java are those of social capital, gender issue ownership, and clientelism. The first concept, namely social capital, at its most fundamental is the idea that an individual's family and friends, and the organisations they belong to, are an important asset that can be – in the words of Woolcock and Narayan (2000: 226) – "called upon in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and/or leveraged for material gain."

In this article, we are using the definition of social capital proposed by Putnam (1995: 67), who defined social capital as "features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." There are, we acknowledge, many definitions of social capital, some of which explore social capital as a means for the individual to acquire and consolidate economic capital and thus power, rather than as a resource to advance group interests. Social capital, in Putnam's sense, can be understood as arising when people come to view themselves as playing a complementary social role with those with whom they are connected by social ties, through the concept of reciprocity. Put simply, social capital helps people live together according to shared norms and values and aids members of a group to produce solidarity to cooperate in order to achieve collective interests (Iravani, 2010: 697). Mutual trust can be an important feature of social capital, especially in political contexts – such as in clientelistic election campaigns those practised in Indonesia – where political actors have many opportunities to betray and cheat one another (on the Indonesian context, see Aspinall, 2014). In this article, the concept of social capital is used to analyse how the five female candidates who won the 2019 election use the Muslimat and Fatayat NU organisation networks as social capital that have important contributions in building political machines and winning candidates.

The second concept we use in our framework is that of gender issue ownership, a concept derived from that of party issue ownership (Herrnson et al., 2003). According to this theory, particular political parties can develop an organisational reputation for competencies on specific issues, such that particular issues become associated with them in the eyes of the public. If voters view as important the issues that a particular party "owns," then candidates from that party will have an electoral advantage (Dolan and Lynch, 2017; Petrocik, 1996). Gender issue ownership, by extension, means that voters assess women candidates as being more competent than men candidates in dealing with issues that are traditionally related to women (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993).

Women are more inclined than men to cast their votes on the basis of their views on gender issues, and they tend to prefer voting for women candidates (at least in the USA where this theory was put forward). The study by Herrnson et al. (2003), which first introduced the concept of gender issue ownership, found that women candidates who used women's issues and targeted women had a significantly increased chance of winning office.

In this article, we employ the concept of gender issue ownership to examine the extent to which women candidates used women's issues and their identity as women to win over women voters. Our study shows that a number of female NU candidates did indeed use women's issues to mobilise electoral support – though they also highlighted issues of religion and other issues of interest to NU more broadly.

Alongside the strategies of utilising social capital and gender issue ownership, some women we interviewed sought to increase their chances of winning by using the politics of clientelism to mobilise voters. They especially used this strategy to gain support from communities not connected to NU, in which case the form of clientelism most commonly used was that of distributing club goods (i.e. donations intended to benefit a group or community). Where the voters targeted were NU members, clientelism primarily involved facilitating the access of women's organisations at the subdistrict (*kecamatan*) or village (*kelurahan*) level (as well as a number of *pesantren* – Islamic boarding schools) to government funds, development programmes, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds from banks.

The third important concept in our framework of analysis is thus clientelism. Clientalism can be understood as a practice that occurs when a voter, campaign team member, or other actor makes their vote (or campaign support) available to a politician during an election in return for material advantage or some form of service (Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019: 2). Politicians provide services, goods, development programmes, or money to individuals and communities in order to seek electoral support (Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019: 2). The essence of clientelism is a contingent relationship between a politician and a voter, typically mediated by a broker – who is an intermediary in a clientelistic exchange – who is embedded in the local community and therefore knows the preferences of individual voters (Aspinall, 2014: 547), and where there is a concrete, material benefit being offered by the politician, via the broker, to the voter (Mohamad, 2018: 427). The reciprocal and contingent element of clientelism is what makes it different from programmatic politics, where candidates or parties offer policies on a broader scale to advantage a large proportion of society without targeting recipients on the basis of their past or future electoral support (Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019: 2).

Muslimat and Fatayat: Producing Social Capital and Providing Political Machines

NU, the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, founded in 1926, has two women's organisations with branches across the archipelago. The first of these is Muslimat NU, a women's organisation founded under the umbrella of NU on 29 March 1946 in Purwokerto in Central Java. Members are aged forty years and above (Arnez, 2010: 63). The second organisation is Fatayat NU, which was founded on 24 April 1950. Fatayat NU accommodates the younger generation of NU women, with members aged between twenty and forty years (Affiah, 2005: 81). These two women's organisations play an important role in the lives of many Muslim women (Hamidah, 2016: 166). At the local level, both organisations host religious activities, such as Majlis Ta'lim (religious study circles), on a regular monthly basis. Members of local branches are also typically deeply involved in the service activities linked to NU, notably

running kindergartens, schools, and health services, and they are also frequently engaged in small-scale educational, income-generation, microcredit, and other development programmes. Such activities not only function to increase the religious understanding of members; they also provide a space to develop solidarity among members and to build social networks that work in the interests of the wider NU community (*umat*). Muslimat and Fatayat are particularly strong in areas that have many religious boarding schools (*pesantren*) aligned to NU, such as East and Central Java (Affiah, 2005: 81). Total membership for Indonesia is said to be around 15 million for Muslimat, and 5 million for Fatayat (Interview, Nur Sa'adah, 3 May 2019).[1]

Central Java is a stronghold of Muslimat and Fatayat, as it is for the wider NU community. Muslimat and Fatayat have leadership bodies and functioning branches at three levels of administration: at the branch level for rural districts (*kabupaten*) and cities, at the subdistrict level, and at the lowest level, the village or urban precinct level. In the areas of Central Java where Muslimat and Fatayat are strongest, in 2019 – as in earlier elections – many candidates (both male and female) had an NU background. While some ran for nationalist parties, many also ran for Islamic parties whose primary support in Central Java is from NU members. Such parties were, above all, the National Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*, PKB) and the United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangungan*, PPP).

The nature of Muslimat and Fatayat as mass organisations with networks reaching down to the village level makes them an important source of social capital in the definition of Putnam (1995) discussed earlier. They function by raising the individual capacity of members and then bringing them together in collective actions to address the issues faced by NU women. In the context of electoral politics, the presence of networks of women belonging to Muslimat and Fatayat greatly assists women politicians with NU backgrounds to engage politically with a sizeable community of women voters, which in turn makes it easier for such women to be competitive in legislative as well as executive elections at the local level (Dewi, 2015).

Moreover, social capital might help some candidates avoid some of the practices – such as clientelism, vote buying, and electoral fraud – which have been associated with Indonesian electoral democracy. According to various scholars, the existence of strong social capital has an impact on the quality of electoral democracy; high social capital and strong civic ties in a particular region are able to raise the performance of democratic institutions (Lowndes, 2004; Putnam, 1995). Finally, women's networks such as Muslimat and Fatayat provide an alternative avenue to reach voters in a context in which party organisations are often dysfunctional and unavailable for candidates at election times (Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019).

The desire of members of Muslimat and Fatayat to become involved in politics is not new – NU women were already active in the political sphere back in the Suharto era (Hamidah, 2016: 170). However, in the last five years, the political orientation of these organisations has strengthened, and NU has become increasingly active in practical politics, as witnessed by the number of Muslimat and Fatayat NU leaders in various regions across Indonesia who have taken part in electoral contests for heads of districts or for legislative seats in local and national parliaments. As one deputy leader of Muslimat in Central Java explained, Muslimat and Fatayat have entered into practical politics with the aim of achieving political power and

using this to create greater opportunities for NU women's empowerment, including by gaining more access for local Muslimat and Fatayat branches to various government resources to support training, economic, and other programmes (Interview with a deputy leader of Muslimat NU in Central Java, 11 July 2019). More bluntly, if the elites of Muslimat and Fatayat are able to occupy a number of political offices, such as heads of districts or members of parliament, then their access to development and empowerment programmes is greatly facilitated and can be used to advance women's interests, especially the interests of NU women. However, according to Ida Fauziyah, a former National Chairwoman of Fatayat and PKB politician, aside from this largely pragmatic goal, NU women's organisations have a bigger goal in mind: they also wish to influence policy so as to raise gender awareness and advance the cause of gender justice (Arnez, 2010).

Accordingly, a number of women from Muslimat and Fatayat elites have been successful in elections for regional heads of government (*pilkada*). In East Java, for example, five NU women won office in the local executive elections of 2018. Among them were the national chairwoman of Muslimat, Khofifah Indar Parawansa who was elected governor of East Java; Ika Puspitasari, the head of the social division of Muslimat in Mojokerto who was elected mayor of Mojokerto; Mundjidah Wahab, head of Muslimat in Jombang, who was elected regent (*bupati*) of Jombang; Ana Muawanah, fourth secretary of the national board of Muslimat, who was elected *bupati* of Bojonegoro; and Lilik Muhibah, the head of Muslimat in Tegal, who was elected as deputy mayor of that city (Torik, 2018). In Central Java, Umi Azizah, the head of Muslimat in Tegal, was elected as *bupati* of the rural district of Tegal in 2018 (Gumilang, 2019). The election of women from among NU elites cannot be seen in isolation from the support they receive from Muslimat and Fatayat. These two organisations have operated effectively as political machines whose capacity far exceeds that of the political parties. A study by Irawanto (2018), for example, found that Muslimat and its networks were behind the 2018 defeat by Khofifah of the incumbent deputy governor of East Java, Saifullah Yusuf.

NU Women Candidates in the 2019 Elections: Mobilising Support

Our research into the 2019 legislative elections in Central Java showed a similar pattern to that of the 2018 elections for provincial and regional executives in East and Central Java. The successful candidates were those who were able to mobilise the women's organisations Muslimat and Fatayat to gain electoral support. However, as we show, being in the leadership of one of those two organisations was not a guarantee of success. To win the support of the NU political machine, women candidates had to align themselves with NU-linked political parties, and they had to campaign vigorously.

The victory of a number of women candidates from PKB and PPP, the two political parties most closely connected with NU, relied more on the women's networks within NU than it did on the political machines of those parties. As one successful candidate from PKB, Tazkyatul Mutmainah, who was the head of Fatayat in Central Java put it:

> Having a background in an organisation like Fatayat certainly made it easier for me to get support from women voters because Fatayat has an organisational structure down to the village level. During the election campaign, I coordinated with heads of the sub-branches (*anak cabang*) of Fatayat, and a small number of Muslimat branches, which are found in every subdistrict in Semarang, to help me win the support of women voters. I think this activity was pretty significant in helping me in my campaign. (Interview, 13 May 2019)

Similarly, Nur Saadah, an incumbent from PKB re-elected in 2019 who was the deputy head of Muslimat in Central Java, stated:

> My background as a woman activist from Muslimat NU certainly meant a lot, particularly in making sure that NU women voters would vote for me rather than other candidates, even if they handed out more money. NU women voters noticed the combination of the organisation and my activities during the campaign in helping the Muslimat and Fatayat NU at the lowest level. (Interview, 3 May 2019)

Women candidates with a background in Muslimat or Fatayat who were serious competitors for seats in the 2019 election had a number of strategic advantages in terms of building their political machines and so winning electoral support. Support from these women's networks also enabled candidates working through them to minimise the amount of money they spent on their campaigns. A shared identity and shared norms and religious beliefs encouraged social trust and loyalty between candidates and these organisations' members and, especially, leaders. This bond then enabled candidates to mobilise women voters attached to Muslimat and Fatayat without having to spend the large sums of money normally required in order to secure votes in Central Java, estimated at between 50,000 and 100,000 rupiah per vote ($US3.50–7.10) (Interview, Ida Nur Saadah, 3 May 2019) (on vote buying in Central Java, see Aspinall et al., 2017).

In essence, NU women voters are more likely to give their vote to a woman candidate from Muslimat or Fatayat NU than to a candidate who lacks this affiliation. Muslimat and Fatayat leaders at the subdistrict level who were members of candidates' *tim sukses* told us that their decision to support and vote for NU women candidates was not simply because they hoped that these candidates would represent the aspirations of women in general but also that they would represent the aspirations of NU women and the *santri* (devout) community.

Women candidates employed a number of strategies to politicise Muslimat and Fatayat networks and build their *tim sukses*. First, they roped the heads of branches at the district and subdistrict level into their teams and asked them to help them by organising events to seek support from their members in villages and rural areas. We observed in the field how these efforts at consolidation and other campaign activities generally began with a religious activity, such as the candidate reading the Prophet's prayer (*sholawat Nabi*) or delivering a sermon. This strategy was used to strengthen the religious flavour of the campaign and increase solidarity among participants – candidate and audience alike – as NU women. Only once the religious dimension had been addressed in campaign activities did the core business of

consolidating support begin, including identifying and recording of voters who could be mobilised by Muslimat and Fatayat leaders to join the candidate's *tim sukses* at the subdistrict and village level.

Second, *tim sukses* leaders who were also leaders of Muslimat and Fatayat district and subdistrict branches invited candidates to attend regular monthly membership meetings or religious study circles. From time to time, they also organised separate gatherings of both women and men voters, particularly those affiliated with NU, to give candidates the opportunity to publicise their candidacy and present their vision and mission statements.

Third, Muslimat and Fatayat members worked together to drum up support for women candidates in electoral districts where only one of the organisations was represented in the campaign. For example, in a district where there was no Muslimat candidate but a leading member of Fatayat was running for a seat, the Muslimat branches would invite that candidate to campaign among their community. In sum, the work of the *tim sukses* at the lower level was aimed at facilitating campaign activities, building up ties between candidates and voters, and assisting candidates to ensure that the votes of the NU community did not go to candidates other than women politicians from NU.

In the field, we also found that many women candidates with an NU background used other networks affiliated with NU, not simply Muslimat and Fatayat. These networks included the NU Female Student Association (*Ikatan Pelajar Putri Nahdlatul Ulama*, IPPNU), and the Association of Madrasah Diniyah [Religious School] Teachers, which by their very nature are dominated by women, the Ma'arif NU Foundation (LP Maarif NU), and networks of the heads of NU-affiliated religious boarding schools (*kiai*). But the networks of Muslimat and Fatayat were the main backbone of the campaigns of most NU women who won office in the 2019 elections. Critically, using women's NU networks meant that even candidates who were not from political dynasties (though many of them were from prominent families of religious scholars) and who did not rely on vote buying were able to win.

The cases of three NU women candidates who were elected to the provincial parliament of Central Java (DPRD) provide evidence for the importance of NU women's networks. The first exemplar is Nur Saadah, a PKB politician and incumbent who has no family connections to incumbent politicians. Her background is as the deputy head of Muslimat in Central Java and the daughter of a *kiai* (traditionalist Islamic scholar) and NU figure in the regency of Demak. She was elected for the second time to the provincial parliament from the electoral district of Central Java III, which encompasses the regencies of Demak, Jepara, and Kudus, and is an area where NU is very strong. The second case, Tazkiyatul Mutmainah, is also a PKB politician but a newcomer to the parliament, similarly lacking in connections to any established political dynasty. She too is the daughter of a *kiai* and NU figure, this time in the rural district of Blora, and is head of Fatayat for Central Java. Mutmainah ran in the electoral district of Central Java I, encompassing the city of Semarang, which is not the region where she was born or grew up. Our third example, Inna Hadianala, is a politician from PPP, a newcomer, who also has no dynastic ties. She too is the daughter of a minor *kiai* (a *kiai kampung*, or village-level *kiai*) and NU leader from Magelang, and she was deputy head of Fatayat in Central Java for ten years. Her electoral district was Central Java VIII, encompassing the regencies of Cilacap and Banyumas. Our research shows that all three of these women

candidates owe their electoral success primarily to the solid support of Muslimat and Fatayat networks in those regions where they ran as candidates. To be sure, their status as leaders of Muslimat and Fatayat was connected to their family backgrounds – each was the daughter of a *kiai*, albeit of very different levels of seniority – but they did not have family connections that could provide them with the access to government institutions or funds in ways that gave them the advantages enjoyed by candidates from political dynasties that dominate local politics in some parts of Indonesia.

The three women candidates acknowledged this support during our interviews with them. They explained that most Muslimat and Fatayat members at the village level were willing to encourage their families, siblings and neighbours to vote for them. All three stated that the support they received from NU women voters was the result of the hard work of the Muslimat and Fatayat leaders at the subdistrict level. The loyalty of these subdistrict leaders was not because they were paid, but because of the moral and social bonds that connected them, and their trust that, if elected, the candidates would be able to represent the aspirations of NU women. The candidates attributed this support to the cooperation and sense of sisterhood that had developed between themselves and the Muslimat and Fatayat leaders at the subdistrict level while they (the candidates) had held leadership positions in these organisations. The incumbent candidate had also worked hard to advocate for programmes of empowerment for the grassroots cadre of Muslimat and Fatayat. These women all claimed that these efforts had engendered social trust and solidarity among grassroots members for the three women (Interviews, women candidates, April–May 2019).

The importance of these bonds for the election campaigns of the three successful women was corroborated by one of the members of the *tim sukses* of Tazkiyatul Mutmainah, who is referred to familiarly in the interview extract below as Ibu Lin. The head of Fatayat in the subdistrict of Pedurungan in Semarang explained the following:

> In the subdistrict of Pedurungan, we, the leaders of Fatayat, worked to support Ibu Lin without being paid anything at all. We got together all the Fatayat members in the subdistrict and villages and offered up their votes and the votes of their families to the candidate. She not only had a track record of experience in the organisation, but her work during her time as the head of Fatayat was really good for the interests of the organisation. The candidate also often advocated for members who were having problems, like domestic violence for example. Because of this, the subdistrict of Pedurungan was able to get 900 votes for Ibu Lin without us spending any money to buy votes. (Interview, Luluk, 18 May 2019)

The electoral advantage provided by the support of Muslimat and Fatayat can also be seen when assessing the overall results for the major Islamic parties at the provincial level in Central and East Java. In 2014, three women were elected to the Central Java provincial parliament from PKB and two from PPP; in 2019, four women from PKB were elected, representing one-fifth of the successful PKB candidates, and three were elected from PPP, making up one-third of PPP's seats. We can see a similar situation in East Java. In 2019, eleven PKB women were elected, making up 44 per cent of the total PKB seats in that province. According to one East Java Muslimat leader, the victory of these eleven women was

because of the support they received from Muslimat and Fatayat (Interview, Setianingsih, 21 June 2019).

Looking at the rate at which such women won seats also points to the importance of the role played by NU women's organisations. Four NU women candidates from Fatayat contested the elections for the provincial parliament of Central Java, and two of these candidates were successful (Interview, Mufikhah, 28 May 2019). Another six candidates contested who were associated with Muslimat, and four of these six won. These are very good winning rates for women candidates at any level of parliament in Indonesia. In addition, a deputy head of Muslimat in Central Java and the head of a Muslimat subdistrict branch in Pekalongan both ran as candidates for the national parliament (DPR), but both of them were unsuccessful. A number of leaders of Muslimat at the subdistrict level also contested elections at the district level, and some of these women were also successful, while others failed to win a seat.

The question then arises, what are the factors that influenced which NU women candidates were successful in their 2019 election campaigns, and which ones lost? We have identified two main factors. First, the defeat of a number of candidates who had a background in Muslimat or Fatayat was caused primarily by the fact that they did not receive structural support from the NU women's organisation they belonged to. Party affiliation was important in this regard. In the 2019 elections, a number of NU women who ran as candidates for parties other than the NU-affiliated PKB experienced problems in securing support from the grassroots. The dominance of PKB within the structures of NU at both the central and regional levels (Fealy, 2018), including Central Java, led to Muslimat and Fatayat leaders issuing an instruction that members could only vote for PKB, despite the fact that PPP has also traditionally had ties to NU (Interview, Fatayat leader, 18 May 2019).[2] A few PPP women candidates with strong influence at the grassroots, such as Inna Hadianala, managed to overcome this obstacle and win support of members at the subdistrict and village levels but PKB candidates had best access to votes of grassroots NU women.

During our research, many Fatayat and Muslimat leaders told us that PKB was the party that had done most to contribute to the progress of NU as an organisation, and that because of this, only PKB politicians were worthy of using the NU network to campaign. As one woman candidate, Zuhar Mahsun, from the secular-nationalist NasDem Party (Nationalist Democratic Party) who was also a deputy head of Muslimat for Central Java expressed it:

> I ran for the electorate of Central Java 13 which encompassed three regencies (Batang, Pekalongan and Pemalang) and one city (Pekalongan) […] Although I occupied the position of first deputy head of Muslimat in Central Java, I only got support from eight subdistrict branches in Batang and one subdistrict branch in Pemalang because all the other subdistricts [there are 14 in total] were dominated by candidates from PKB. […] I was obstructed from using Muslimat and Fatayat networks because I was from a nationalist party and there were other NU politicians who were from Islamic parties like PKB. According to them, if you are NU, you have to be PKB. The leaders of the subdistrict branches who I met said to me "we would like to support you but sorry, you're from NasDem." (Interview, 9 April 2019)

The lack of support from Muslimat and Fatayat networks meant that Zuhar Mahsun had to build her own *tim sukses* down to every polling booth in the villages, using NasDem supporters and party members. This in turn meant that her success team was dominated by men, and they all had to be paid. She had to pay her campaign manager every month for seven months, and her team members below him for every event they were involved in. Further, to support her campaign and mobilise voters, she acknowledged she had to distribute patronage goods as well as money on election day. Despite having spent up to two billion rupiah (about $US150,000), she failed to win a seat. It is probable that Mahsun lacked loyalty and trust from her success team and the voters she sought to mobilise because she ran for the NasDem Party. She was not the only one to have this experience; we spoke to several women candidates who ran for parties other than PKB who faced a similar challenge.

The second factor that contributed to the loss of NU women candidates in the 2019 elections was simply that some of them did not put much effort into their campaigns; some did not even go into communities to try to win the support of voters. These women were generally nominated only to fulfil the 30 per cent female candidate quota required by law in every electoral district. Parties that did not fulfil this requirement were disqualified from competing in that electoral district, and so a number of parties, including Islamic parties associated with NU, placed Muslimat and Fatayat cadres on their lists simply to fulfil the quota.

In addition to these two factors, it must be assumed that money politics also played a role in the loss of many women candidates, including those associated with NU. The culture of money politics that has taken root in elections in Indonesia has forced many women out of the contest. The women who can compete in such circumstances tend to be those who can rely on strong women's networks, or who have dynastic connections.

Women Candidates, Women's Issues, and Women Voters

While we have argued that the ability of NU women associated with Muslimat and Fatayat to harness those organisations was a primary factor producing electoral victories, NU women candidates employed two other important strategies that contributed to their success: giving prominence to women's or gender issues; and targeting women voters (in fact, working through Fatayat and Muslimat helped candidates employ these strategies).

In the context of Central Java, we found that NU women candidates who predominantly used women's issues – alongside using Muslimat and Fatayat networks – to target women voters had a greater chance of winning office in the 2019 elections than NU women who did not use gender issues. For example, Nur Saadah and Tazkiyatul Mutmainah, who were both successfully elected to the provincial parliament in Central Java, campaigned heavily on women's issues. Women candidates who did not address women's issues to specifically target women voters were less likely to be successful; certainly, most of the women candidates we interviewed who were defeated did not focus on women's issues in the campaign.

The women's issues raised by women candidates in Central Java during the election campaign varied, depending on which women voters were being targeted. When addressing voters from NU backgrounds, women candidates generally spoke about the importance of protecting women and children from violence in the home, reproductive health, and

combating infant and maternal mortality. They also stressed the importance of having women in legislatures who could fight to improve the welfare of NU women, many of whom work as teachers in religious schools. Such candidates also stressed the importance of having Muslimat and Fatayat members enter politics, not simply to promote the aspirations of NU women, but also as a way of protecting "moderate" Islam, so-called *Islam Nusantara* (Archipelagic Islam), and guarding the religious beliefs of the NU community from the threat of religious fundamentalism and radicalism.[3]

When facing religious constituencies, apart from raising women's issues, women candidates running for PKB spoke about "Santri Day," a day celebrating religious students and recognising the role played by religious figures in the fight against colonialism, for which NU and PKB claim credit. Similarly, NU women candidates for PPP spoke about the increased incentives for teachers of religious schools in Central Java their party had successfully fought for. Thus, NU women candidates strategically highlighted issues of symbolic and material importance for NU supporters. When they campaigned among women outside NU networks, particularly in urban areas, NU women candidates tended to focus on issues traditionally associated with women such as education, child and infant health, reproductive health, domestic violence, work safety for women, and the importance of achieving gender equality in the social and political sphere.

We argue that the focus on issues associated with women's interests described above was an important reason for the victory of a number of NU women in the 2019 election. The organisational structures of Muslimat and Fatayat were instrumental for candidates in disseminating messages related to women's issues at the grassroots. The politicisation of women's networks and the focus on women's issues also allowed NU women candidates to overcome cultural stereotypes that have been shown to act as a barrier to voters choosing women candidates. In particular, opposition to women's leadership in the public sphere and stereotyping of women as weak, easily influenced, and emotional (rather than rational) make it difficult for women candidates to win office (Fattore et al., 2010; Hillman, 2017; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). According to a number of our sources, negative stereotypes about women in leadership are still strong in Central Java. Some men candidates even raised the issue of women's unsuitability to lead during their campaigns. As one female PKB candidate, Tazkiyatul Mutmainah, told us:

> I see it this way. Under the hegemony of patriarchy, women are still considered second-class, this is what I felt during the campaign. I had a competitor internal to the party, and he was a man who had an important position within NU in Central Java. When I had already built up support from among *kiai* circles, he tried to withdraw that support by belittling me when he campaigned among those *kiai* by spreading negative stereotypes about women, like what will happen if a woman is elected. I know about this because I got the information from my *tim sukses* members who I got to spy [on him]. (Interview, Tazkiyatul Mutmainah, Women Candidate of PKB, 13 May 2019)

By prioritising gender issues, women candidates were able to work against the negative stereotypes that are often used to defeat women candidates in electoral politics. A number of

women candidates used women's issues as a way to build up a picture of themselves as competent and capable of being elected and representing the aspirations of women in parliament, and in order to demonstrate their ability to formulate policies. In addition to this, the background of women candidates as activists in Muslimat and Fatayat, and, for some of them, as activists in other women's organisations, meant that they were able to capitalise on their track records to convince voters, both men and women, that they were equal in competence to male candidates.

Nevertheless, we must emphasise that focusing on gender issue ownership did not operate as a standalone strategy, but rather needed to be combined with access to women's networks. Interaction between using a campaign focus on gender issues, women's networks, and the background of candidates as activists in Muslimat and Fatayat combined to give a number of NU women strategic advantages in the 2019 election and to place them on equal footing with men candidates. Some women candidates were thus able to defeat men candidates even though those men candidates used vote buying as their primary strategy to win over voters.

Clientelism as a Strategy to Increase Support among Voters

In our research in Central Java, we also came across a number of NU women candidates who used clientelism as a way to get support from a broader constituency. Not all candidates used this strategy: those who did not use it, such as Inna Hadianala, were able to tap into a strong basis of support from Muslimat and Fatayat. Using clientelism to mobilise electoral support is a common practice in Indonesia (Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019; Aspinall and Sukmajati, 2016). Indeed, there is evidence that the political culture in Southeast Asia is strongly coloured by clientelism, where personalisation of politics – the giving of assistance and service orientation on the basis of patron–client relations – is one of the keys to winning voter support (Bjarnegård, 2013; Teehankee, 2013). It is therefore not surprising that in the context of the 2019 elections in Indonesia some candidates with a background in Muslimat and Fatayat used clientelistic methods to strengthen and broaden the basis of their electoral support, despite the fact that they already had access to social capital in the form of NU women's networks. We explain below why they believed it was necessary for their campaigns to reach out to voters in this way.

The forms of clientelism used by women candidates varied. First, we see clientelism in the form of distribution of money to develop community institutions or organisations. This practice takes place when a candidate visits a community, whether a religious study circle involving members of Muslimat or Fatayat at the subdistrict or village level, a gathering of the Association of Religious Teachers of Madrasah (Madin), a gathering of the NU Female Student Association (IPPNU), or a gathering of voters associated with the Maarif Foundation. Usually this approach involves the candidate making a contribution to the organisation's kitty of an amount ranging from one to three million rupiah ($US70–210). Candidates present this practice as a good deed (*shadaqoh*), which in Islam is used to denote the giving of goods or cash by the wealthy to the poor. In the context of electoral politics in Indonesia, candidates contended that distributing cash in this way constitutes showing concern for grassroots NU women's organisations. The giving of cash to lower-level Muslimat and

Fatayat groups is a practice that they also engage in outside the campaign period. They hope that these efforts to construct an image as a generous politician will strengthen the social trust connecting them to the group of voters concerned, so as to solidify loyalty and support without resorting to the practice of individualised vote buying.

The second form of clientelism pursued by NU women candidates involved the candidates positioning themselves in a mediating role, and helping community organisations and Islamic boarding schools to access funds derived from government and other sources. Tazkiyatul Muthmainah, a young first-time candidate of PKB, who was elected in 2019, for example, has a background as an activist and former commissioner of the Regional Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (*Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia Daerah*, KPID), and her position as head of the regional board of Fatayat in Central Java also meant she had a broad network of contacts in government and financial institutions. She used these networks to access empowerment and development programmes, distributing the funds she acquired in this way to community organisations. In order to increase her support among *kiai*, their students, and male voters, she assisted dozens of *pesantren* in Semarang to access funds in the amount of 25 to 50 million rupiah ($US1,800–3,500) per *pesantren*. All of these funds were CSR funds to develop *pesantren*, which the candidate accessed from financial institutions (Interview, 13 May 2019). She also facilitated access to financial assistance from the Ministry of Labour and Transmigration to develop the facilities of two large *pesantren* in Semarang (the Minister at the time was a PKB politician from Central Java).

Such distribution of funds for development programmes paid for by financial and government institutions is often done by incumbents who have direct access to government programmes; the experience of the 2014 election shows that it can be an effective means of mobilising electoral support (Mahsun, 2016). Sometimes, however, candidates fund donations or benefits themselves, that they distribute to particular groups, whether social, ethnic or religious societies (see Aspinall and Sukmajati, 2016). In 2019, we found that women candidates with a Muslimat or Fatayat background usually paid for such "club goods" from state funds. Zuhar Mahsun, an unsuccessful candidate for NasDem, gave the following explanation:

> I have networks and access to the Ministry of Trade and Industry which is headed up by a NasDem person. This means I can access programs paid for by the government which I can then take to community groups that are committed to supporting me. These are programs like fixing up food stalls, distributing hand-carts, tents, and pressure cookers [that is, equipment for home businesses and small-scale economic activities]. I accessed these and gave them to people who were serious in their commitment to support me. If I got their support, I would definitely bring the program to them. (Interview, 29 March 2019)

The NU women candidates we encountered who distributed club goods generally did so if they were running in an electoral district where Muslimat or Fatayat lacked a mass support base, or where it was a strong NU area but where the candidate did not have the structural support of Muslimat and Fatayat. This was the case with the candidate Zuhar Mahsun because, as previously discussed, she ran for NasDem rather than an Islamic party associated

with NU, and was thus denied the support of the Muslimat and Fatayat organisations. Tazkiyatul Muthmainah, who also used clientelism in her campaign, was competing in the electoral district encompassing Semarang, which is the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, PDI-P), and hence a nationalist stronghold, not a NU one. This was also not the area where she grew up and lives, with the result that she lacked organic connections in local community. These were the reasons she gave for pursuing a club-goods strategy.

However, NU women candidates in Central Java who had the support of Muslimat and Fatayat generally did not use such short-term and transactional clientelistic strategies, especially if they were running in areas where these organisations had a large base and which were their own places of origin. Such candidates included the successful candidates Nur Saadah and Inna Hadianala, both discussed above. In such contexts, NU women candidates, particularly those who were incumbents, were most likely to rely on support from Muslimat and Fatayat cadres in the villages. These cadres were women with whom the candidates had had long involvement in their capacity as leaders of Muslimat and Fatayat at the district or provincial levels. As leaders of these organisations, these candidates had long advocated in favour of the interests of these women at the grassroots, interacted with them through numerous programmes and activities over the years, developed their capacities through training programmes, and assisted them to access government empowerment programmes. While involving a form of long-term clientelism – or "relational clientelism," as opposed to "electoral clientelism," which focuses on short-term reward through vote buying (see Nichter, 2018) – such practices engender solidarity and build shared values, culture, and emotional ties, and ultimately strong levels of social trust. It is this solidarity and trust that was the most important source of social capital supporting the victory of NU women candidates in Central Java. Although our fieldwork was limited to Central Java, we suspect that the same mechanism of support operates in East Java, another NU stronghold where many women connected to Muslimat and Fatayat have been elected to provincial and district parliaments.

Conclusion

Our analysis of the experience of NU women who contested seats in the provincial parliament of Central Java in 2019 provides a new perspective on the political strategies that can underpin the success of women candidates seeking office. By using Muslimat and Fatayat – the women's networks associated with NU – and focusing on gender issues to target women voters, a number of women were able to achieve electoral success. The success of these women candidates is a good news story for women's political representation in Indonesia. Winning candidates do not have to come from among the ranks of families who already dominate formal power structures at the local level underpinned by oligarchic structures, or resort to vote buying as many candidates do in new democracies such as Indonesia. The ability of women candidates to use Islamic women's networks to win office also demonstrates the importance of these organisations to social and community life in Indonesia and how they can be harnessed for political purposes. In the context of contemporary politics in Indonesia, women in many regions who have access to women's organisational networks,

particularly those associated with NU, have the same potential as the women we have discussed here to win office if they too can highlight women's issues and target women voters for political support. This is especially the case if they are able to gain access to various empowerment programmes that can then be implemented to the community and thus be used to build a broader base of political support.

This case study of a number of NU women in Central Java demonstrates that although electoral politics is still dominated by patriarchal attitudes, women candidates are able to achieve electoral success. In an open list proportional representation electoral system such as Indonesia's, every candidate, man or woman, has to compete with every other candidate, both from within the candidate's own party and with candidates from other parties. Because of both the patriarchal nature of politics in Indonesia and its competitiveness, women candidates have to come up with strategies to maximise electoral support. We argue that the key to the success of the women we studied is that they were able to successfully combine several elements in their campaigning strategies: they used the structural capacity of the women's networks NU of Muslimat and Fatayat effectively to build campaign teams and capitalise on the social trust that accrued to them as leaders of those women's networks; they saw their identity as women as an asset that could give them a strategic advantage particularly in targeting women voters; and they addressed women's issues for which they were able to show issue competency. It was the combination of these elements that gave them an electoral advantage and led to their electoral victories. As Herrnson et al. (2003: 251) conclude, "women can never truly be equal in the campaign process until they employ their identity as a strength rather than camouflage it as a weakness." NU women candidates in Central Java came from a position of strength: they used women's networks and spoke about women's issues to women voters.

Of course, this formula for electoral success is not applicable to all women candidates in all situations. We have shown that at times NU women candidates also had to resort to clientelistic practices in their attempts to win enough electoral support because the NU women's networks were not strong enough in their electoral districts, or they were not running for an NU-affiliated party. However, there are other women's networks in Indonesia that could be tapped into by women candidates, including those belonging to the modernist Islamic organisation Muhammadiyah and women's welfare organisations. There are thus numerous potential mobilisational alternatives for women candidates, including those with a track record of gender activism and advocacy on social issues.

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Notes

1. One estimate for Central Java puts the combined membership at up to eight or nine million (Interview with Ida Fauziyah, 30 May 2019), but this seems unlikely given that it would mean that 57 per cent of women voters in Central Java are members of one of the two organisations.
2. Khofifah Indar Parawansa, former chairwoman of Muslimat and now Governor of East Java, for example, is a PPP politician. See Fealy (2018) on PKB and NU dynamics.
3. On the concept of *Islam Nusantara* and NU, see Fealy (2018) and Hosen (2016).

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