

Gendered media representation and political leadership: The case of Khofifah Indar Parawansa in Indonesia's 2024 election

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Abstract. This study examines how gendered media framing shapes public perceptions of female political leadership in Indonesia, focusing on Khofifah Indar Parawansa during the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election. Although women's political participation has increased through affirmative action and the growing visibility of female leaders, gender stereotypes continue to influence political communication. Using Robert Entman's framing theory and a qualitative content analysis of news reports published by *Mediaindonesia.com*, this research identifies the dominant frames used to portray Khofifah's leadership. Four key frames emerged: competence, religiosity, domesticity, and personal traits. The competence and religiosity frames emphasize administrative experience, policy achievements, and moral credibility, enhancing her legitimacy as a regional leader. Conversely, the domesticity and personal traits frames highlight nurturing qualities, emotional sensitivity, and maternal identity, revealing the persistence of gendered expectations that shape interpretations of female leadership. These combined narratives demonstrate an ambivalent pattern in which media coverage simultaneously strengthens women's political visibility while reinforcing traditional gender norms. The study contributes to discussions on gendered mediation in Southeast Asian political communication and underscores the need for more gender-sensitive reporting practices to support equitable representation in regional executive elections.

1 Introduction

Women's participation in Indonesian politics has shown substantial progress over the past two decades, driven by affirmative action policies, growing public awareness of gender equality, and the increasing visibility of female leaders in national and regional positions. The adoption of a 30 percent gender quota has enabled more women to enter legislative bodies, while prominent political actors including ministers, governors, and local executives have contributed to shifting public perceptions regarding women's political capabilities. Despite these advancements, female candidates continue to face structural, cultural, and symbolic barriers within Indonesia's political landscape. Gendered stereotypes, expectations of moral purity, and persistent assumptions regarding women's emotionality or domestic responsibilities shape how the public and political institutions interpret female leadership.

In this environment, the media play a central role in shaping narratives about political figures. Digital news platforms, which have become a primary source of political information

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for Indonesian voters, construct specific portrayals that influence how candidates are evaluated. Through framing, media selectively emphasize certain attributes, events, or issues while minimizing others. Such framing does more than describe political realities it implicitly guides the audience toward particular interpretations of competence, legitimacy, and trustworthiness. For female politicians, these interpretive patterns often intersect with cultural expectations about gender roles. As documented by global and Southeast Asian scholarship, women in politics tend to be framed through narratives of morality, empathy, personality traits, and domestic identity, which differ substantially from the frames commonly applied to male politicians.

The dynamics of gendered framing are particularly relevant in Indonesia's regional executive elections, where public trust, religious legitimacy, and leadership character are crucial factors. East Java, one of Indonesia's most populous and politically influential provinces, represents a significant context for analyzing these patterns. The 2024 East Java gubernatorial election featured Khofifah Indar Parawansa as one of the leading candidates. Having served as the former Minister of Social Affairs and as the incumbent governor seeking re-election, Khofifah brings extensive administrative experience, strong grassroots networks, and moral-cultural legitimacy rooted in her role within Nahdlatul Ulama's Muslimat organization. These attributes make her a unique figure in Indonesian regional politics. However, her high-profile candidacy also exposes her to distinct gendered discourses in media coverage, especially regarding how her identity and leadership are framed by national news outlets.

As digital consumption increases, online platforms like *Mediaindonesia.com* have become key agenda-setters in shaping political narratives. Their framing choices significantly influence the portrayal of candidates' leadership qualities, policy competence, and personal attributes. Previous studies on media representation in Indonesia have acknowledged the persistence of gender bias, yet they have predominantly focused on national-level politics, legislative elections, or broad analyses of gender stereotypes. Research examining the framing of specific female candidates in subnational executive elections Particularly gubernatorial races is still limited. Even fewer studies analyze how major national digital news portals construct narratives surrounding women who hold or seek executive authority at the regional level.

Despite growing interest in gendered media analysis, scholarly attention to the framing of female regional executive candidates in Indonesia remains insufficient. Existing literature tends to concentrate on either gender stereotypes in general political coverage or national-level dynamics, leaving a gap in understanding how gendered mediation operates in provincial elections where cultural, religious, and political structures intersect. Additionally, limited research investigates how *Mediaindonesia.com*, as one of Indonesia's leading digital news platforms, frames a prominent female candidate such as Khofifah Indar Parawansa during a competitive gubernatorial contest in East Java. This gap is particularly important because media framing at the regional level can shape leadership legitimacy, public trust, and perceptions of women's suitability for executive roles.

This study aims to analyze how *Mediaindonesia.com* framed Khofifah Indar Parawansa during the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election. Using Robert Entman's framing theory and gendered mediation perspectives, the research identifies dominant narrative patterns such as competence, religiosity, domesticity, and personal traits and examines how these frames influence the construction of female political leadership in Indonesia. The study contributes to gender-media scholarship by offering empirical evidence of how digital news platforms mediate women's political visibility and by highlighting the ongoing interplay between empowerment and gender bias within contemporary Indonesian political communication.

2 Theoretical Framework

This research employs Robert Entman's (1993) framing theory as its primary analytical lens. According to Entman, framing is the process by which media select certain aspects of a perceived reality and highlight them in a way that promotes particular interpretations. He identifies four key functions of framing: (1) defining problems, (2) diagnosing causes, (3) making moral evaluations, and (4) suggesting remedies. These functions illustrate how media narratives shape meaning by directing attention toward specific elements while obscuring others. Through these mechanisms, framing influences how audiences understand political events and evaluate the actions and legitimacy of political actors.

In the context of political communication, framing is especially influential because it helps structure public perceptions of leadership qualities, moral character, and competence. News outlets may emphasize policy expertise, personal charisma, moral integrity, or emotional traits depending on their interpretive goals. These choices are rarely neutral; rather, they reflect broader social and cultural expectations embedded within media institutions and audiences.

To deepen this analysis, the study incorporates gendered mediation theory, which examines how political news coverage reflects and reproduces gender norms. Scholars such as Ross (2017), Campus (2013), and Byerly & Ross (2006) argue that media frequently apply gendered frames that position women differently from men in political discourse. Women are more likely to be framed through narratives emphasizing domesticity, empathy, moral virtue, or personal traits, whereas men are often associated with competence, authority, or strategic leadership. Even when coverage appears positive, gendered mediation suggests that underlying assumptions about femininity and masculinity shape how political actors are evaluated.

This theoretical perspective is essential for understanding media portrayals in Indonesia, where cultural norms, religious values, and patriarchal structures continue to influence public interpretations of female leadership. Digital news platforms such as *Mediaindonesia.com* operate within this sociocultural environment, and their framing choices may reinforce or challenge prevailing gender expectations. For instance, emphasizing Khofifah's maternal identity or religious morality may enhance her appeal in East Java's sociopolitical context but simultaneously constrain perceptions of her leadership by associating her with traditional feminine attributes.

Integrating Entman's framework with gendered mediation theory allows for a comprehensive analysis of both explicit and implicit narratives in political reporting. Entman's model provides a systematic method for identifying how frames are constructed, while gendered mediation theory offers a critical lens for uncovering subtle gender biases. Together, these perspectives enable the study to examine how frames such as competence, religiosity, domesticity, and personal traits shape the media construction of Khofifah Indar Parawansa during the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election.

This combined framework also supports an examination of the broader implications of media framing for women's political representation. By evaluating how digital news platforms depict female executives, the study contributes to understanding how media narratives influence public trust, leadership legitimacy, and the symbolic inclusion of women in political power. The theoretical framework thus provides a robust foundation for analyzing the gendered dimensions of political communication in Indonesia's rapidly evolving digital media ecosystem.

3 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design using content analysis to examine how *Mediaindonesia.com* framed Khofifah Indar Parawansa during the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election. Content analysis is an appropriate method for investigating interpretive patterns in media texts, as it enables systematic identification of thematic frames, narrative strategies, and implicit gendered meanings embedded in news discourse.

3.1 Data Source and Sampling Procedure

The primary data consist of online news articles published by *Mediaindonesia.com*, one of Indonesia's leading national news portals. Articles were collected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objective. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. articles explicitly mentioning Khofifah Indar Parawansa;
2. articles published within the active campaign and pre-election period of the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election;
3. articles categorized under political news or regional politics;
4. articles containing evaluative, descriptive, or interpretive statements about Khofifah's leadership, identity, or public image.

Articles outside the electoral timeframe, those unrelated to political attributes, or those focusing purely on administrative events without narrative descriptions were excluded. The final dataset consists of eight news articles that met all criteria.

3.2 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is the complete news article. Each article was examined to identify how specific aspects of Khofifah's leadership, identity, and political activities were selected and highlighted. Sentences, paragraphs, and thematic patterns served as coding segments to capture the building blocks of media frames.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis is guided by Robert Entman's (1993) framing model, which identifies four core framing functions:

1. problem definition;
2. causal interpretation;
3. moral evaluation;
4. treatment recommendation.

These functions provide a systematic structure for identifying how media narratives define political issues, attribute responsibility, moralize leadership qualities, and suggest interpretations for readers. Frames were operationalized into four thematic categories derived from preliminary readings of the data and supported by gender-media scholarship:

- competence,
- religiosity,
- domesticity,
- personal traits.

These categories serve as analytical lenses to explore how media representation intersects with gender norms in the political sphere.

3.4 Coding Procedure

Data were coded manually using a structured coding sheet developed based on Entman's framing indicators and prior research on gendered mediation. The coding process involved three steps:

1. open coding, identifying recurring themes and descriptive patterns;

2. axial coding, grouping patterns into meaningful categories;
3. selective coding, aligning categories with the framing functions and gendered mediation concepts.

Each article was coded independently to ensure that frames were captured consistently across texts.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

To enhance reliability, an intercoder reliability procedure was conducted. A second coder familiar with media framing and gender studies independently coded a subset of the articles. Coding results were compared, and discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. This process ensured consistency and minimized subjective bias.

Validity was strengthened through:

- theoretical triangulation, using both framing theory and gendered mediation concepts;
- data triangulation, cross-checking patterns across multiple articles;
- thick description, providing detailed interpretation of narrative strategies.

3.6 Analytical Process

The final stage involved synthesizing coded data into thematic narrative patterns. Articles were analyzed to identify how *Mediaindonesia.com* emphasized specific aspects of Khofifah's leadership, how these selections aligned with gendered expectations, and how the resulting frames shaped broader political interpretations. The findings were then interpreted in relation to existing gender-media scholarship to provide a comprehensive understanding of the gendered framing of female political leadership in Indonesia's regional elections.

4. Results And Discussion

The analysis of *Mediaindonesia.com* coverage of Khofifah Indar Parawansa during the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election reveals four dominant media frames: competence, religiosity, domesticity, and personal traits. These frames collectively construct a multilayered representation of female political leadership that both empowers and constrains Khofifah's public image. Using Entman's framing functions problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation this section examines how these frames operate and how they reflect gendered mediation in Indonesian digital news discourse

4.1 Competence Frame

The competence frame appears prominently in the coverage, positioning Khofifah as an experienced and effective administrator. Articles frequently highlight her leadership record, policy achievements, and long-standing involvement in public service. This frame defines the political issue in East Java as one requiring strategic governance, stability, and capable hands implicitly aligning these needs with Khofifah's technocratic profile. *Mediaindonesia.com* often attributes positive outcomes to her managerial experience, portraying her as a problem-solver who provides clear direction and administrative continuity.

From Entman's perspective, these narratives perform moral evaluations that legitimize her political leadership. By emphasizing policy knowledge, administrative expertise, and proven performance, the media construct Khofifah as a qualified candidate whose leadership rests on merit rather than gender identity. In contrast with common patterns of gender bias that downplay women's competence, this frame challenges stereotypes and supports broader efforts to normalize women's presence in executive roles.

However, this frame still operates within cultural expectations that require female leaders to “prove” their capability more explicitly than male counterparts. While positive, the competence frame indirectly reinforces gendered scrutiny by highlighting competence as an exceptional attribute for a female candidate rather than a standard expectation. This ambivalence is consistent with gendered mediation theories, which suggest that even merit-based portrayals of women can be framed as deviations from normative masculinity in leadership.

4.2 Religiosity Frame

The religiosity frame situates Khofifah’s leadership within Islamic moral values, emphasizing her identity as a respected figure in Nahdlatul Ulama and her longstanding connection to Muslimat NU. Articles frequently portray her decisions as grounded in ethical responsibility, community care, and religious commitment. This frame aligns with East Java’s socio-religious landscape, where moral authority carries significant political weight.

Through Entman’s functions, this frame constructs causal interpretations that link Khofifah’s moral grounding to public trust and political stability. The media suggest that her religious values shape her policy orientation and leadership approach, thereby enhancing her legitimacy. Such narratives position her not only as a political actor but also as a moral guide familiar with the cultural-religious fabric of East Java.

Yet, the religiosity frame also intersects with gendered expectations that women must embody purity, humility, and moral guardianship. While strengthening her appeal, this frame risks circumscribing her leadership within culturally feminine virtues rather than presenting religiosity as a universal leadership attribute. This reflects broader findings in gendered mediation literature, which highlight the tendency to frame female politicians through moralized identities.

4.3 Domesticity Frame

The domesticity frame constitutes the most explicitly gendered dimension of the media coverage. Khofifah is frequently depicted through references to motherhood, caregiving, and emotional understanding. Statements portraying her as “a mother who understands the people’s struggles” exemplify how domestic roles are used to construct political empathy. These narratives define political issues as requiring nurturing, compassion, and sensitivity traits culturally associated with femininity.

In Entman’s model, this frame establishes moral evaluations that link political legitimacy to maternal identity. While intended to humanize and elevate Khofifah’s public image, such portrayals reinforce stereotypes that women’s leadership value is rooted primarily in domestic or emotional qualities. This limits the perceived scope of their authority, narrowing leadership to social or emotional domains rather than political, economic, or administrative realms.

Gendered mediation theory underscores how such framing reproduces patriarchal norms by tying female leadership to domestic virtues. Although the frame is positive in tone, it simultaneously constrains female political agency by framing nurturing traits as essential components of women’s political legitimacy.

4.4 Personal Traits Frame

The personal traits frame highlights Khofifah’s calmness, empathy, emotional composure, and interpersonal skills. These attributes are used to construct a narrative of stable and approachable leadership. Media articles emphasize her ability to connect with communities, remain composed during political tension, and display warmth in public interactions.

This frame performs moral evaluations that present emotional stability as a political strength. However, compared to male politicians who are more often framed through decisiveness, assertiveness, or strategic acumen, the focus on personality traits reflects

persistent gendered expectations. It replicates patterns documented in global research in which female leaders are evaluated through interpersonal qualities rather than policy-driven attributes.

While the personal traits frame can enhance Khofifah's broad appeal, it also reinforces the symbolic gendering of leadership by positioning emotional intelligence as her main comparative advantage. Such framing subtly aligns with stereotypes that women are naturally empathetic or nurturing, thereby limiting interpretations of women's capacity for assertive or strategic leadership.

4.5 Ambivalent Gendered Framing

Across the four frames, *Mediaindonesia.com* constructs an ambivalent portrayal of Khofifah's leadership. On one hand, competence and religiosity frames enhance her political legitimacy by highlighting expertise, experience, and moral grounding. On the other hand, domesticity and personality frames reproduce gender norms that tie her legitimacy to feminine virtues rather than universal leadership qualities.

This duality reflects the broader dynamics of gendered mediation in Indonesia, where female leaders gain visibility yet remain symbolically constrained by traditional gender expectations. The coexistence of empowerment and gendered bias underscores the complex role of media in shaping the public acceptance of women in executive leadership positions.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how *Mediaindonesia.com* framed Khofifah Indar Parawansa during the 2024 East Java gubernatorial election using Robert Entman's framing theory and gendered mediation perspectives. The findings reveal that four dominant frames competence, religiosity, domesticity, and personal traits shape the media construction of Khofifah's political identity in complex and ambivalent ways.

On one hand, the competence and religiosity frames reinforce Khofifah's legitimacy as a capable and morally grounded leader. These narratives emphasize administrative experience, policy achievements, and ethical leadership rooted in her religious background, thereby enhancing her credibility in East Java's sociopolitical context. Such portrayals challenge traditional assumptions that question women's suitability for executive roles and contribute to expanding the visibility of female political leadership in Indonesia.

On the other hand, the domesticity and personal traits frames subtly reproduce gendered expectations that position women within nurturing, emotional, or familial roles. By emphasizing maternal identity, empathy, and interpersonal warmth, these frames limit the interpretive space available to female leaders and reinforce cultural norms that tie women's political legitimacy to feminine virtues. This ambivalence reflects the broader patterns of gendered mediation in Indonesian media, where women are simultaneously empowered through visibility yet constrained by symbolic gender norms.

Overall, the study demonstrates that media framing plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of female leadership during regional elections. The coexistence of empowering and restrictive frames reveals how digital news platforms continue to negotiate cultural expectations surrounding femininity and political authority. These findings underscore the need for more gender-sensitive journalistic practices that present female leaders through multidimensional and non-stereotypical representations.

Future research could compare media framing across multiple news platforms, assess how social media influences audience reception of gendered narratives, or examine framing dynamics in other regional elections. Expanding such analyses would provide deeper insights into how Indonesia's evolving media ecosystem shapes the political visibility and legitimacy of women in executive leadership roles.

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