

Political Communication and Gender: An Analysis of Public's Perceptions Toward the Election of the 2017 Mayoral Candidates of Banda Aceh

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ABSTRACT

This research attempted to describe the public's perception toward political communication of certain gender in winning the mayoral election of Banda Aceh in 2017 and to find out people's perceptions on the ability of gender to influence the candidacy in winning the mayoral election of Banda Aceh in 2017. This research employed qualitative method by using structured-interview on expert informants from the Independent Election Commission, the Head of Islamic *Shari'a* Office of Banda Aceh and the voting community (male and female) selected by using purposive sampling. The theory used is social cognition theory, which developed by Albert Bandura since 1960 and emphasized the tendency to imitate what people see through the media or other people. The political communication carried out by the two mayor candidates of Banda Aceh stemmed a new problem since one of the candidates was female. This issue triggered a controversy in the community in terms of contradicting the teachings of Islamic *Shari'a* regarding gender. In terms of political participation, women have been given special proportion in both management of political parties and legislative candidacy (30%). Meanwhile, this arrangement is still not well-considered because there are no strict sanctions for political parties. Hence, there are still many serious problems, starting from women's interest which is still low in the political sphere as well as the problems of gender bias experienced by women. Furthermore, the urgency of women's representation in the political sphere is hampered due to negative stereotypes towards women and the level of patriarchal knowledge which still sticks on people's lives.

Keywords: *Political Communication, Gender, Public's Perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

Perception is a process of someone's activity in giving an impression, judgment, opinion, feeling and interpreting something based on information displayed from the source perceived. The perception referred to in this research is people's views on gender in political communication in the election of the 2017 mayoral candidates of Banda Aceh. Gender is a concept used to identify the differences between men and women in terms of social, cultural and law (rights and obligations) or in terms of a non-biological perspective. Theoretically, gender as a social construction does not need to be questioned if it does not cause discrimination and injustice towards one of the human sexes (Siti Marlina, 2015: 5), whereas, the concept of gender is the characteristics attached to men and women that are constructed socially and culturally (Joko Sutarso, 2011: 4).

The existence of gender nowadays does not only illustrate the differences of men and women in society but also represents gender participation in politics. Women's participation in politics in Indonesia indicates that the representation of women is still low at all levels of decision making such as executive, legislative, judiciary and bureaucratic levels of government, political parties and public's life.

In addition to the low number of women's representation in political sphere, the quality of women representing their community is another issue emerging in society. So far, the participation of women in politics, if any, only seems to play a secondary role. They are only seen as supporting figures and this reflects their lack of knowledge in the political field (Ani Widyani, 2005: 22-23). The urgency of women's representation in politics of Indonesia is hampered by many factors such as the system and political parties in Indonesia that do not concern the gender issues. As a result, many women do not show up in political sphere. There are numerous issues related to themselves that are frequently underestimated.

In the context of Aceh, gender participation in politics can be seen in the 2017 mayoral election of the Banda Aceh. The mayoral election of Banda Aceh held on February 15th 2017 aimed to elect the Mayor of Banda Aceh for the period of 2017-2022. There were two pairs of candidates who were competing in the mayoral election of Banda Aceh. The first candidate pair was represented by Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal and Farid Nyak Umar promoted by a number of parties including The Democratic Party, Aceh Party, The Prosperous Justice Party, The United Development Party, Aceh Peace Party, The Justice and Unity Party, The People's Conscience Party and The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle. On the other side, the second candidate pair was Aminullah Usman and Zainal Arifin were supported by National Democrat Party, The National Mandate Party, The Party of Functional Groups, The Great Indonesia Movement Party, The National Awakening Party, and The Crescent Star Party. (<http://kip.bandaceh.ac.co>, retrieved: October 2, 2017). In order to win the election in 2017, the candidates attempted to attract the community throughout political communication regarding both social activities and political participation.

People of Banda Aceh, in general, still consider women to be weak in both politics and leadership. When observed more closely, the perception is caused by patriarchal culture that is still inherent in people's lives. This can be seen from the party management structure at the regional level which largely is dominated by men although there are a lot of women in Aceh who have expertise and higher education.

Hence, based on this phenomenon, this research was conducted to reveal public's perceptions toward political communication delivered by particular gender in winning the mayoral election of Banda Aceh in 2017 and to find out people's perceptions on whether gender is able to influence the candidacy in winning the mayoral election of Banda Aceh in 2017.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research employed the theory of social cognitive developed by a psychologist, Albert Bandura. The theory of social cognition is one of learning theories explaining patterns of behavior. The theory that has been developed by Albert Bandura since 1960 emphasized that people tend to imitate or emulate what they see through the media or other people. This theory is the development of social learning theory used to understand, predict and change human's behavior (source: *pakarkom* Communications.com, accessed November 16, 2018).

Perception constitutes a kind of visualization of each person toward an object which results in different concepts. Etymologically, perception is derived from English (perception) and Latin (*percipare*) which means to accept or take. Leavit (as quoted by Lagza Lasita, 2012: 6-7), defined perception terminologically as a vision by which one sees things.

Within the last fifteen years, the word gender has been considerably included into the word banks in every scientific discussion or writings. According to Narwoko (as quoted by Nur Indah, 2013: 3), gender constitutes a difference that is obvious within men and women if viewed from their values and behavior. Therefore, gender becomes a term used to socially delineate the differences between men and women.

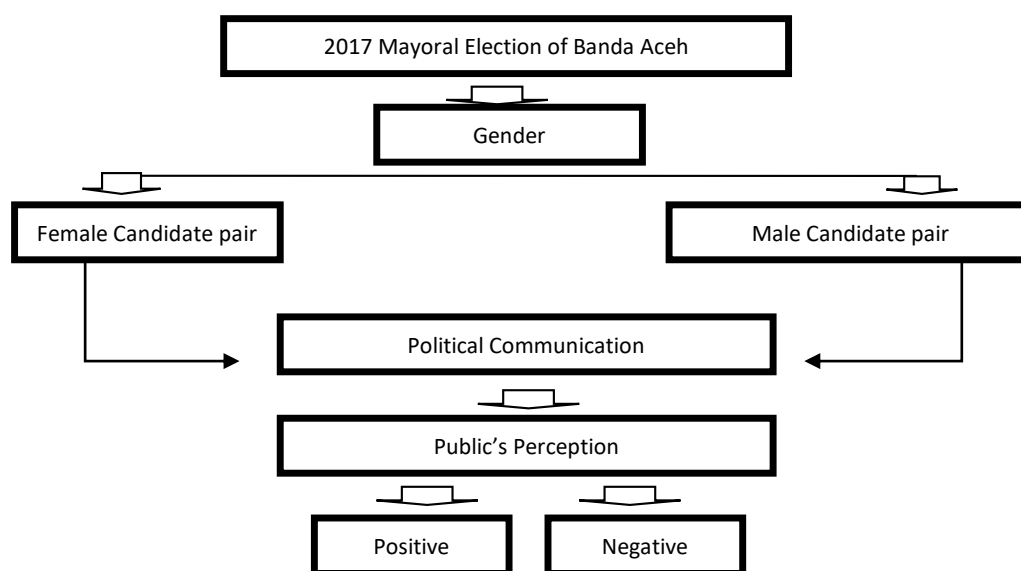
Gender is a group of cultural attributes and behaviors that exist within men and women. Thus, gender as a concept produced from human's thought or human's imagination is formed by the community. It is dynamic and different due to differences in customs, culture, religion, society and certain ethnic groups. Gender can change because of history, political, economic, social, cultural changes or development progress. Therefore, gender is not universal and may not be generally applied, but, is situational in society.

Meanwhile, political communication is the process of delivering information about politics from the government to the community and from the community to the government (Ramlan Surbakti, 2010: 152). The impact of political communication such as political image, public's opinion and the effect of the distribution of political participation that can be measured is the result of voting in elections. The political communication strategy that must be used is to preserve figures as political heroes, raise parties, create togetherness and build consensus based on clear political vision, mission and programs. The impact of political communication in question is some elements such as political image, public opinion and the effect of the distribution of political participation that can be measured throughout the results of voting in general elections.

Many researches had been focused on women and political participation in local politics. Lawless (2004) agreed that the support towards women leaders are lower as a result of gender stereotypes. Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes (2003) suggested that using voters' dispositions toward gender is one of the keys to success for female candidate. Hence, Ryan (2007) agreed that dismantling the stereotypes and implement good strategies to develop women leaders. Ferreira and Gyourko (2014) believed that women leader have higher political skills as long as they do

not implement different policies. Nevertheless, Kassa (2015) found that many factors contributed to women’s poor political participation in the country, which are economic, religious, social and cultural factors. Tsuji (2017) also considered that background environmental factors also affect women’s candidacy for mayoral elections. Sumbas (2019) found that challenges faced by female mayors in local politics comes from the cultural factors such as male-dominance of political seat as well as the burden of traditional gendered roles on female mayors. Besides, Sharma (2020) suggested some factors that are needed for political empowerment of women, among them are legal environment, political environment, and internal motivation.

The following figure illustrates the research framework.



METHOD

This research was conducted in Banda Aceh, a city which consists of 9 sub-district: *Meuraxa, Jaya Baru, Banda Raya, Baiturrahman, Leung Bata, Kuta Alam, Kuta Raja, Syiah Kuala* and *Ulee Kareng*. The object of research is the target of the research. The target of the research does not depend on the title and the topic of the research, but it is concretely described in the formulation of the research problem (Bungin, 2007: 78). The object of this research is the view of people of Banda Aceh toward gender in carrying out the political communication in the 2017 mayoral election of Banda Aceh. The research subjects are those becoming the samples or the subjects the researcher intends to study about. Research subjects are chosen deliberately and become informants who will provide the information required during the research (Sugiyono, 2012: 171). The informants in this research were chosen by using purposive sampling technique determined intentionally by the researcher (Faisal, 2007: 67). In this research, the researcher chose several informants who have required information related to the object of the research. In line with this, the informants might be those who were directly or indirectly involved in the election. Therefore, some criteria were made to determine the subjects of this research as follows:

1. A native of Banda Aceh

2. An active voter in the 2017 mayoral election
3. Get to know the candidate
4. A member of community participating in the election
5. An organizer of the Independent Election Commission

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

GENDER AND PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

One of the female candidates who ran for in the mayoral election of Banda Aceh for the period 2017-2022 was the number one candidate pair, Sa'aduddin Djamal and Farid Nyak Umar. Previously, Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal had ever officiated as the first female mayor of Banda Aceh after the death of previous mayor, Mawardin Nurdin. In 2017, Illiza proposed the same vision and mission as she did when he ran for the election in the prior period.

In the 2017 mayoral election of Banda Aceh, the male candidate pair who ran for mayor and deputy mayor of Banda Aceh for the period 2017-2022 were H. Aminullah Usman, SE. AK., MM and Drs. H. Zainal Arifin. The main purpose of political advertising of the number two-candidate pair was persuasive-informative informing the public that by choosing particular political candidates, their quality of life can change.

The results of the research indicated that the political message delivered by the number-one candidate pair was underrated because it stated the same vision and mission as the previous period. Words and goals in planning the programs are very influential on people's behavior, both the use of political communication strategies and ways to attract people's attention which will certainly have an impact. The narrative was delivered by one of the informants:

"Yes, in my opinion, it is more of a way to attract people's interest by the candidate number one is less efficient and the political strategy is also weakened". (Nasir, interviewed on April 21, 2018).

Meanwhile, the number-two candidate pair was considered to have the most realistic political message in its implementation, as informed by one of the informants:

"Personally, I am interested in the vision and mission presented by the candidate number two, such as solving the problem of clean water in Banda Aceh. If Illiza has been felt and seen her development in the Banda Aceh community when she was at the position". (Salwiyah, interviewed on April 01, 2018).

In supporting political campaigns, the use of media including mainstream, online and social media was very crucial to reach constituents. In addition, the profile, characteristics and solidity of the supporting parties also influenced the success of the candidates. Furthermore, the campaign strategy, especially the strategy in arranging political messages, which became the key message of number-two candidate's campaign, turned out to have a significant impact on the prospective voters. Moreover, the key message is associated with the perspective of Islamic teachings which argues that women should not be public leaders. Despite the controversy, it turned out that this political message was able to make prospective voters support the number-one candidate pair. This statement is supported by the testimony from some informants:

"In my opinion, they use mass media as a mediation tool has been effective, by conducting campaigns both directly and also through various media, including social media as well, so as to reach people from various realm". (Fatimah, interviewed on March 30, 2018).

"Both are equally strong in publicizing their vision and mission. Whether it's in the field of mass media or directly into the field, for example campaigning. It's just that maybe on the side of Mrs. Illza at that time there was a weak point maybe in the field of her political party not being solid". (Baihaqi, interview on April 26, 2018).

GENDER AND WINNING FACTORS IN BANDA ACEH MAYOR ELECTION

Perception of a person is naturally preceded by sensing, by which, the senses act as the means of connector possessed by the individual to receive stimulus and connect the individual to the outside world. The results of this research confirmed a number of obstacles for a woman in attracting community of Banda Aceh that are influenced by the following factors:

Firstly, Religion. Aceh is a province in which the majority of its population adhere to Islam and highly cling on customs and the opinion of the '*ulama*'. The role and the speech of the '*ulama*' become an influential reference in society because they are the most respected figure and are role models. The following are the statements from some informants which agreed to the opinion of '*ulama*':

"There are fewer opportunities for women to become leaders, because in Aceh according to clerics say women should not be leaders at the time of the previous election I prefer male candidate, because that position is better for men who are elected." (Yusra, interviewed on April 08, 2018).

The next informant also explained a similar point:

"In religion women should not be a leader, even clerics forbid. If the opportunity is possible, but if elected, it is okay to be his representative. The obstacle for women to dabble in the outside world is because the position of women is not the same as men, men are more firmly seen as judged in terms of gender and women are invaluable and there is a meek nature. I disagree that women take precedence, because men are better suited to explore the profession". (Zafar, interviewed on May, 06, 2018).

Secondly, Culture. Culture regulates human in order to understand how they should act and determine their attitudes when dealing with others. The patriarchal structure of society has an impact on differences in the rights and obligations of women and men. As the result, it becomes the root of gender inequality, a source of injustice to women and gives identity to gender equality or gender bias. Gender inequality that is interrelated in various forms of injustice is shown throughout the formation of stereotypes or negative binding, violence, and workload. In this case, the community considered that men are more decent to be a leader or mayor of Banda Aceh compared to women.

"Actually, I'm referring to two versions that maybe we can use, essentially in the context of Islam women have been leaders. There are certain values that are certainly impossible for women to have and are only owned by men. That's why this leader must be able to embrace, nurture and so on. Indeed women can but there are some who may be women who do not have the nature of behavior because this leader must animate, feel, and must protect. If the language is dichotomous by religion, I'm not saying it's not mandatory for women to lead. If men don't exist as potential as leadership it probably can. Because for me, men are more suitable to lead." (Nasir, interviewed on April 21, 2018).

Thirdly, Gender. In terms of gender, people tended to give perception toward it in the 2017 mayoral election of Banda Aceh which later influenced their vote. Besides, female community were more sensitive when asked for their opinions.

"I see that currently the opportunity for women to become a leader is still relatively narrow because generally our society in Aceh still assumes that a woman's job is to take care of the household. For me, women can also lead, the real proof is that Mrs. Illiza has been steady in becoming a leader, in fact we have seen what changes in Banda Aceh City are both in the form of infrastructure, in urban planning. Men and women must have justice in the social sphere. I believe women can hold the mandate of the people and can become a leader. I voted for and supported Mrs. Illiza and at the time of the election I also voted for her. So, I like her leadership and I am happy that women can contribute to the outside world apart from taking care of the household" (Fatimah, interviewed on March 30, 2018).

Of the nine informants, three of whom were more supportive of Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal and Farid Nyak Umar because they were satisfied with the results achieved by Illiza once she was the mayor of Banda Aceh. However, the other six informants preferred the number-two candidate pair as they perceived that only a man who deserve to be a leader. It cannot be ignored that the majority of Banda Aceh community still hold strong belief in the patriarchal structure. This belief evoked both positive and negative view of the community in considering the gender as a vital aspect in electing a leader of community. For instance, one of informants namely DHS, stated that the number-two candidate pair is the best candidate and deserved to lead Banda Aceh. This statement indicated that number-two candidate pair is considered decent to be a leader as they are male candidates.

Women's participation in politics reflects that the patriarchal ideology in community is still strong, in which, the participation of women in political parties is part of the dominance of power. Furthermore, gender stereotypes attached to women emphasize that women are not decent to be leaders. This argument became a significant reason for community to refuse women to occupy high positions in formal political institutions. Thus, women's leadership is considered difficult to obtain its recognition in the political sphere.

Society are people who frequently interact each other in certain areas and have a shared culture. Meanwhile, the provisions of perception or opinion of an object may vary among people since it is influenced by their different ways of thinking. Therefore, the extent of political communication and Gender towards the 2017 mayoral candidate of Banda Aceh became a benchmark of rating the qualification of both candidate pairs.

The results of this research indicated that political communication carried out by male gender could affect the victory of male gender candidates in the 2017 mayoral election of Banda Aceh. Meanwhile, the political message delivered by the number-one candidate, which consists of female and male candidate, turned out to attract less attention of the voters.

In addition, the defeat of the number-one candidate pair was also influenced by public's perception that, during Illiza's position as Mayor of Banda Aceh, there were still many weaknesses. Since a large part of the community wanted a better city change, the number-one candidate pair, in their political campaign, apparently were considered incapable to propose different vision and missions from the previous period. As the result, it made most of people felt bored. Although most of media have been used by the number-one candidate pair, it was not able to provide greater support to the candidate.

On the contrary, community of Banda Aceh welcomed and supported the vision and mission oriented by the number-two candidate pair. One of the most controversial political messages was the issue that women are not decent to be a public leader. Moreover, it was even claimed that women is unlawful to become a leader. Although the Achenese voters are categorized as highly educated and urbanized people, fanaticism towards political messages and gender issues framed by ulama's references has turned out to be a political dynamic that has a huge impact on the win of the number-two candidate pair

The results of this research proved the assumption that the role between men and women is an influential element in both social and political sphere. In Aceh, women's participation in politics is still unable to compete with men, especially in occupying high position and having a role in practical politics. One of the obstacles of this issue is patriarchal culture which has been the mindset of Aceh community. In addition, there are also factors influencing people's perceptions including family and individuals.

Gender is no longer a new issue in social assessment. The differentiation of men and women occurs throughout the process of socialization, reinforcement, social and cultural construction of religion even state power. Gender gradually has become as if it is a natural or biological determination that no longer can be changed. Finally, the differences of gender beliefs has been considered so natural and normal that those who start to contravene it will be considered against the rule. As a result, gender influences human beliefs and the culture of society in terms of how men and women think and act in accordance with the social provisions. In Aceh, the role and the function of women and men must be in accordance with the Islamic values, in which, women's level are under the men's. As the result, men are considered as the only gender that properly leads the community. The particular roles and functions between men and women in Aceh society differs in terms of rights and obligations. Thus, political communication delivered by the number-one candidate pair, in their political campaign, is said to successfully appeal large number of voters.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this research, several points are drawn as the conclusions. Firstly, political communication and vision and missions delivered by the number-one candidate pair

differed from the opposite candidate pair's, the number-two candidate pair was perceived to be superior in their vision and missions and were able to package the main message in political communication with a firm message that women's capabilities are hesitated to be a leader and is not suggested in Islam.

Secondly, gender has a different role and function in Aceh as the majority of the community are Moslem. In the perspectives of Islam, in terms of their roles, men always become leaders and women always become the followers of them. This issue has such a huge impact on the political communication delivered by both mayoral candidate pairs. The political communication done by the number-one candidate pair tended to be less efficient because the mayoral candidate was a female, whereas, the political communication conveyed by the number-two candidate pair were positively welcomed since there is no female gender in the candidate pair.

Finally, most of people in Banda Aceh still perceive that women have not been able to be equal as men in terms of leading a large scale of community. This perception is based on several factors including religious, cultural and gender. Therefore, accepting female figure as public leader is still uncommon and burdensome for the majority of people in Banda Aceh.

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