

Minority Candidate Victory and Dynamics of Voter Behavior in the 2024 Semarang Mayoral Election

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ABSTRACT: Few minority candidates win in regional elections. Previous studies have suggested that being from a majority group and having a strong voter base are key factors in winning elections. This study aims to understand the dynamics of voter behavior toward triple minority candidates in the 2024 Semarang Mayoral Election. This phenomenon is interesting to investigate further because it demonstrates voter involvement in a political process involving candidates with multiple minority identities, including ethnicity, gender, and religion. Using descriptive qualitative methods, this study involved 30 informants with diverse social, economic, and educational backgrounds. The results indicate that voter behavior is shaped by a combination of sociological, psychological, and rational factors, with strong influences from the social context and the candidate's identity representation. Identity politics plays a significant role in shaping public perception of triple minority candidates, while credibility, emotional closeness, and rational programs strengthen voter support in determining their choice.

KEYWORDS: Identity Politics, Semarang Regional Election, Triple Minority, Voter Behavior.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia's electoral democracy system, regional head elections are a concrete manifestation of democracy at the local level, allowing citizens to directly participate in determining their regional leaders. Regional elections are not merely a formal electoral procedure but also a crucial arena for determining the direction of regional development, encompassing economic, social, and cultural aspects. Through regional elections, ideally, every citizen has the same opportunity and right to be elected and to vote, regardless of their identity. However, in practice, regional elections often become an arena for identity struggles, with factors such as gender, ethnicity, and religion playing significant roles in influencing public perception, voter preferences, and candidate strategies.

In Indonesia, minority groups across gender, ethnicity, and religion often face serious obstacles in entering the political arena, especially in demographically and culturally homogeneous regions. On the one hand, they must contend with fierce and pragmatic political competition. On the other hand, they must also contend with the challenges of cultural discrimination, negative stereotypes, and resistance from some groups who still view minority identities as political weaknesses. Political campaigns often exploit identity issues to garner voter support, which has the effect of strengthening identity politics and hampering inclusive democracy at the local level.

Indonesia's first direct regional head elections were held in 2005. These elections marked a new era in local democracy, providing greater participation for communities in determining their leaders. According to data released by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, during the 2015 simultaneous regional head elections, 1,646 candidates competed in the regional head and deputy head elections. Of these, only 124, or approximately 7.5%, were women. This figure demonstrates the low level of women's participation in local electoral politics. Even more concerning, the number of female candidates declined significantly in the 2017 regional elections. Of the 614 candidates competing in that year's simultaneous elections, only 44 were women, representing only approximately 7.1% of the total field.

The phenomenon of low female representation in regional head elections illustrates that various structural, cultural, and political barriers still strongly hinder women's participation in electoral politics in Indonesia. Structural barriers are often related to a non-inclusive political recruitment system, where political parties, as the primary gateway to nominations, tend to provide more space for male candidates. Gender bias still colors the nomination process, where women are often considered to have less capacity or electoral competitiveness than men. Furthermore, cultural barriers also play a significant role in reducing women's opportunities to participate in politics. The deeply rooted patriarchal culture in Indonesian society influences the public's perception of women's roles, which are still considered more suited to managing domestic affairs than to becoming public leaders. One example is patriarchal

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political attitudes among voters. While the term "patriarchy" is widely used to describe a social system in which male dominance is institutionalized, the term "political patriarchy" refers to the attitude that politics should be a male domain and that women are less suited and capable of holding political office than men. Therefore, even though the direct regional election system has been in place for almost two decades, the issue of women's representation remains a serious challenge in local democracy in Indonesia.

In the current era, particularly in the implementation of the 2024 regional head elections, there has been quite significant development regarding the involvement of women in the electoral political arena at the local level. Data shows that of the total 1,551 candidates who advanced as regional head candidates, there were 309 women who took part in the contestation. Then, based on the recapitulation of the determination of the results of the 2024 regional head elections (governors, regents, mayors) by the General Elections Commission of each province and district/city, 2 governors, 34 regents, and 9 mayors were elected from women who excelled in competing out of 149 female regional head candidates. This means that as many as 30% of female regional head candidates won the contest. This figure reflects an increasing positive trend in women's political participation compared to previous periods. This indicates a change in public attitudes towards female leadership. Society is starting to open up and accept women as leaders, both at the local and national levels.

One of the regions that will hold the 2024 Regional Head Elections is the city of Semarang. Semarang is widely known as one of Indonesia's multicultural cities, home to people from various ethnic backgrounds. Not only is the Javanese ethnic group the majority, but Semarang is also home to ethnic Chinese, Malays, Indians, and Arabs. The presence of these diverse ethnic groups not only enriches the demographic diversity but also contributes significantly to shaping the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of Semarang. The harmonious and tolerant inter-ethnic life in this city has become a key force in maintaining social stability and creating an inclusive public space.

The 2024 Semarang mayoral election is marked by competition between two pairs of candidates, each of whom brings interesting political backgrounds and support. Candidate pair number 1 is Agustina Wilujeng Pramestuti who is paired with Iswar Aminudin, both are supported by the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDI-P), a major party known for having a strong mass base in Central Java, including in Semarang. Meanwhile, candidate pair number 2 is A. Sukawijaya, better known as Yoyok Sukawi, paired with Joko Susanto. This pair received support from a large coalition of nine political parties at once, namely the Partai Demokrat, Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra), Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB), Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN), Partai Golkar, Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (PSI), and Partai Nasdem.

The Semarang City General Election Commission officially determined the results of the vote recapitulation for the 2024 Semarang mayoral and deputy mayoral election through official minutes and recapitulation certificates that have been ratified in accordance with the applicable legal regulations. Based on the official results, the candidate pair Agustina Wilujeng Pramestuti and Iswar Aminudin managed to win the most votes and emerged as the winner in this contest, beating their opponents, namely A. Sukawijaya (Yoyok Sukawi) and Joko Susanto. The Agustina-Iswar pair obtained a total of 486,423 votes or equivalent to 57.24% of the total valid votes cast. Meanwhile, the Yoyok Sukawi-Joko Susanto pair received support of 363,331 votes or around 42.76%.

The election of Agustina Wilujeng Pramestuti as Mayor of Semarang in 2024 is both an anomaly and a significant milestone in the dynamics of local politics in Indonesia. Agustina Wilujeng Pramestuti's victory in the Semarang mayoral election is not merely a political victory but also a significant momentum in the context of women's representation, especially those from multiple or even triple minority groups. As a woman with a non-Muslim (Catholic) religious background and not from the ethnic majority in Semarang, Agustina was able to overcome various symbolic and structural barriers that have marginalized minorities in the local political sphere. This phenomenon not only reflects social diversity but also evidence that the people of Semarang are open to plurality of identities in political contestation. Agustina not only faced general political contestation but also had to confront patriarchal norms that infiltrated local political culture. This not only enriched local political diversity but also challenged the old paradigm in regional politics, which is generally dominated by figures from the social majority.

The presence of these triple minority candidates indicates that the local population of Semarang is shifting their political orientation from solely considering party affiliation or majority identity to choosing based on other factors, such as the candidate's credibility, social representation, and how the figure can represent previously underrepresented groups. Furthermore, the emergence of candidates with dual or even triple minority identities indicates a significant shift in voter behavior. While previously political choices were more often influenced by party affiliation or shared majority identity, many voters now consider other factors such as the candidate's credibility, track record, and ability to represent a broader social group. Furthermore, in terms of voter behavior, this shift indicates that voters are not solely choosing based on identity lines or partisan propaganda. Many voters are beginning to look further into aspects of the candidate's program, track record, and how the candidate can bridge social and economic diversity in their region. This change in voter behavior patterns is in line with voter behavior theory, which places sociological, psychological, and rational factors as key dimensions in the decision-making process.

Several previous studies have shown that voter behavior can be influenced by various factors. Research conducted by Pratiwi (2019) which analyzed voter behavior in the 2018 Regional Head Election in Jambi City. The findings of this study are that

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voter behavior in Jambi City in the Jambi City regional head election is influenced by several factors including the sociological model (The sociological background in question includes age, a person's area of origin (for example: Java, Outside Java), a person's residence (for example: city, village), gender, race and ethnicity, employment status, socio-economic status, and religious orientation. Subsequent research was conducted by Istianah et al. (2025) who examined voter behavior in the 2024 Sukabumi Regional Election. The findings showed that in Sukabumi City, voter behavior tends to be rational-pragmatic, namely choosing based on considerations of direct benefits and concrete personal interests. Voters tend to be transactional, indicating a shift from value- and identity-based participation to more pragmatic and results-oriented decisions. The weakening of ideological loyalty and social ties is an indicator of the reduced influence of emotions and group identity in determining people's political choices. Subsequent research was conducted by Afriandi et al. (2025) which examines the voting behavior of indigenous minority communities in determining leaders. The research results found that the voting behavior of the Kampa community is influenced by, first, political preferences, which are based on considerations from indigenous leaders; second, geopolitics, where the region is geographically inhabited by a Minangkabau majority; and third, socioeconomic structures that influence the rationale for choosing a regional head.

Based on various previous studies that have been conducted, this study is expected to be able to answer various things from the existing research gaps and attempt to examine in depth how voter behavior towards minority candidates in the 2024 Semarang Mayoral Election.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type. The purpose of this study is to describe in depth voter behavior towards minority candidates in the 2024 Semarang Mayoral Election. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research is a method used to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to social and humanitarian issues. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives, which explain how voter behavior is formed and how identity, social, economic, and psychological factors influence their decisions. This study was designed to understand the phenomenon in depth through field data collection and direct interaction with research subjects (Kusumastuti et al., 2019). Informants were determined using purposive sampling and non-random sampling, selecting informants deemed to have relevant knowledge and experience regarding the research topic. The informants consisted of 30 voters from the Semarang City community with varying backgrounds.

The data collection techniques used included observation, interviews, and documentation. Secondary data were also obtained from literature studies, including books, scientific journals, and official documents. The primary instrument in this study was the researcher herself, supported by interview guidelines, notebooks, and recording devices such as mobile phones to document information. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model according to Miles Huberman and Saldana (2014), which includes four stages: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This design and method were chosen because they were able to fully explore the sociological, psychological, and rational factors that influence voter behavior in the research area, contextually and in-depth.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dynamics of voter behavior is a fascinating topic in every regional election contest. Voters are a crucial factor for regional head candidates in gaining votes. Voter behavior can be seen through their behavior in determining their political choices, according to the circumstances experienced by each voter. Voter behavior in the 2024 Semarang Mayoral Election demonstrates that no single approach can absolutely explain voters' political decisions. Rather, various approaches are used to understand voter behavior. Voter behavior is the result of complex social processes, where psychological, sociological, and rational approaches interact and integrate in unique and contextual ways.

However, these three frameworks rarely operate in isolation. In practice, voters' political choices are typically shaped by a mix of emotional, social, and rational considerations. Therefore, voter behavior cannot be accurately interpreted in terms of emotional versus rational considerations alone, or even individual versus collective considerations. Specifically, in the context of Semarang City, voters move within a social space that requires them to simultaneously negotiate multiple identities and interests. As a result, voting decisions emerge as reflective and contextual social actions, not merely mechanical responses or traditional routines.

Sociological Dynamics in Voter Choice

A sociological approach to voter behavior in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election shows that social factors still play a significant role in determining local voter preferences. Lipset (1960) stated that the sociological approach emphasizes the importance of several factors related to a person's social instruments, such as social class/socioeconomic status (such as education, type of employment, income), religion, ethnicity, and even residential area, for example, city, village, coastal area, or inland. Based on interviews with various sources, factors such as regional proximity, similar professions, kinship relations, religion, gender, and residence are the main considerations for most voters. Several informants assessed that their choices were based on emotional ties and personal trust in their regional head candidates. Respondents, such as Ardian (32 years old) and Suwarti (43 years old), stated that they were not influenced by the candidate's religious, ethnic, or gender identity. They judge leaders based on their vision,

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mission, and work abilities, not their identity background.

"I judge a prospective leader based on their vision and mission, not their religion." (Ardian, a resident of Semarang City)

Other factors influencing voting behavior are the gender and age of the prospective leader. Interviews revealed that female informants tended to prefer political representation from fellow women. They considered female leaders to be more aware of women's specific needs. Furthermore, relatively young age was a plus in the eyes of female voters. This finding indicates a strong push for female representatives who are both youthful and female. This sentiment was echoed by Nailah, a young and first-time voter in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election.

"As a woman, I hope women can also lead." (Nailah, a young and first-time voter in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election)

In line with Fadilah (2024), age plays a significant role, especially for first-time voters, who are generally younger and bring a fresh perspective to the political arena. On the other hand, gender is also a significant variable, as male and female voting patterns can differ, influenced by relevant gender issues and the program plans offered by prospective leadership candidates. Furthermore, based on observations made by researchers, female voters were quite enthusiastic about attending the election. This was conveyed not only by female voters but also by male voters who were also enthusiastic about the Semarang mayoral election.

Many residents then emphasized shared identities such as ethnicity, profession, and proximity to residence as the basis for their voting preferences. Interviews revealed that informants tended to support candidates who reflected their own identities. The assumption was that these similarities would allow candidates to prioritize the issues they faced upon election. Furthermore, shared language and ethnic background were seen as facilitating communication between voters and candidates. Margaret echoed this sentiment.

"I'm non-Muslim and of Chinese descent, so I definitely try to elect a leader who shares my religion and ethnicity." (Margaret, non-Muslim voter of Chinese descent)

A series of interviews, field observations, and other data and information obtained from discussions with residents of Semarang City show that the main sociological considerations in determining political choices are based on a number of factors, namely kinship, age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, and shared identity.

Psychological Factors and Candidate Image

Research conducted on the 2024 Semarang mayoral election, specifically in the city of Semarang, revealed how psychological approaches influence local voter behavior. The psychological approach attempts to explain the factors that influence short-term electoral decisions, or decisions made within a short period of time. This is explained through the triad of determinants: party identification; candidate orientation; and issue/theme orientation.

The research results show varying patterns based on respondents' demographic, social, economic, and educational backgrounds. Religious identity is a strong psychological factor influencing voters' decisions in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election. The study revealed that many voters feel more comfortable and trust the orientation of leadership candidates who share their religious identity and uphold religious values that align with their beliefs. This religious-based psychological attachment creates a sense of security and trust that their moral and ethical aspirations will be better represented. This sentiment echoes that expressed by Sriyono, a mosque administrator in Semarang.

"In the 2024 Semarang mayoral election, as a Muslim, I was obliged to elect a leader of my own religion. This aligns with my beliefs." (Sriyono, a mosque administrator in Semarang)

Muhammad Farhan expressed a different view. Farhan stated that religious identity did not influence the decision to vote in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election.

"Religious identity doesn't influence my voting decision, sir. I choose leadership candidates based on their track records." (Muhammad Farhan, private employee)

Although most respondents did not vote based on religion, there was a tendency for older and more religious voters to consider candidates of the same faith. This indicates a generational difference in how identity politics is viewed. From the two statements delivered by Mr. Sriyono and Muhammad Farhan, it is clear that religious identity can influence voter choice. However, on the other hand, religious identity does not influence the choice of leader because voters choose based on. Furthermore, other findings from several respondents regarding candidate orientation indicators in a psychological approach, voters view Agustina as a firm, courageous, and experienced figure, although not all of them have close ties to the party. For Dwi (50 years old) and Elly (23 years old), Agustina's image as a public figure with extensive experience in the legislature is a key factor. Elly, a voter in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election, expressed similar sentiments.

"I chose Ms. Agustin because I found her to be decisive and courageous, and I'm confident she can work with all stakeholders to improve the city of Semarang."

However, noted that with changing times, the type of voter who adheres closely to religious identity is becoming increasingly rare. Religious voters do not always consistently support parties that espouse religious ideologies. One explanation is the context of a democratic state that provides citizens with greater freedom in making political choices. Furthermore, researchers observed that references to party ideology that still appear in informants' narratives are related to personal experiences and political

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orientations deemed relevant. Both are often formed through political socialization within the family, environmental influences, or marital ties. Interviews with an older source suggested that political parties and political party ideology influence voter preferences. However, some younger respondents admitted to experiencing trust issues regarding political promises, thus evaluating candidates more based on their personal track records than the party they support. These findings reinforce the Michigan School model, where voter behavior is shaped by psychological perception and identification with candidates, rather than solely party orientation.

Thus, it can be concluded that the psychological approach to voting behavior in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election demonstrates complexity and dynamics influenced by various internal and external factors. Voter decisions are not solely based on rational considerations, but also involve deep psychological aspects such as candidate orientation, issue/theme orientation, identity, experience, perception, and emotional attachment to a particular party or candidate. While some voters maintain traditional loyalties, many also show a development towards more critical and informed voting behavior. This reflects the evolution of public political awareness influenced by past experiences and changes in political aspirations from generation to generation.

Rational Factors and Program Evaluation

The rational choice approach emerged from dissatisfaction with sociological and psychological approaches. The rational choice approach applies an economic approach in practice. Rational voting is based on economic interests, where an individual's actions are based on economic principles. Adherents of this school of thought attempt to explain that voter behavior toward a particular candidate or political party is based on calculating the benefits gained from making that choice. In electoral studies, rational action is also linked to aspects of government performance (the incumbent) as a basis for evaluation in awarding rewards or punishments.

Based on interviews and observations conducted by researchers, in general, Semarang residents tend to be rational in determining their choices. The rational actions taken by some Semarang residents are rational in assessing the programs and capabilities of candidates, in this case in accordance with the issue/theme/program orientation indicators presented by each candidate for leader. Concrete programs brought by one of the regional head candidates, such as the 25 million rupiah per year RT Subsidy and educational equality, were mentioned repeatedly by voters from various backgrounds. This was conveyed by Adit, a postgraduate student at Diponegoro University and a native of Semarang.

"I find the work program that's interesting is the annual assistance/subsidy program for neighborhood units (RTs). I hope this program will benefit the community, especially at the neighborhood level."

The same thing was also conveyed by Mr. Agus Susanto, as a Semarang resident who works as an Educational Staff at one of the universities in Semarang.

"What I know is that the program is from Mrs. Agustin, namely an assistance program for neighborhood units amounting to 25 million per year."

In addition to the Neighborhood Unit subsidy assistance program of 25 million per year, there is also an educational equality program that attracted one of the young voters in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election. This was conveyed by Nailah Dewi Khalisah, a Semarang resident who is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree at a university in Semarang.

"Of the many programs and visions offered by the candidates, I'm most interested in the educational equality program of candidate pair number 1. I believe equitable education will provide the right and convenience for all Semarang residents to attend school."

Based on the results of these interviews and observations, voters consisting of university students and schoolchildren have different preferences than other voters. They tend to consider many factors before making their choice, although not all students and schoolchildren share this attitude. One consideration these voters consider is the candidate's work program. The work program will serve as concrete evidence of the candidate's concern for the community's needs. In fact, according to the Head of the JAGUAR Campaign Team, one of the candidates' campaign teams, the campaign strategy is focused on demonstrating "direct benefits" to the community.

Unlike the pattern among young voters, who emphasize the benefits of programs for citizens, in the bureaucratic segment, assessments are more procedural and oriented toward policy feasibility. Civil servant informants emphasized the capacity of regional head candidates to design and offer programs that directly address the needs of Semarang City as the primary selection criterion. However, based on observations, researchers observed that those holding certain positions, especially civil servants, tended to vote based on the programs offered by regional head candidates. Some even preferred to maintain a neutral stance in every election and even tended to withdraw from political discussions.

From observations and interviews with voters from various backgrounds, these results are in line with the Rational Choice theory that voters act like "economic actors" who choose the most politically and socially advantageous options.

Identity Politics: Awareness without Polarization

It is undeniable that in the implementation of regional head elections in Indonesia, identity issues such as ethnicity, racial, and religion often arise during campaign activities. Theoretically, identity politics, according to Lukmantoro, is defined as a political action to prioritize the interests of members of a group because they share a common identity or characteristics, whether based on race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. However, over time, identity politics has been hijacked and embraced by the majority

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group to establish its dominance of power. The use of identity politics to gain power, which actually hardens differences and encourages conflict, does not mean it is without sharp criticism. Identity politics seems to affirm the essentialistic wholeness of the existence of certain social groups based on primordial identification.

Based on interviews and observations of the 2024 Semarang mayoral election, various identity issues related to ethnicity, race, and religion emerged during the campaign. If this issue is left unaddressed, even crystallizing to such an extent, it could put psychological pressure on voters. The identity issues in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election are said to be directed at one of the candidates from a minority background. This sentiment echoed that of Nasyilla Putri, a young voter in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election.

"Identity issues are definitely there, sir. I saw a lot of identity issues being raised on social media and during the campaign." (Nasyilla Putri)

The candidate pair with minority backgrounds are Ms. Agustina Wilujeng Pramestuti and Mr. Iswar Aminuddin. Ms. Agustin herself is a candidate from a minority background. Her minority background stems from gender, ethnicity, and religion. Ms. Agustina is female, and ethnically, she is of Chinese descent. Based on data from the Semarang City Statistics Agency, the majority of ethnic groups inhabiting Semarang City are Javanese. Therefore, Ms. Agustin is an ethnic minority. Finally, she is a female politician who is non-Muslim. Data from the Semarang City Statistics Agency also states that the majority of Semarang City's population is Muslim.

Although identity issues were raised during the campaign, interviews with several other informants indicated that Semarang residents were mature in dealing with differences, even though gender and religious issues did arise during the campaign. Nida Husna, a voter in Semarang, echoed this sentiment.

"It's undeniable, sir. In every regional election, issues of identity, such as racial, ethnicity, and religion, always arise during the campaign. Even though these issues always arise, I don't pay attention or respond to them, sir. My focus is on the candidate's track record."

An interview with the campaign team of one of the candidates confirmed that racial, ethnic, and intergroup issues were exploited by political opponents ahead of election day, but were successfully mitigated through a programmatic approach and inclusive public communication. Kadar Lusman, also known as Bapak Pilus, the head of the JAGUAR campaign team, echoed this sentiment.

"Identity issues that lead to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations do arise, but I'm sure the people of Semarang are smart and not easily influenced." (Kadar Lusman, Head of the JAGUAR Winning Team)

This phenomenon indicates the existence of moderate identity politics, where voters remain aware of differences but place them in a more rational and inclusive context.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research shows that voter behavior in the 2024 Semarang mayoral election has undergone significant changes compared to the previous period. Voters are no longer dominated by ideological orientation or close social identities, but instead place greater emphasis on the capacity, credibility, and track record of candidates. Field findings indicate that sociological factors such as gender and social environment still play a role, but at a symbolic level, serving as expressions of solidarity and collective awareness, rather than as primary determinants in decision-making. Psychological and rational factors are the primary drivers of changes in voter behavior. Positive perceptions of the candidates' image and integrity, coupled with rational evaluations of concrete programs such as neighborhood assistance and women's empowerment, demonstrate that the people of Semarang are increasingly thinking critically and pragmatically in evaluating their potential leaders. This phenomenon aligns with the theory of Rational Choice and reinforces the modern model of voter behavior that focuses on tangible benefits rather than shared identities. Agustina Wilujeng Pramestuti's victory as a "triple minority" candidate reflects political openness and the maturity of local democracy. The people of Semarang demonstrate that differences in religion, ethnicity, and gender are not barriers to political legitimacy. Within the framework of Pitkin's theory of political representation, these results illustrate a shift from descriptive representation to substantive representation where leaders not only become symbols of group identity, but also represent the values of justice, real work, and equality.

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