

Pragmatism over Piety: Understanding Muslim Electoral Choices in East Nusa Tenggara's Local Elections

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Abstract

This article explores the electoral behaviour of Muslim voters in the 2024 gubernatorial election of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), Indonesia. Motivated by concerns over the political marginalisation of Muslim candidates in NTT's local elections and the wider discourse on minority political participation, the study adopts a voting behaviour framework that integrates sociological, psychological, and rational-choice approaches. It examines how sociocultural backgrounds, religious identity, economic considerations, and political affiliations influence Muslim voting preferences. The analysis also considers the role of historical voting patterns, political party dynamics, and the influence of prominent Islamic figures and organisations. Set in a Christian-majority province, the study investigates the interplay between identity politics, economic rationality, and political pragmatism. Findings suggest that Muslim voters exhibit a nuanced approach to leadership selection, prioritising democratic values, visionary governance, and service-oriented leadership over narrow religious affiliations. Interview data reveal that qualities such as empathy, populism, decisiveness, and moral integrity—particularly a strong anti-corruption stance—are highly valued. Voters also emphasise the importance of political and administrative experience, while viewing intelligence, religiosity, and military credentials as supplementary advantages. Overall, Muslim voters in NTT seek leaders who combine intellectual competence with emotional proximity to the electorate and a deep commitment to public welfare. This research contributes to the broader understanding of minority political agency in Indonesia and highlights the need for more inclusive political frameworks to promote equitable representation and strengthen democratic practices in multi-religious societies.

Keywords

Muslim voter behaviour, political participation, identity politics, East Nusa Tenggara, minority politics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study of voter behavior remains a critical domain within political science, particularly in transitional democracies such as Indonesia, where electoral decisions are influenced by a convergence of social, cultural, economic, and religious factors (Raymond, 2018). Previous studies by Affan Gaffar (1992), Andy Mallarangeng (1997), and Firmanzah (2008) have demonstrated that voter preferences in Indonesia are largely shaped by sociocultural affiliations, identity politics, and personal proximity to



candidates, with considerable variation between legislative and regional head elections (Mujani, 2020). The transition from the New Order to the Reform era in 1998 fundamentally restructured Indonesia's electoral system, introducing direct elections that recalibrated the dynamics of political participation and party strength (Qodari, 2007; Ananta et al., 2004; Liddle & Mujani, 2000; King, 2003).

The 2024 simultaneous regional head elections represent a pivotal democratic moment for Indonesia, involving 38 provinces, 514 regencies, and 93 cities, with 203,055,748 registered voters nationwide. In East Nusa Tenggara (NTT)—a province characterized by religious and ethnic diversity—4,008,475 voters across 21 regencies, one city, and 16,746 polling stations will determine their regional leadership (BPS NTT, 2022). Within this context, the Muslim community constitutes a numerical minority, comprising just 9.05% of NTT's total population (Gueorguiev, 2018). This demographic disparity presents significant challenges for Muslim political representation and participation, particularly as no Muslim candidate has historically contested the gubernatorial office in NTT (BPS NTT, 2022).

Despite Islam's introduction to NTT in the 15th century, its adherents remain demographically and politically marginalized (Heath, 2015). Muslim population distribution varies considerably by regency, with the highest concentrations in Lembata (27.46%), Ende (25.77%), and Alor (23.74%) (BPS NTT, 2022). The absence of Muslim gubernatorial candidates, even within the ostensibly inclusive framework of direct elections, underscores the persistence of a majority-minority dichotomy in NTT's political landscape (Mujani, 2020). Christian (Catholic and Protestant) leadership's dominance reflects sociopolitical history and contemporary electoral strategies, prioritizing majority support in securing regional victories (Dowley, 2021).

This marginalization is further evidenced by the 2018 NTT gubernatorial election, where the elected pair Viktor Bungtilu Laiskodat and Josef A. Nae Soi secured 35.60% of the votes without Muslim representation among the candidates (KPU NTT, 2018). The election's outcome was notable for subverting identity-based political expectations (Gueorguiev, 2018), as political observer Ahmad Atang argued that NTT politics had begun to shift from primordial loyalties to rational pragmatism (Pos Kupang, 2018). Nevertheless, identity politics remain latent, particularly concerning religious and ethnic affiliations, as indicated by prior voter behavior trends and the composition of candidate support bases (Golosov, 2014).

In this sociopolitical context, understanding the electoral behavior of Muslim voters in NTT is both academically significant and democratically essential (Said, 2021). Research on minority political behavior, especially among Muslim voters in a Christian-majority province (Mocan, 2017), remains scarce. M. Imaduddin Nasution (2012) defines minority politics as political activities conducted by underrepresented groups that often navigate a complex intersection of faith, culture, social conditions, and majority acceptance (Maliepaard, 2015). This aligns with the Institute for International Law & Human Rights (2009) findings, highlighting the importance and challenges of minority political representation within democratic systems (Golosov, 2014).

Notably, empirical data from the 2019 religious adherent census recorded 466,815 Muslims in NTT, spread unevenly across regencies, with the highest numbers in Ende (65,299), East Flores (60,146), and West Manggarai (57,984) (BPS, 2019). However, this demographic potential remains politically underutilized, given the absence of Muslim candidates in both past and prospective electoral lineups for the 2024 gubernatorial race. The list of 25 potential gubernatorial candidates publicized by local media and political parties in 2023 notably excluded Muslim figures, with only tokenistic references to Muslim cadres such as Haji Awang Natoprawiro (Rakyat NTT, 2023).

The Charta Politika survey conducted in March 2022 further underscores the marginal political positioning of Muslim candidates, with none achieving notable electability rankings among the top contenders (Charta Politika, 2022). The highest-ranked candidate, Viktor Bungtilu Laiskodat, garnered 27.5% support, while no Muslim candidate featured within the primary electability cohort. This electoral landscape raises crucial questions about Muslim voters' political preferences and participatory tendencies, whose choices could potentially sway electoral outcomes in closely contested races (Kedikli, 2018).

Given this context, studying Muslim voter behavior in the 2024 NTT Gubernatorial Election is indispensable for several reasons. First, it addresses the chronic underrepresentation of Muslim cadres in NTT's gubernatorial politics. Second, it explores the dynamics of minority political behavior in a multicultural and multi-religious province, contributing to the broader discourse on participatory democracy in Indonesia (Maliapaard, 2015). Third, it examines how Muslim voters navigate issues of identity, pragmatism, and democratic values within a predominantly Christian political sphere. Finally, it provides insights into the influence of Islamic organizations, religious leaders, and national political currents on local electoral decisions (Klandermans, 2008).

This research adopts a comprehensive voting behavior framework, integrating sociological, psychological, and rational-choice approaches to elucidate the factors shaping Muslim voter preferences. It investigates how religious identity, sociocultural affiliations, economic considerations, and political pragmatism determine Muslim voting behavior. Furthermore, it assesses the impact of leadership attributes, including integrity, empathy, anti-corruption commitment, and democratic orientation, on electoral choices (Loveland, 2005). Focusing on Muslim voters' nuanced and context-specific experiences in NTT, this study aims to expand existing voting behavior theory and provide empirical evidence for policy recommendations promoting inclusive, representative, and fair democratic processes in Indonesia's regional elections.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the behavioral orientation of Muslim voters in the 2024 East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) gubernatorial election, particularly within the context of the Muslim minority amidst the Catholic and Protestant majority in NTT. The choice of qualitative research is made because the study seeks to comprehensively explore the social, political, and cultural realities surrounding Muslim voters' behavior in local elections, which cannot be measured through quantitative numbers but rather through an in-depth description of attitudes, perceptions, preferences, and political considerations in making electoral decisions.

The data collection method used in this study is in-depth interviews conducted directly with pre-established key informants, including Muslim voters eligible to vote in the 2024 NTT local election, religious leaders such as the Chairman of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama (PW NU), Chairman of Muhammadiyah, as well as Islamic mass organization leaders in NTT, political party leaders, gubernatorial candidates, members of the General Elections Commission (KPU) and Election Supervisory Board (Bawaslu) of NTT Province, and local political observers. A semi-structured interview format guides the interviews to ensure that the researcher stays focused on obtaining relevant information for the study while allowing informants the space to freely and naturally express their personal views and experiences.

In selecting informants, the sampling method used is purposive sampling, a technique that takes

into account specific characteristics relevant to the study's objectives, namely individuals with knowledge, experience, involvement, and strategic positions in the dynamics of the 2024 NTT local election and the representation of the Muslim community in the region. Additionally, snowball sampling is employed to recruit further informants based on recommendations from initial informants, particularly to capture Muslim voters in various districts/cities with minority distributions, such as in Kupang City, Lembata, Alor, Ende, and East Flores. This approach ensures a more comprehensive and representative depiction of the field conditions.

The data obtained from the in-depth interviews are then analyzed using the qualitative data analysis method developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selects, focuses, simplifies, and transforms the interview data relevant to the research focus, which is the behavioral orientation of Muslim voters in the 2024 NTT local election based on sociological, psychological, and rational approaches. Irrelevant or excessive data are eliminated, while important data are categorized and coded. In the data display stage, the selected data are organized into matrices, tables, or narrative descriptions to facilitate further analysis and interpretation of voting behavior patterns from various informant categories. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interprets the emerging patterns in the data, links the findings with voting behavior theory—namely sociological, psychological, and rational approaches—and compares them with previous relevant research at both national and international levels, thereby producing valid, credible, and academically accountable conclusions. Data triangulation is also conducted to ensure the validity of the research findings by comparing interview data from various informant categories with supporting documents, such as statistical data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), previous election results, electability survey results, and reports from local media. This approach ensures that the research provides a comprehensive understanding of the behavioral orientation of Muslim minority voters in determining their political choices in the 2024 NTT local election. Thus, this research methodology is systematically designed to yield valid, reliable findings that contribute to developing voting behavior theory in the context of Muslim minority voters in predominantly Catholic regions like NTT.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Leadership Factors

The leadership factors examined in this study relate to the type of leaders that Muslim voters expect in the 2024 gubernatorial election in NTT, such as democratic, delegative, authoritarian, charismatic, servant, militaristic, transactional, visionary, and paternalistic leaders. The following are the results of the interviews:

Interview with NTT Muslim figure, Mr. KH. Abdul Makarim (74 years old), residing at Jalan Gajah Mada, Oetete Village, Oebobo District, Kupang City, from the Sabu ethnic group, on September 23, 2024, at 10:30 AM WITA. He is a former member of the DPR-MPR RI during the New Order, a Muslim politician from Golkar, and a former Chairman of MUI NTT. Regarding the type of leadership expected by Muslim voters in the 2024 gubernatorial election in NTT, he stated that democratic leadership is preferred:

"Saya pilih pemimpin yang demokratis, ya kan yang menjadi Gubernur tidak perlu dia suku apa sepanjang dia masih mau mengabdikan untuk masyarakat NTT, terserah suku itu selalu yang kesekian." ("I choose a democratic leader; the Governor does not need to belong to a specific ethnic group as

long as they are willing to serve the people of NTT, regardless of their ethnicity being of secondary importance.")

A similar opinion was expressed by one of the voter figures, Mr. Haji Muhammad Nasir (54 years old), from the Buton ethnic group, a businessman from Lembata, on June 25, 2024, at 08:23 AM WITA. He emphasized the importance of democratic leadership:

"Demokrasi adalah proses pemilihan yang melibatkan rakyat, 'one man one vote'. Pemimpin yang demokratis harus memahami esensi dari proses ini dan menghargai keputusan rakyat yang memilihnya." (Democracy is a process of election that involves the people, 'one man one vote.' A democratic leader must understand the essence of this process and respect the decision made by the people who elect them.")

A different perspective was provided by Mr. Ahmad Atang (59 years old) on April 16, 2024, at 1:00 PM WITA. He is from the Lamaholot ethnic group and is an academic at the Muhammadiyah University of Kupang. He emphasized delegative leadership:

"Dalam birokrasi, pemimpin seharusnya bersikap delegatif agar tugas terbagi merata di bawahannya, tanpa bertumpu pada satu orang. Birokrasi harus taat pada aturan dan keputusan atasan, dengan ruang dialog terbuka untuk kebebasan berpikir. Pemimpin perlu memastikan bahwa setiap tugas terdistribusi dengan jelas kepada setiap OPD, dan memotivasi bawahannya untuk bekerja sesuai dengan tupoksi mereka." ("In bureaucracy, leaders should adopt a delegative approach to ensure that tasks are distributed evenly among subordinates, without relying on one individual. Bureaucracy must adhere to rules and decisions from superiors, while maintaining open spaces for dialogue and freedom of thought. Leaders need to ensure that tasks are clearly distributed across each agency and motivate subordinates to work in accordance with their duties.")

Meanwhile, Mr. KH. Pua Monto Uumbu Nay (Chairman of PWNNU NTT and a civil servant at the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of NTT Province) from the Sumba ethnic group, Kupang, on April 16, 2024, at 3:00 PM WITA, expressed his preference for a servant leadership type:

"Yang menjadi pilihan saya adalah tipe pemimpin melayani karena pemimpin itu melayani, dia harus mempunyai jiwa melayani karena kita sadari sesungguhnya pemimpin itu pelayan." ("My preference is for a service-oriented leader because leadership is about serving. A leader must have a spirit of service because, in reality, a leader is a servant.")

A different perspective was provided by Brigadier General Pol. Drs. Johanis Asadoma, S.I.K., M.Hum, (58 years old), from the Lamaholot ethnic group, originally from Alor Regency, former NTT Regional Police Chief, and one of the prospective candidates for NTT Governor, in Kupang on June 12, 2024, at 1:00 PM WITA. He believes leadership should be situational and combine various styles:

"Menurut saya, kepemimpinan itu bersifat situasional. Kita harus tahu kapan bersikap demokratis, kapan menunjukkan karisma, dan kapan menjadi otoriter atau kompromistis. Karisma, meskipun penting, tidak datang begitu saja; ia berkembang seiring waktu dan harus didukung oleh berbagai kualitas lain. Kepemimpinan yang efektif menggabungkan semua gaya ini, dan itu adalah seni memimpin yang harus dimiliki oleh setiap pemimpin." ("In my opinion, leadership is situational. We must know when to act democratically, when to show charisma, and when to be authoritative or compromising. Charisma, though important, does not come easily; it develops over time and must be supported by other qualities. Effective leadership combines all these styles, and it is the art of leading that every leader must possess.")

A different opinion was shared by Mr. Ali Oemar Fadaq (62 years old) from the Arab ethnic group, residing in Waingapu City, East Sumba Regency, on June 16, 2024, at 5:39 PM WITA. He has

been a member of the East Sumba Regency DPRD for 35 years from the Golkar Party and emphasized three leadership types: democratic, servant, and visionary:

"Saya mengidentifikasi tiga tipe kepemimpinan yang ideal. Pertama, pemimpin demokratis, yang menghargai perbedaan dan mendengarkan berbagai pilihan masyarakat dalam Pilgub NTT. Kedua, pemimpin yang melayani, memahami kebutuhan masyarakat dan berfokus pada apa yang mereka inginkan, bukan apa yang kita kira mereka butuhkan. Ketiga, pemimpin visioner, yang mampu melihat kebutuhan masa depan dan mendahului harapan masyarakat untuk memberikan solusi yang tepat." ("I identify three ideal types of leadership. First, a democratic leader who values diversity and listens to the various choices of the people in the NTT gubernatorial election. Second, a servant leader who understands the needs of the people and focuses on what they want, not what we think they need. Third, a visionary leader who can foresee future needs and surpass public expectations to provide appropriate solutions.")

Similarly, Mr. Haji Ahmad Yohan, M.Si (49 years old) from the Lamaholot-Flores Timur ethnic group, Kupang, on May 19, 2024, at 7:09 PM WITA, Chairman of DPW PAN NTT and a three-term member of the DPR RI from the PAN faction, residing in Tebet Village, Pasar Minggu District, South Jakarta, emphasized a combined leadership approach:

"Kepemimpinan yang efektif itu fleksibel, bisa menggabungkan berbagai pendekatan. Pemimpin harus tahu kapan bersikap demokratis, kapan delegatif, dan kapan tegas. Tergantung situasinya, jika bekerja dengan orang yang kompeten, ajak diskusi. Untuk yang setara, beri arahan, dan untuk yang lebih rendah, beri perintah. Jika terus berdiskusi dalam situasi tertentu, pekerjaan tidak akan selesai." ("Effective leadership is flexible and able to combine various approaches. Leaders must know when to act democratically, when to delegate, and when to be firm. It depends on the situation: if working with competent individuals, engage in discussion; for peers, provide direction; and for subordinates, give orders. If discussions continue in certain situations, the work will not be completed.")

Interview with Mrs. Hj. Aida Chomsah, S.PdI., M.Ag, from the Javanese ethnic group (49 years old), on April 20, 2024, at 4:39 PM WITA, Chairwoman of Fatayat NU NTT and a senior official in the Public Relations Department of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of NTT, Kupang City, emphasized five leadership types:

"Tipe-tipe pemimpin yang wajib/harus dimiliki adalah Tipe pemimpin demokratis, Tipe pemimpin delegatif, Tipe pemimpin karismatik, Tipe pemimpin melayani, Tipe pemimpin visioner." ("The types of leadership that are essential/necessary include: democratic leadership, delegative leadership, charismatic leadership, servant leadership, and visionary leadership.")

An interview with Mr. Harun Al Rasid, a young entrepreneur (43 years old) from the Bima ethnic group, in Macang Tanggar Village, Komodo District, West Manggarai Regency, Labuan Bajo, on June 28, 2024, at 10:30 AM WITA, emphasized visionary leadership:

"Saya lebih pada visioner, pertimbangan saya memilih orang visioner ini akan ada hal-hal baru yang berlaku yang kita bisa dapat dalam hal kebijakannya tidak hanya tergantung pada apa yang akan diterapkan, tapi juga ada hal baru yang bisa diperbuat untuk masyarakat." ("I lean towards being a visionary leader, as I believe that by choosing a visionary person, there will be new policies introduced that we can benefit from, not only relying on what is already to be implemented but also on innovative solutions that can be made for the people.")

Interview with Mr. Syafruddin Sira (44 years old), from the Lamaholot ethnic group, Chairman of the Lembata Regency DPRD for the 2024-2029 period, in Lewoleba, on April 29, 2024, at 11:30 AM WITA, emphasized democratic leadership:

"Kalau saya lebih memiliki tipe pemimpin yang demokratis karena Calon Gubernur dan Wakil Gubernur nanti bisa mendengar semua unsur sehingga nanti dia bisa pertimbangkan mana yang terbaik untuk lebih bijak." (Personally, I tend to prefer a democratic leader because the future Governor and Deputy Governor will be able to listen to all aspects and consider what is best for more wise decision-making.")

Leadership Character Factors

In the research on Muslim Voter Behavior Orientation in the 2024 Gubernatorial Election in NTT, leadership character is an important factor as it influences regional progress. The factors considered include decisiveness, empathy, military background, integrity (free from corruption), youthfulness, intelligence, religiosity, experience, and charisma. Below are the results of interviews and questionnaire distribution:

Interview with Mr. Aloysius Lado Madi (52 years old), of Sumba ethnicity, Chairman of DPW PKB NTT, Deputy Chairman of the NTT Provincial DPRD, residing in Fatululi Subdistrict, Oebobo District, Kupang City, regarding the characteristics expected from a Candidate for Governor and Deputy Governor of NTT in 2024. He stated that two key characteristics are expected: first, empathy and populism; second, experience. His full statement is as follows:

"Pertama, empati dan populisme sangat penting karena seorang calon Gubernur atau Wakil Gubernur harus memiliki rasa kepedulian terhadap daerah dan masyarakat, serta berbagai aspek sosial yang akan mereka tangani setelah terpilih. Kedua, pengalaman merupakan faktor krusial karena pemilih akan menilai rekam jejak calon dalam kurun waktu tertentu." ("First, empathy and populism are crucial because a Governor or Deputy Governor candidate must demonstrate a sense of concern for the region and the community, as well as the various social aspects they will address once elected. Second, experience is a critical factor because voters will evaluate the candidate's track record over a certain period".)

A different perspective was shared by Mr. Haji Ahmad Yohan, M.Si (49 years old), of Lamaholot-Flores Timur ethnicity, Kupang, on May 19, 2024, at 19:09:06 WITA. He is the Chairman of DPW PAN NTT and a three-term DPR RI member from PAN. Residing in Tebet Subdistrict, Pasar Minggu District, South Jakarta, he emphasized a combined leadership style for the next five years. His full statement is as follows:

"Di atas segalanya, pemimpin harus bersih dan jujur, tanpa penyimpangan dalam pelaksanaan program. Saat ini, kita membutuhkan kepemimpinan yang kuat untuk memajukan NTT dan menjembatani kesenjangan bagi masyarakat. Ini memerlukan individu dengan kapabilitas, ketulusan, dan komitmen dalam perjuangan." ("Above all, leaders must be clean and honest, without deviations in the implementation of programs. Today, we need strong leadership to advance NTT and bridge the gaps for the community. This requires individuals with capability, sincerity, and commitment in the struggle.")

Mrs. Emi Nomleni (58 years old), residing in Oetete Subdistrict, Oebobo District, Kupang City, of Dawan-Timor ethnicity, is the Chairman of DPD PDIP NTT, Chairman of the NTT DPRD, and a potential candidate for Governor of NTT. Regarding the leadership type expected by Muslim voters,

she emphasized the importance of decisiveness and empathy/populism. Her full statement is as follows:

"Saya lebih menyukai pemimpin yang tegas dan berani, terutama bagi perempuan, karena pengambilan keputusan di ruang publik memerlukan ketegasan dan keberanian. Kedua, empati dan populisme sangat penting karena pemimpin harus memiliki hati untuk melayani. Pemimpin yang baik tidak akan terlibat dalam korupsi, baik secara finansial maupun kekuasaan, serta tidak bertindak sewenang-wenang. Setiap keputusan yang diambil harus selalu mengutamakan kepentingan rakyat." ("I prefer leaders who are firm and brave, especially for women, because decision-making in the public sphere requires assertiveness and courage. Second, empathy and populism are crucial because leaders must have a heart for service. A good leader will not engage in corruption, whether financial or in power, and will not act arbitrarily. Every decision made must always prioritize the people's interests.")

Interview with Mr. Haji Muhammad Gofar (63 years old), of Ende ethnicity, Chairman of PCNU Ende Regency, residing in Kelimutu Subdistrict, Ende Tengah District, Ende Regency, on July 5, 2024, concerning the leadership characteristics expected by Muslim voters. He emphasized decisiveness and courage. His full statement is as follows:

"Saya akan memilih Gubernur atau Wakil Gubernur yang tegas dan berani. Pemimpin harus tegas dan berani dalam mengambil keputusan serta bertanggung jawab penuh atasnya. Pemimpin tidak boleh lemah seperti layang-layang—ditarik saat tidak ada angin dan dilepaskan saat angin bertiup." ("I will choose a Governor or Deputy Governor who is firm and brave. A leader must be decisive and courageous in making decisions and fully responsible for them. A leader should not be weak like a kite—pulled when there is no wind and let go when the wind blows.")

Interview with Mr. Syafruddin Sira (44 years old), of Lamaholot ethnicity, Chairman of the Lembata Regency DPRD (2024-2029), residing in Silandoro Subdistrict, Lubetukan District, Lembata Regency, regarding leadership characteristics expected by Muslim voters. He highlighted empathy/populism. His full statement is as follows.

"Menurut saya, seorang Calon Gubernur atau Wakil Gubernur harus memiliki empati dan populisme, yang secara alami mencakup ketegasan. Jika seorang pemimpin peduli dan berpihak kepada rakyat, maka ia akan mampu mengambil sikap tegas terhadap usulan yang mungkin tidak menguntungkan masyarakat." (In my opinion, a Candidate for Governor or Deputy Governor must have empathy and populism, which naturally includes assertiveness. If a leader cares and is on the side of the people, they will be able to take a firm stance on proposals that may not benefit the community.")

Interview with NTT Muslim figures Mr. KH. Pua Monto Umbu Nay (Chairman of PWNU NTT, ASN at the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of NTT Province), of Sumba ethnicity, Kupang, April 16, 2024, at 15:00:33 WITA, Kelapa Lima Subdistrict, Kelapa Lima District, Kupang City, regarding the leadership characteristics expected by Muslim voters. His full statement is as follows:

"Jika saya dapat memilih, saya akan memasukkan semua kualitas kecuali daya tarik fisik. Kualitas tersebut adalah ketegasan/keberanian, empati/populisme, latar belakang militer, integritas (bebas dari korupsi), usia muda, kecerdasan, religiositas, dan pengalaman." (If I could choose, I would include all qualities except physical attractiveness. These qualities are assertiveness/courage, empathy/populism, military background, integrity (free from corruption), youth, intelligence, religiosity, and experience.")

Interview with voter figure Mr. Zainuddin Hobol (50 years old), a civil servant at the Alak District Office, residing in Penkase-Oeleta Subdistrict, Alak District, Kupang City, on April 19, 2024, at 13:35:27 WITA. Regarding the characteristics expected from a Deputy Governor of NTT in 2024, he stated:

"Seorang pemimpin ideal harus memiliki tujuh kualitas: pertama, ketegasan dan keberanian dalam membuat kebijakan; kedua, empati dan populisme; ketiga, integritas (bebas dari korupsi); keempat, usia muda dan energi; kelima, kecerdasan; keenam, religiositas untuk menjaga integritas moral; dan ketujuh, pengalaman, karena hal ini memastikan keberhasilan dalam membangun NTT." ("An ideal leader must possess seven qualities: first, decisiveness and courage in policymaking; second, empathy and populism; third, integrity (free from corruption); fourth, youth and energy; fifth, intelligence; sixth, religiosity to maintain moral integrity; and seventh, experience, as this ensures success in building NTT.")

Interview with Mr. Hamsari, S.IP (66 years old), a retired civil servant residing in Labuan Bajo, Wai Kelambu Subdistrict, Komodo District, West Manggarai Regency, on June 27, 2024, regarding the characteristics expected from a Deputy Governor of NTT in 2024. His full statement is as follows:

"Integritas (bebas dari korupsi) adalah yang paling utama karena saya secara pribadi meyakini prinsip bebas dari korupsi." ("Integrity (free from corruption) is paramount because I personally believe in the principle of being free from corruption.")

Interview with Mr. Ali Oemar Fadaq (62 years old), of Arab ethnicity, residing in Waingapu City, on June 16, 2024, at 17:39 WITA. He is the Chairman of the East Sumba Regency DPRD and has served as a DPRD member for 35 consecutive years from the Golkar Party. Regarding the characteristics expected from a Deputy Governor of NTT in 2024, he stated:

"Jika saya dapat memilih, saya akan memasukkan semua kualitas kecuali daya tarik fisik. Kualitas tersebut adalah ketegasan/keberanian, empati/populisme, latar belakang militer, integritas (bebas dari korupsi), usia muda, kecerdasan, religiositas, dan pengalaman." ("If I could choose, I would include all qualities except physical attractiveness. These qualities are assertiveness/courage, empathy/populism, military background, integrity (free from corruption), youth, intelligence, religiosity, and experience.")

Interview with Mr. Dipo Nusantara Pua Upa (59 years old), residing on Jalan Tunggal Ika, RT 01/RW 01, Kayu Putih Subdistrict, Oebobo District, Kupang City, of Nagekeo ethnicity, on May 25, 2024, at 19:09:53 WITA. He is a Muslim politician from PKB and a three-term DPR RI member. Regarding the characteristics expected from a Deputy Governor of NTT in 2024, he stated:

"Integritas (bebas dari korupsi) adalah hal yang sangat penting. Kita tidak boleh dipimpin oleh individu yang korup. Seorang pemimpin harus bersih dari korupsi karena, sebagaimana pepatah mengatakan, kita harus menggunakan sapu yang bersih untuk membersihkan secara efektif. Jika pemimpin di tingkat atas bersih, maka yang lainnya akan mengikuti." ("Integrity (free from corruption) is very important. We should not be led by corrupt individuals. A leader must be free from corruption because, as the saying goes, we must use a clean broom to clean effectively. If the leader at the top is clean, then others will follow.")

Interview with prospective NTT Governor Mr. Melki Laka Lena (48 years old), of Ende ethnicity, Kupang, on May 25, 2024, at 18:15 WITA. He is the Chairman of DPD 1 Golkar NTT and a three-term DPR RI member from the Golkar faction. Regarding the characteristics expected from a Deputy Governor of NTT in 2024, he stated:

"Saya memilih pemimpin yang memiliki empati dan berjiwa populis karena hal ini mempererat hubungan antara pemimpin dan rakyat, sehingga mempermudah dalam menyusun serta mengimplementasikan program di tingkat pusat maupun daerah. Karakteristik ini juga sangat penting bagi seorang Wakil Gubernur." ("I choose leaders who have empathy and a populist spirit because this strengthens the relationship between the leader and the people, making it easier to design and implement programs both at the central and regional levels. This characteristic is also crucial for a Deputy Governor.")

Interview with prospective NTT Governor and Deputy Governor candidate Mr. Yohanis Fransiskus Lema, S.IP, M.Si, of Ende ethnicity, also a two-term DPR RI member from the PDIP faction, residing in Kelapa Lima Subdistrict, Kupang City, on August 23, 2024, at 21:45 WITA. Regarding the characteristics expected from a Deputy Governor of NTT in 2024, he stated:

"Empati dan jiwa populis. Seorang pemimpin harus dekat dengan rakyat serta terlibat langsung dalam memahami permasalahan yang mereka hadapi. Namun, kedekatan saja tidak cukup; seorang pemimpin juga harus memperjuangkan kepentingan rakyat dan merumuskan kebijakan yang mampu mengatasi permasalahan mereka." ("Empathy and a populist spirit. A leader must be close to the people and directly involved in understanding the issues they face. However, mere proximity is not enough; a leader must also fight for the people's interests and formulate policies that can address their problems".)

Discussion

The electoral behavior of Muslim voters in the 2024 NTT Gubernatorial Election reflects a nuanced expectation of leadership qualities, emphasizing democratic values, service-oriented governance, and visionary leadership. Interviews reveal that Muslim voters prioritize leaders who uphold democratic principles, respect the people's choices, and ensure fair electoral processes. Additionally, characteristics such as empathy, populism, decisiveness, and courage in decision-making are highly valued, alongside integrity and a strong commitment to anti-corruption. Political and administrative experience is crucial for effective governance, while attributes like intelligence, religiosity, and military background are potential advantages. Overall, Muslim voters in NTT seek leaders who possess intellectual capacity and experience and demonstrate emotional closeness with the people and a steadfast commitment to advancing societal welfare (Castle, 2018).

In understanding the electoral behavior of Muslim voters in the 2024 NTT Gubernatorial Election, it is crucial to approach it through the lens of political behavior theories, particularly focusing on the theory of rational choice and participatory democracy (Blais, 2000). According to the rational choice theory, voters are seen as decision-makers who evaluate candidates based on their expected utility. In this case, Muslim voters in NTT are not just choosing leaders based on ethnicity or religion, but rather on a comprehensive evaluation of leadership qualities. This theory posits that voters seek the candidate who promises the greatest benefits regarding democratic values, service-oriented governance, and visionary leadership. Muslim voters prioritize leaders who uphold democratic principles, respect electoral processes, and guarantee fairness, reflecting a rational calculation where the focus is on societal welfare and good governance (Blais, 2000).

Additionally, the theory of participatory democracy highlights the importance of a voter's active engagement in the political process. In this context, Muslim voters in NTT are portrayed as seeking leaders capable of addressing their needs and embodying empathy, populism, decisiveness, and courage in decision-making (Bird, 2011). These voters expect to feel emotionally connected to their

leaders, a sentiment that is crucial in participatory models where the relationship between the governed and the governing is characterized by mutual respect and involvement (Azabar, 2022). Leaders with these qualities demonstrate a willingness to serve the people, addressing their immediate concerns while also focusing on long-term societal development. The emotional connection between the leader and the voters enhances trust and contributes to a more inclusive and responsive governance system (Arzheimer, 2019).

Finally, the theory of political behavior, especially the theory of political elites, can be applied to understand the value Muslim voters place on political and administrative experience. This theory suggests that voters are likely to favor candidates with a background in governance, as they are perceived as more capable of managing the complexities of leadership. In the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election, Muslim voters regard integrity, anti-corruption stances, intelligence, and military experience as key factors ensuring effective leadership. These qualities align with the theory's assertion that voters tend to choose candidates who have demonstrated the skills and experience necessary to navigate political systems and manage societal challenges effectively. This perspective suggests that while religion and ethnicity are not irrelevant, the emphasis on practical leadership and experience significantly influences electoral choices in this Christian-majority province (Alam, 2023).

Previous studies on electoral behavior in Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) provide insights that align with the findings of the 2024 gubernatorial election. A study by Martin Malo (2024) identified three voter characteristics influencing electoral decisions: emotional voters, who base their choices on identity factors such as ethnicity, culture, or religion; rational-emotional voters, who are conservative but can rationalize their choices; and rational voters, who prioritize data, track records, and policy analysis. Malo also introduced a fourth category, transactional voters, who seek immediate personal benefits, exemplified by the notion "ada uang, ada suara" ("money talks").

Additionally, a survey by Voxpol Center (2024) revealed that 44.2% of millennial voters supported the pair Emanuel Melkiades Laka Lena-Johanis Asadoma. This demographic's preference underscores the importance of democratic principles, respect for electoral processes, and leaders with integrity and anti-corruption commitment, reflecting the nuanced expectations of NTT's electorate.

4. CONCLUSION

The voting behavior of Muslim voters in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election reflects a sophisticated set of expectations regarding leadership, focusing on democratic values, service-oriented governance, and visionary leadership. Interviews indicate that Muslim voters prioritize leaders who uphold democratic principles, respect people's will, and ensure fair electoral practices. Moreover, qualities such as empathy, populism, decisiveness, and courage in making decisions are highly regarded, along with integrity and a firm stance against corruption. Political and administrative experience is essential for effective governance, while qualities like intelligence, religiosity, and military experience are potential advantages. In general, Muslim voters in NTT are looking for leaders who not only have intellectual capability and experience but also show emotional closeness to the people and a strong commitment to advancing the welfare of society.

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