

ASIA PROGRAM

WOMEN IN POWER IN EAST-JAVA: PROGRESS OR ILLUSION?

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After the results of the last territorial elections in Indonesia in June 2018, there are now ten women elected at the head of some of the main cities of East-Java, prefectures and the Province itself. For Indonesian political journalists, these women activists and feminists will manage local politics in a "softer" and less "harsh" direction, in comparison with the one conducted by their male counterparts. Known as *Srikandi* (central female character of Javanese and Balinese shadow theatre), do these women really embody the emergence of a new female political class, eager to moralize Indonesian political practices?

GLOBAL, NATIONAL OR LOCAL "PHENOMENON"?

More and more women are gaining political leadership in Indonesia at a national level, particularly in East Java, considered less conservative compared to the rest of the island. Initiated by Tri Rismaharini, elected mayor of Surabaya (the second largest city of the country) in 2010, this movement keeps on going in a spectacular way with the election last June of Khofifah Indar Parawansa, now governor of East-Java province. Leader of the independent Muslimat NU organization (the largest Muslim social organization in the world, created in Surabaya in 1926 and built upon a moderated practice of Islam), Khofifah is supported by many Islamic groups, including conservative ones. With Muslimat and the support of many Ulemas, Khofifah has an influence that goes beyond the political world. As an alumni of Airlangga University of Surabaya and former student of Abdurrahman Wahid (former leader of the liberal and moderate Islamic movement), Khofifa made a prominent political debut. Indeed, in the 1990s she challenged President Soeharto's policies and actively fought for more transparency and against corruption.

WOMEN OF INFLUENCE: A PATTERNED PROFILE CARRIED BY FEMALE VOTERS

If Khofifah and Rismaharini (more commonly known as Risma by the citizens), remains the emblematic figure that what the Surabayan daily Radar name a "phenomenon" in its edition of July 8, other women, such as Faida (Prefect of Jember) are in a leadership position within this province. Most of these politically influential women are part of Muslimat organization and their profile is quite constant: Muslim, from the middle-class,

young, educated, bureaucrats. Their rising number is a consequence of the growing interest of women in politics and the fact that they are more numerous than men on the electoral rolls (they represent 60% of the Indonesian voters). Khofifah is very popular with women, for one objective reason: she embodies a "firm and feminine" power, and for the more futile reason that she is assisted by Emil Dardak, prefect of Trenggalek, considered as a young, handsome and brilliant man (who got his Doctor's degree when he was only 22 years old).

ISLAM AS A TRADEMARK

While being Muslim, influential female politicians are close to leaders of non-Muslim communities and give importance to the multi-religious political dialogue. However, they display themselves as a banner of their religious confession by systematically wearing the hijab. There are three main reasons for this choice: their socio-cultural origins, the growth of the Islamic consumption market in Indonesia and above all, the need to gain political credibility and to still get heard by the conservative Muslim community. Puti Guntur Soekarno (running mate of Gus Ipul, opponent of Khofifah) only started wearing the hijab when the election campaign began. According to Airlangga Pribadi, Professor of political science at Airlangga University, Indonesian voters are not yet ready to choose a non-Muslim woman to lead within an important local authority, but if that was to happen, he believes that this is likely to be in East-Java in the first place.

FEMALE LEADERSHIP CONSIDERED "TOO EMOTIONAL" BY INDONESIAN PUBLIC OPINION

Given the recent rise of women in powerful positions, Airlangga Pribadi states that he does not have enough elements to compare and draw any stereotype. However, especially among elites, citizens often consider women to be overly emotional in the exercise of power. This stigma particularly affects Risma, famous for being expressive and angry. Her behaviour is in fact only an obvious reaction to a patriarchal, macho and manipulative society towards women in general, especially since Soeharto's regime. Risma thus developed a constant need to protest these ancient moral practices, which is

not necessarily understood by Indonesians. However, she has an excellent reputation and recognition thanks to her charisma and for her political actions consisting mainly in offering a better quality of life for her citizens.

DO THESE FEMALE LEADERS AIM FOR A COMMON WILL?

These newly elected women, heads of Javanese communities (provinces, cities, prefectures), all display a desire to reform an oligarchic system that is still ongoing, and break the alliance strongly established between business actors and political figures. Their desire for transparency is real and they fight for a clearer separation of the legislative and executive entities, both very affected by corruption. According to Airlangga Pribadi, tensions can be expected as soon as Khofifah takes office and they could grow if she (or Risma) joins the government. Many businessmen and politicians fear this possibility. A quick review of the situation shows, however, that the system is well anchored in people's minds: two of these ten new women in power succeeded to their husbands; Rukmini Buchori (Mayor of Probolinggo) after the ten years of her husband's term of office (2004 to 2014) and Dewanti Rumpo (Mayor of Batu), who took over after her husband Eddy, suspected of corruption. Has the gender revolution truly begun in the Indonesian politics? ■

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