



Gender and Social Construction in Local Government: A Experience from Regent of Lebak Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article dissects how socially constructed society views women in politics as regional heads. Amid the minimal existence of women in politics, women still dare to enter politics to become regional heads. The research results in this article will first explain how social construction translates social roles between women and men, including in the political sphere. Second, this article highlights gender analysis of the leadership style of Iti Octavia Jayabaya as Regent of Lebak from a social construction perspective. With their myriad of problems, women are challenged to enter politics without solid support and political capital. Likewise with Iti Octavia Jayabaya, although her leadership cannot be separated from the existence of a political dynasty, Iti Octavia Jayabaya broke the social construction, which assumes that it is difficult for women to be involved in politics and even become regional leaders. Iti Octavia Jayabaya has proven this through various achievements related to the development of the region he leads to escape it as a disadvantaged region. This research contribution enriches approaches and references regarding the study of women's leadership, to gender issues in government and local politics.

Keywords: Political Dynasties, Social Construction, Women Leaders, Local Government, Lebak Regency

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Introduction

In the current era, female regional leaders can now demonstrate their existence in various leadership positions, including being regional heads. However, its presence is still relatively minimal (Boylan et al., 2019; Yi Wang & Redmiles, 2019), considering the percentage of women involved in the local political sphere. The existence of female leaders is considered necessary because they are considered more capable of leading, especially during times of crisis (Dadanlar & Abebe, 2020; Palvia et al., 2020; Post et al., 2019; Yang Wang et al., 2022). This is because women's leadership is considered more comprehensive and cross-cultural in order to minimize conflict. (Garfield et al., 2020) because of open communication, adaptation and trust (Sharif, 2019). Women's leadership is able to have a positive impact on gender equality (Flabbi et al., 2019) because it can encourage the democratization process (Cumming et al., 2019; Franzke et al., 2022) through collective solidarity (Wardatun et al., 2023)

The irony is that many women do not yet understand the rights of women's roles in the public sphere. Women's lack of understanding of their rights in the public sphere results in a lack of women's involvement in policy-making, and their positions tend to be underestimated (Wahyudi, 2018). In villages, women's leadership still experiences discrimination with the perception that women leaders are unfamiliar. The presence of female leaders is considered more capable of accommodating women's needs compared to male leaders (Abdullah & Holida, 2023; Singh et al., 2023). It is because women know more about their own needs and problems (Al-shakha, 2019; Lemoine & Blum, 2019)

The challenges of becoming a female leader cannot be separated from the persistence of discrimination with the assumption that female leaders are unfamiliar with society (Holilah, 2014). On the other hand, women's roles are still limited by domestic affairs (Hessami & da Fanseca, 2020). Currently, many positions in the political realm are filled by women, from national to local. The involvement of women in the political sphere includes Retno Marsudi as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sri Mulyani as Minister of Finance, and so on. However, currently, especially in Banten Province, there are transformations in the existence of advanced women in regional leadership. It shows that there is a form of democratic progress in achieving gender equality by breaking down the patriarchal culture that has been socially constructed (Prastiwi & Haliim, 2018).

In the world of politics, leadership is synonymous with power. Politics, leadership, and power have long been closely associated with masculine activities synonymous with men. In contrast, women synonymous with femininity are seen as unsuitable in politics and incredibly unfit to occupy various important positions, such as political elites (Gusmansyah, 2019; Maseda et al., 2021; Torres & Carmen, 2023). Women's progress in the political realm today is still overshadowed by religious and cultural views related to the concepts of patriarchy and gender that have been rooted for a long time. This concept refers to gender between men and women who are considered different. It is because, in society, gender is often seen as biological sex, not as social sex, which has the same social roles for men and women. The concept of gender is important to discuss because gender differences are considered to have given rise to gender injustice, which ultimately results in the

marginalization of women in work, households, society, and even the state (Mandasari, 2023).

Massive discrimination and subordination mean that women are seen as a second-class group. It is influenced by the social culture of society, which is formed and becomes a social construction. The social construction approach developed in the 20th century (Maulida, 2021). The social construction approach emerged and developed rapidly around the 1970s. This approach developed inseparably from various Foucault ideas that influenced the creation of social constructionism, socio-constructionism, and non-essentialism (Ngangi, 2011). Social construction has a broad meaning and is often connected to various social influences from each individual's life experiences. The basis of social construction is Berger and Luckmann's assumption that "reality is a social construction" (Sulaiman, 2016). Apart from that, social construction has several strengths, including First, the role of language in social culture, which is inherent and has a concrete impact so that it can influence individual thoughts and behavior. Second, social construction can be representative of the many complexities in a culture where it does not assume uniformity. Third, social construction tends to be consistent with society and time (Ngangi, 2011).

Gender construction makes it a challenge for women to show their existence by being present in a position as a political leader (Maulida, 2021). The things that become obstacles for women are gender issues, which are always linked to nature. It seems invisible, but in reality, it is a challenge for women to have access to leadership; in fact, this is so inherent that it is socially and culturally constructed. The dominance of patriarchal culture provides a clear line that women and politics are two different worlds and cannot be in synergy with each other. Women's world is at home, which includes the domestic area, taking care of children with all their details, and even having a career outside the house. Then work/career is just one of the things. Women must be ready to play dual roles as mothers and working women. Meanwhile, politics suits men because it is full of dangerous intrigues, looks macho, is full of maneuvers, and is synonymous with money and power (Mandasari, 2023).

Talking about potential, the capacity of women leaders have a much more fantastic opportunity to influence other women through their policies or personalities. Because symbolically, the presence of women in politics is shown in the number of women involved in the political process (Fitriani, 2015). The presence of women in politics must be developed so that it is not only symbolic but becomes more substantial, where the presence of women is expected to be able to represent or represent various aspirations and interests of women to be appointed to the public and political spheres (Parawansa, 2002).

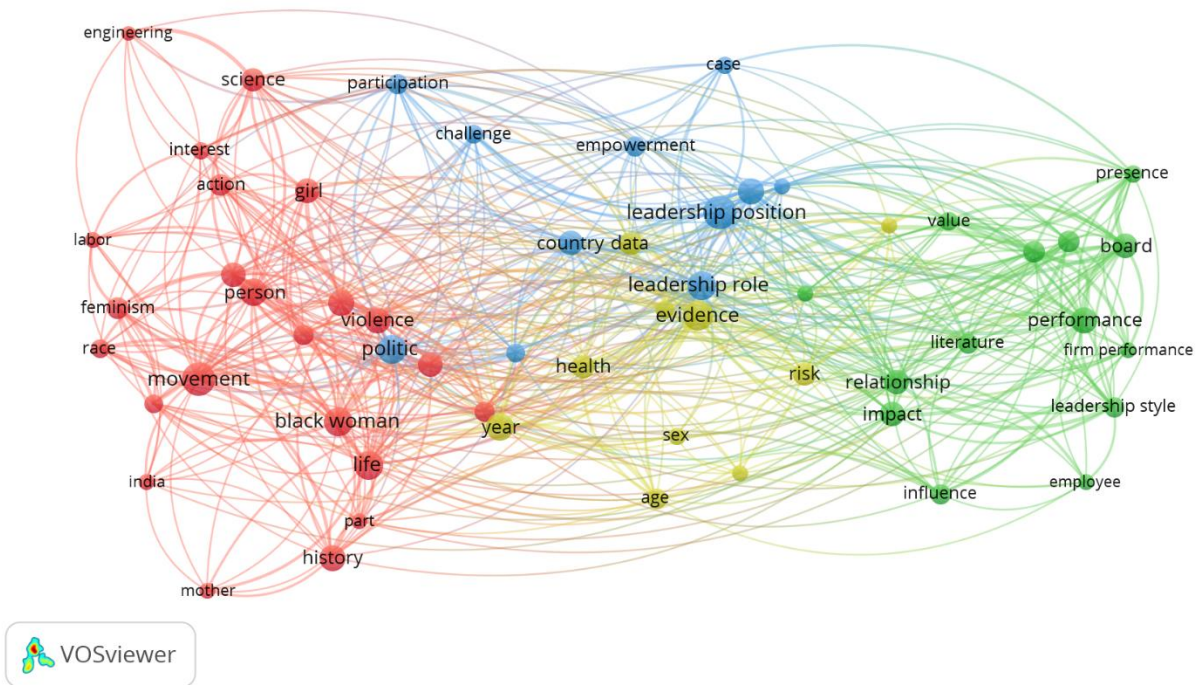


Figure 1. *Gap Research on Women Leadership Topics Visualized by Vos Viewers. Source: Processed by authors, 2024*

After carrying out a data mining process (see Figure 1) through Publish or Perish on 1000 pieces of literature related to women's leadership over the last five years and visualizing it through Vos Viewer, this research seeks to see research gaps, especially related to the topic of women's leadership. The topic of women's leadership has never linked itself to social construction. Patriarchal culture is very closely related to the social construction that exists in society. It means that women's leadership must be connected to social construction. This research attempts to look at women's leadership from a social construction perspective

Iti Octavia Jayabaya is one of the representatives of women who have succeeded in occupying elite political positions in the Lebak Regency. In the context of women's leadership amidst the inherent social construction in society, it shows the presence of Iti Octavia Jayabaya as Regent of Lebak Regency, who has won regional elections for two periods since 2013. It is proof that women are capable of becoming leaders in politics. What is interesting in this case is that Iti Octavia Jayabaya is none other than within the circle of the Jayabaya political dynasty as a local strongman in the Lebak Regency. So, how can Iti Octavia Jayabaya's leadership still be within the political dynasty circle and only be an extension of her family (Zahra, 2020)

Local Strongmen itself refers to figures where these figures are identified with the various advantages they have through expertise in their field. Apart from that, local strongmen is a terminology often associated with and synonymous with elites. Even though there are many understandings of the concept of elite, it has the same meaning in knowledge that the

concept of elite refers to a group of people as superior individuals who are different from the masses who control power networks or groups who are in circles of power or are currently in power (Indriyany et al., 2020; Ramadhan & Indriyany, 2022). As for the context of this research, Mulyadi Jayabaya is a local strongman and father of Iti Octavia Jayabaya, who once served as Regent of Lebak Regency.

H. Mulyadi Jayabaya, who had a large capital capacity, could condition Lebak Regency so that Jayabaya could finally create a political dynasty in Lebak Regency. Jayabaya's political position was able to increase his wealth. Apart from that, Jayabaya can also involve his family in strategic positions such as in regional government and business organizations. The reason is that when we look at potential leaders in Lebak, we must be kept from the power of political dynasties with large capital capacities. In Lebak, people with high capital can become leaders, whereas people with little capital will easily be marginalized. Jayabaya, who comes from a dynasty family, has very high capital, so in 2003, he was elected Regent of Lebak.

Based on this explanation, this article examines and elaborates on the gender and social construction of women's leadership in Banten, especially for Iti Octavia Jayabaya, the female regional head of the Lebak Regency. This article will try to dissect whether its presence is a form of women's representation in the political realm or just to perpetuate the Jayabaya political dynasty. This article will also examine how the character Iti Jayabaya reconstructs gender roles in politics in a patriarchal society with his leadership style.

Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach (see Figure 2), chosen for its relevance in answering the problems at hand through descriptive analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The central focus of this research is to meticulously dissect and examine how social construction perceives the leadership of Iti Octavia Jayabaya. As a female leader in the local realm, she holds a significant position in the Jayabaya dynasty line, making her leadership a crucial aspect of our study.

Various data collection techniques were carried out using observation and interviews with the community during the leadership of Iti Octavia Jayabaya as primary data. Interviews with the community are one of the data collection techniques in this research because they want to see how the community views the position of women involved in politics, in this case, becoming a regional head. Additionally, scientific literature and mainstream media information are considered credible in supporting this article. So, combining primary and secondary data will collect more accurate information and produce information to answer existing problems.

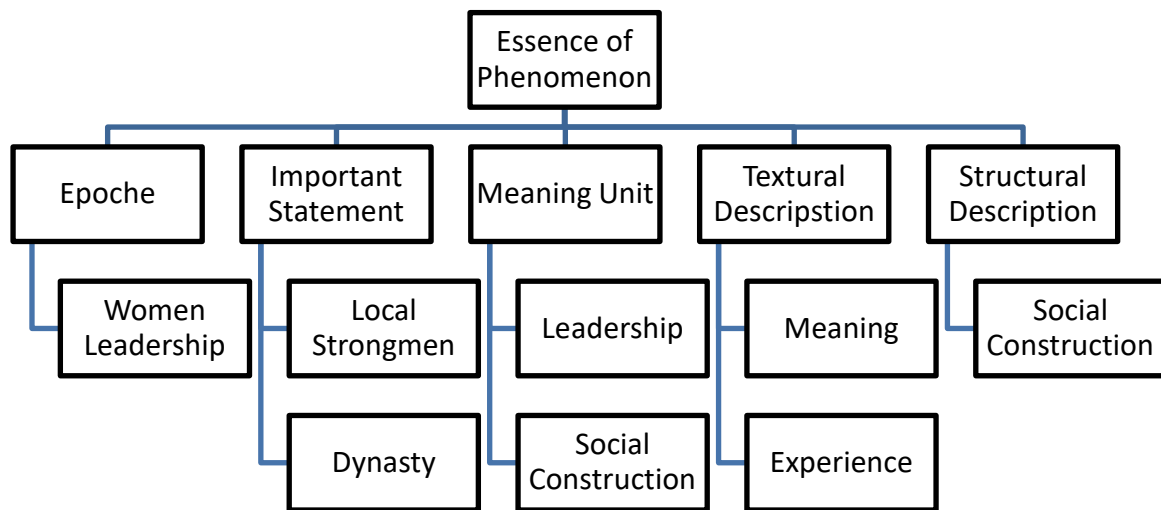


Figure 2. *Mindmap of Phenomenology in this Research. Source: Processed by authors, 2024*

Results and Discussion

Social Construction of Women's Leadership

Talking about gender, quite a few people misunderstand the meaning of gender itself. It is necessary to know that gender and sex have different meanings. Of course, if we refer to gender, we will discuss its social role. In contrast to biological sex, it will refer to natural things, such as giving birth and breastfeeding (Elsi et al., 2022). Seeing that gender is social sex, the roles of men and women should be equal in society. However, gender equality and fairness are not fully realized. Because a patriarchal culture still influences social values, they are organized into a social construction and tend to be stable because they have been formed over a long period.

Social construction often positions the roles of men and women in different or even unequal terms. It can be seen from how massive various gender inequality problems are, such as subordination, marginalization, and violence against women (Fitriani, 2015; Utaminingsih, Sabariman, et al., 2020; Utaminingsih, Wike, et al., 2020). Not to mention, there are still stereotypical solid views and double burdens carried by themselves. From this, social construction often becomes an obstacle for women to progress and demonstrate their existence in the political realm, including becoming political leaders at the national or regional level.

From social construction influenced by patriarchal culture, there is discrimination against women so that women do not have access to participate in gender-based development and exercise control over development that is equal. Moreover, a lack of understanding regarding religious teachings often intimidates women's position in their social roles in society

(Syahril, 2014). Seeing this, the existence of a system that tends to be very detrimental to men and women in particular needs to be corrected. These things include the importance of increasing understanding of gender equality and justice, which will align with the values and culture currently developing in society.

Apart from that, it is essential to pay attention to the need to be able to understand good and correct religious teachings as a form of effort to control the relationship between men and women who have the same position in the context of social roles, especially about gender-based human development to achieve social welfare without any parties who are disadvantaged and tend to hinder the progress and development of women in playing a role and showing their existence in the social and political realm.

Women in political participation are seen from a gender perspective and a functional, structural approach, namely the importance of women being able to actively participate and build relationships, especially for community development and social welfare. Therefore, there is a need for reconstruction regarding women's involvement in the social and political realm. The purpose of political participation for women, especially in efforts and community development processes, is not to be used as a polemic and role dichotomy seen from a biological perspective. However, this creates a division of labor, creating order in society. In this way, a dynamic, functional social system will be made.

It cannot be separated from how it relates to development, which can be said to be gender-based. This, as has been explained, talking about the sociological context of gender results in a definition as a form of difference like men and women, which, if viewed from biological sex, tends to be natural. However, discussing gender will contain various social and cultural values, giving rise to other values that continue to become a general value for groups of a particular type.

The importance of understanding gender as social sex will provide a much broader division of labor for men and women. For this reason, it is necessary to examine in depth how gender exists and cannot be separated from the processes that shape it socially. Therefore, the existence of gender itself means that men and women have the same social roles, so the roles between the two are very interchangeable. It is because the things that are different between women and men are seen as things related to their biological characteristics, which, of course, these characteristics have been brought from birth. Things that are biological or can be said to be forms of nature that cannot be changed, such as women having a uterus so they can give birth, get pregnant, and breastfeed, whereas men do not have this. Of course, on the contrary, this is a necessity, and the truth of various actions carried out by women or men has been constructed, which is the result of learning from what each individual, both men and women, has experienced.

Through social interaction, it is often used as a social construction that has been formed over a very long period. For this reason, social construction can be changed even though it requires quite a long process and time through social reconstruction. In this way, the existence of women in their roles is often always associated with things identical to everything in the domestic realm. From this, women are not allowed to participate in every community development process. Moreover, it is increasingly difficult for women to

demonstrate their existence in practical politics, which is often considered a man's world. Of course, this assumption cannot be separated from the influence of patriarchal culture, which has been going on for a long time to become a social construct.

This social construction can be reconstructed into a new paradigm. There is a need for a reconstruction that politics and other public activities are a common property. Because men and women have the same social and political roles, an orderly system will be created because there is equal balance as components of society work together to develop culture and achieve prosperity. Thus, the view of gender awareness, apart from the understanding that gender is the same as biological sex, no longer exists. Gender roles are, of course, not natural, and this can be changed to achieve balance through social reconstruction in understanding the meaning of gender.

Local Strongman Jayabaya Dynasty

H. Mulyadi Jayabaya is the son of a prominent figure in Lebak, H. Datu Mulyadi Jayabaya. Jayabaya initially started his business as a salted fish seller; with his persistence and hard work, he spread his wings to open other companies, such as material goods. Jayabaya started opening companies in 1993, where the first successful company he founded was PT Cipadang Jayabaya Putra Utama. Then, in 1995, Jayabaya founded a second company called PT Giri Jaya Putra; in 2008, he also founded CV Bintang Wafar. Jayabaya's company name is better known as Jaya Baya Group. Because Jayabaya's company has helped the Lebak government in terms of development, it is not surprising that Jayabaya is one of the wealthiest people in the Lebak Regency (Wasi, 2023)

H. Mulyadi Jayabaya, who had a large capital capacity, could condition Lebak Regency so that Jayabaya could finally create a political dynasty in Lebak Regency. Jayabaya's political position increased his wealth; apart from that, Jayabaya was also able to involve his family in strategic positions such as in regional government and business organizations. The reason is that when we see prospective leaders or leaders in Lebak, we must be kept from the power of political dynasties with large capital capacities. In Lebak, people with high capital can become leaders, whereas people with little capital will easily be marginalized. Jayabaya, who comes from a dynasty family, has very high capital, so in 2003, he was elected Regent of Lebak (Wasi, 2023).

The reason is that in Lebak Regency, money politics is still often practiced by prospective leaders, where those who have significant capital can, of course, win while those who do not have capital will be marginalized; it is not surprising that Jayabaya, who comes from a political dynasty, can easily occupy political positions in Lebak. Since Jayabaya served as Regent of Lebak, every political position in Lebak Regency has been occupied by the Jayabaya family, where the impact was that the power of the Jayabaya political dynasty dominated Lebak. In fact, with the power and influence of his political dynasty, Jayabaya could serve as Regent of Lebak Regency for up to 2 terms. Not only that, as if he didn't want just to let go of the position he had held, Jayabaya then involved his son in the political realm, namely by entering his son in the 2014 regional elections where with the power of significant capital in the end his first son, Hj. Iti Octavia Jayabaya was able to become the first female Regent in Lebak Regency, and is still in office today (Furnivall, 2019; Wijaya, 2019).

Iti Octavia Jayabaya's Leadership as As Regent in Lebak Regency, Indonesia

It cannot be denied that women are currently starting to show their existence by daring to take part in politics and even become leaders at the central and regional levels. Iti Octavia Jayabaya was the first woman who dared to run for regent, and she was even more proud that she could survive for two terms.

Women are permanently attached to society's perception of being feminine and gentle. This construction of the nature of women means that women are considered unfit to be in the political realm, including female leaders. However, the opposite is valid for a female regional head in Lebak Regency. The reason is that Iti Octavia Jayabaya's leadership style is far from the construct built up in society that women are gentle and always involve feelings; in fact, Iti more often shows masculine traits in her political gestures, such as being brave, firm, and also populist.

On several occasions, Iti was caught riding a truck and got angry at the driver who broke the rules; on one occasion, she even got angry in a very loud voice and, in his typical language, threatened to tear down a building that had been built right in the newly opened park. Iti was very angry when he saw that the garden, created to beautify the environment, was being destroyed because of undue needs.

Even Iti, who is a female Regent, dared to scold the officials during the inspection. Apart from that, on one occasion, precisely during durian season, Iti dared to climb up and take a ripe durian directly. Iti even ate the durian together with the Baduy community. In fact, even though Iti is a female leader, her political gestures are far from feminine. She more often shows a firm, brave, and populist attitude.

Apart from that, during the leadership of Iti, Lebak Regency, he was crowned as one of the Regencies with the best governance system. It was inseparable from the role of Iti Octavia Jayabaya, who was the Regent of Lebak Regency, where Iti, with his firm, brave leadership style, could lead Lebak Regency. to be better (Permatasari, 2020). From this, women can become leaders, leading to much better regional development. Thus, Iti Octavia Jayabaya's leadership broke the existing social construction where there was a constructed assumption that women could not be in the political realm.

Moreover, there are several things we need to know about Lebak Regency itself. In 2012, dozens of villages were still categorized as poor out of 340 (Wijaya, 2019). Also, Lebak was crowned at that time as having the most poor villages in Banten Province, reaching 50%. These problems did not make the Regent of Lebak Iti remain silent, and the Lebak Regency government began to make innovations to achieve more optimal and high-quality public services. It continues beyond there, various innovations through collaboration between the government and the communications and information service to develop a network-based public service. With this collaboration, an application emerged, namely Lebak Smart City, where with the presence of Lebak Smart City, people in Lebak Regency can easily find various kinds of information, from information about education, tourism, health, culture, culinary, transportation, and so on (Wijaya, 2019)

In 2016, especially in the education sector in Lebak Regency, the population aged 15 years and over had a relatively high level of Latin letters, reaching 97.57 percent. This figure shows a high increase from the previous year (lebakkab, 2019). Besides, under Iti Octavia Jayabaya's leadership, the Lebak Regency received the 2019 State Pandu Award from the Indonesia Institute For Public Governance (IIPG) (Wijaya, 2019). From the brief explanation above, it can be concluded that the female leader, namely Iti Octavia Jayabaya, can prove that the social construction that assumes women are weak can be resolved through their actions because, on certain occasions, women have the right to be firm in making decisions, especially in terms of leading.

Iti is an example of a female Regent who can fight against the construct established in society that women are not suitable to be in the political arena, because politics is synonymous with hard work and requires a lot of capital. Iti was able to become a new color in political competition, her firm, brave and famous attitude was able to make her a leader who could advance Lebak Regency. However, there is something unfortunate about the fact that Iti is none other than a political dynasty. Thus, every policy issued by Iti still cannot represent women. However, behind it all, Iti is a female regent who is firm and has integrity.

For this reason, if you try to study and dissect it more deeply, the gender aspect itself is born from the existence of socio-cultural processes in a society. Therefore, gender roles should be the same for men and women, and of course, they should be interchangeable. It is because a difference between men and women only covers things related to biological characteristics, which, in fact, have been innate since humans were born and, of course, tend to be natural.

Seeing how the existence of women is seen from their biology (See Figure 3), of course, they have a uterus so that women give birth, become pregnant, and breastfeed. In contrast, men do not have the biological characteristics that women have. In this way, all forms related to social roles are a social construction formed over a very long period. In this way, if gender-related matters that have been socially constructed become obstacles for women to demonstrate their existence in the social and political realm, they should be reconstructed to achieve balance and order as a form of representation of existing problems through new social construction.

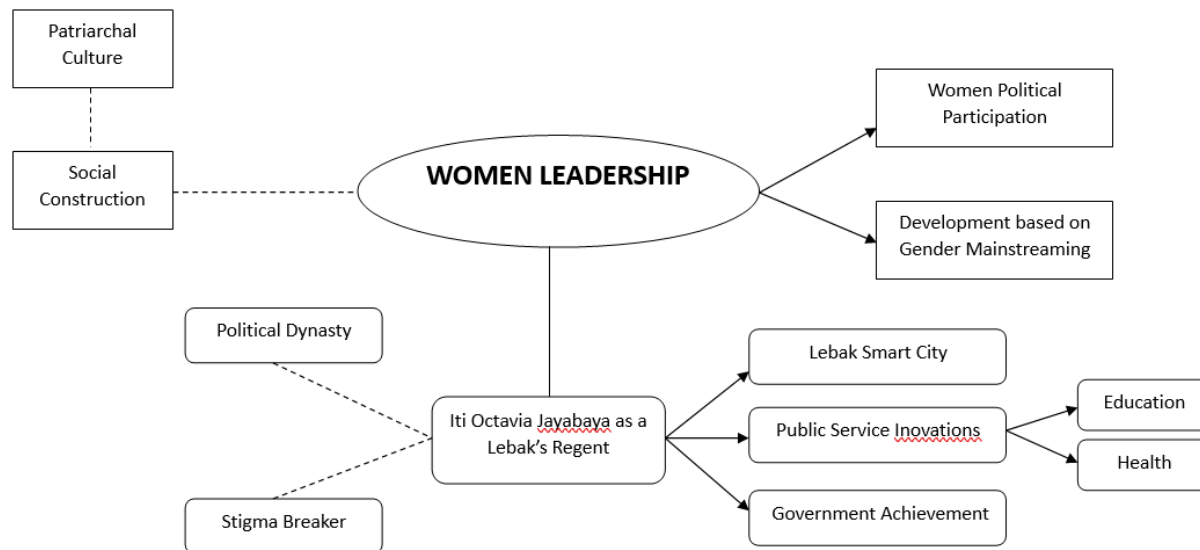


Figure 3. *Women Leadership in Lebak Regency. Source: Processed by authors, 2024*

Conclusion

Based on Figure 3 the explanation above, it can be concluded that the existing socio-cultural construction related to gender should be reconstructed as a form of effort to balance men and women who should have the same social role in the political realm. That way, there will no longer be any confusion regarding the understanding that gender is often equated with biological genitals, which tend to be natural; in fact, these assumptions tend to stick to the point of becoming an obstacle for women to progress and demonstrate their existence as political leaders. In contrast to biological sex, which is natural, the existence of gender is social so that it can be exchanged. Women and men can participate according to their abilities without fear of being considered out of step with their social nature. If we talk about nature, the only thing that differentiates women is how women have a uterus, so women can conceive, give birth, and breastfeed while men cannot. In contrast, the standard meaning of men is that they have testicles and an Adam's apple, which, of course, women do not have. These things are natural, not social constructions, and can be changed into new social constructions because they are related to social roles.

Apart from that, women's leadership in Banten shows that the existence of women to advance in political leadership cannot be separated from social constructions that become obstacles. Thus, there still needs to be more women who can advance to become political leaders. The reason is that only women who are within political dynasties have the opportunity to demonstrate their existence in the political realm. The irony is that female leaders who cannot be separated from political dynasties are only used to perpetuate political dynasties as a form of local strongmen. Moreover, even though Iti Octavia Jayabaya was able to become a leader because she was closely associated with the Jayabaya political dynasty, the existence of Iti Octavia Jayabaya as a female leader has shown her ability

through various achievements and the development of a much more prosperous society has shown that women are capable of becoming leaders in politics. It has been proven that gender justice in various sectors is a form of democracy. It succeeded in making Lebak Regency accessible to underdeveloped areas through encouragement and change from its leadership.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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