

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### Abstrak

Berita media massa dalam waktu dua tahun terakhir selalu pesan-pesan yang disebarkan dari sosial media, konferensi pers hampir selalu menampilkan informasi dan opini mengenai penyebaran virus Corona sebagai krisis kesehatan yang telah menggabal. Tanggapan bersama terhadap pandemi Covid-19 menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat percaya akan pentingnya kesejahteraan manusia dibandingkan dengan pertumbuhan ekonomi, inilah yang menjadi fokus dari kebijakan ekonomi. Pentingnya reproduksi manusia secara berkelanjutan pada bidang ekonomi. Kepala daerah Kabupaten Sragen yang telah mendapat kepercayaan dan terlegitimasi kekuasaannya oleh masyarakat mengupayakan ketahanan ekonomi keluarga sebagai basis mempertahankan keberlanjutan kehidupan warganya. Tujuan dari tulisan ini untuk melihat kebijakan dan program pada bidang ekonomi yang ditetapkan oleh Bupati Sragen Kusdinar Untung Yuni Sukowati yang mampu mendobrak jeratan patriarki untuk mengatasi dampak Covid-19 pada bidang ekonomi. Pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif menjadi pedoman dalam penyusunan penelitian ini dengan pengumpulan data dari penelusuran pustaka dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perempuan yang diberi kesempatan dan kepercayaan untuk menjadi pemimpin politik mampu merespon permasalahan yang dihadapi rakyatnya. Bupati Sragen yang seorang perempuan menerapkan kepemimpinan transformatif pada masa Covid-19 mengupayakan berbagai cara guna mempertahankan sumber daya ekonomi masyarakatnya dengan melibatkan dan memberdayakan semua sumber daya yang ada di wilayahnya.

**Kata Kunci :** Perempuan, Kepala Daerah, Covid-19, ekonomi

### Abstrak

*Mass media news in the last two years has always been messages spread from social media, press conferences almost always display information and opinions about the spread of the Corona virus as a global health crisis. All responses to the Covid-19 pandemic shows that people believe in the importance of human well-being compared to economy growth, which is the focus of economy policy. The importance is economy sustainable reproduction. The regional head of Sragen Regency who has gained trust and legitimized her power by citizens seeks the economy resilience of the family as a basis for maintaining the sustainability of life. The purpose of this paper to show economy policies and programs of Kusdinar Untung Yuni Sukowati as a Sragen Regent who was able to break the patriarchy's entanglements to overcome the economy impact of Covid-19. Qualitative description approach as guidelines of this research with the data collection from library browsing and documentation. Result of this research show that women who given the opportunity and trust to become a political leader able to respond to the problems faced by her people. Regent Sragen who is a woman implementing transformative leadership during Covid-19 seeks various ways to maintain and strengthen economy of her citizens by involving and empowering all resources in her region.*

**Keywords:** Women, Leader Region, Covid-19, Economy

## Introduction

Chinese Medical Team announced the new threat caused by virus infection to international public in December 2020. The novel virus is very infectious and transmits very rapidly through inter-human horizontal transmission called Covid-19 later. On March 11, 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) officially announced Covid-19 as global pandemic with high transmission rate. Its very rapid transmission can make the respiratory system collapses in the weak body immunity. Health crisis or pandemic due to Covid-19 is a large-scale humanity epidemic resulting in global uncertainty.

Pandemic is a large-scale infectious disease epidemic that can increase morbidity and mortality with typical characteristic, i.e. landscape scale, thereby is defined as unexpected event with extraordinary speed (Kantorowicz-reznichenko, 2020). In critical situation colored with uncertainty and sudden unusualness requires considerably adaptation in order to respond to effectively. What is needed in extraordinary crisis is not only a leader responsive to the management as planned but also behavior and mindset that can prevent excessive reaction against the crisis.

In early period, Covid-19 pandemic transmitted so rapidly that government was

overwhelmed in providing health facilities and social welfare program (Ozili, 2020). The presence of responsive, communicative, and pro-people leader is very desirable because: 1) during covid-19 pandemic, people encounter social isolation through minimizing physical contact and avoiding crowd; 2) the members of society' emotions like shock, fear, anger, and sorrow became more sensitive and out of control, thereby many people were depressed (Varón Sandoval et al., 2020); 3) the income gap between men and women becomes more visible; 4) the increase in domestic violence against women and children as the effect of unemployment (*Briefing and Preliminary Policy Recommendations on the Role of Local Government in the International Covid-19 Crisis Response*, 2020).

In short period of time, some international mass media - *New York Times, Forbes, Vox, the Harvard Business Review, Stanford Medicine, and NBC News* – tell the popularity of a stateswoman amid Covid-19. The media praise the effect of gender on policy and programs or strategy to mitigate the negative effect of Covid-19. The empirical evidence of leader's performance shows that a number of states with female leader are considered are considered as

successfully suppressing the risk of health hazard and mortality due to Covid-19 pandemic in their area. Provisional narration appearing recently represents that the states with female leader (Belgia, Denmark, Estonia, Jerman, Finlandia, Iceland, New Zealand, Norwegia, Yunani, dan Taiwan) have mortality rate six folds less than that of the states with male leader (Coscieme et al., 2020). The states affiliated with Organisation for Economy Co-operation and Development (OECD) led by women have better fate during Covid-19 pandemic (Windsor, et.al, 2020;Rameshan, 2021).

The research conducted by Leah C Windsor et.al. (2020) found that national female leaders deal with Covid-19 more responsively. Previous studies with the developed countries being the objects revealed some women leading the state: Angela Merkel as Chancellor of Germany (Aprilia et al., 2020;Susanto, 2020;Susanto, 2020), Tsai Ing-Wen as the President of Taiwan (Summers et al., 2020;Aprilia et al., 2020;Lien & Wu, 2021), and Jacinda Ardern as the Prime Minister of New Zealand (Rameshan, 2021; Wilson, 2020;Summers et al., 2020).

Other studies with developing state being their object of research led by women found that despite patriarchic environment,

they have better fate socially and economically and can maintain their power, as shown by Rose Christiane Raponda as the Prime Minister of Gabon (Popouet, 2021), Mia Mottley as the Prime Minister of Barbados, (Nicholls, 2020), Bidhya Devi Bhandari as the President of Nepal (Piryani et al., 2020), and Ana Brnabic as Prime Minister of Serbia (Beraha & Đuričin, 2020).

Considering the facts aforementioned, the objective of article is to explain the role of women's transformative political leadership through a mitigating strategy in dealing with the economic effect of Covid-19. This writing is divided into three subject matters: firstly, explaining the effect of Covid-19 on economic field occurring in the states led by stateswomen; secondly, transformation political leadership in crisis time; and thirdly, mitigation program policy in economic field through productive women.

### **Transformational Political Leadership**

Leadership becomes a set of dynamic collective activities in the construction of relation combining the webs of influence. Leadership is also defined as way, style, and strategy a leader uses in influencing others in the process of achieving an objective (Brouer, er.al. 2013). Political leadership is

still often defined as male activities implemented in a hierarchic institution with power and influence over others. In such power relation and influence, the role of individual leaders dominating or equalizing themselves to their adherent can be seen in the institution (Yoder, 2001). Political leadership revealed by a man should drive others to support his leadership, and thereby political skill is required. Political skills are an instrument to influence others through negotiation, political communication, persuasion, and manipulation. Political skill consists of interpersonal influence, networking skill, social intelligence, and sincere and honesty (Teles, 2012; Buch et al., 2016; Kimura, 2013).

Recently, leadership studies reveal contemporary political leadership offering new perspective in power relation between leader (ruler) and follower (people). The contemporary political leadership is intended to reframe the traditional leadership style in order to represent the pattern of power relation between leader and follower more dynamically. Conventionally, leadership according to (Komives & Dugan, 2010) is a process putting a leader to be an actor tending to monopolize, dominate, and command. Contemporary political leadership shows leader behavior pattern putting the follower

onto the equal role. Thus, everyone becoming the follower will be respected for his/her character. Leader and follower are accountable, collaborating, and developing together to achieve their objective and to adapt to certain situation.

Haque (2015) confirms that female leader undertakes her task more successfully when performing transformational leadership style. The transformational leadership is characterized with the leader's ability of motivating others through cooperation, coordination, and two-way communication. There are some elements of transformational leadership: (1) an ideal effect of leader. In this element, charisma an individual has becomes the follower's reason of trusting him/her; (2) the leader's inspirational motivation for his/her followers; (3) the leader's individual consideration through fulfilling the followers' need; (4) intellectual stimulation by giving the followers an opportunity of growing, developing, learning something new, corresponding to their creativity and innovation (Buch et al., 2016; Hur et al., 2011).

Transformational leadership framework emphasizes on the followers or others' feedback to decision maker's behavior and policy. In this context, a leader

is defined as an individual with an ability of influencing other interpersonally in certain situation and time through communication in order to achieve the specified objective. The leader adopting transformational leadership pays attention to the followers' interest and motive in social relation to improve job motivation. In this view, there are some basic strengths: (1) organizational or institutional activity is considered as collective practice, thereby emphasizes on collective achievement, social network, and the importance of teamwork; (2) transformational leadership indicating egalitarian values in social interaction between leader and follower, thereby being dynamic collective activities; and (3) as a teamwork, leader and follower should attempt to create output useful to organization or institution and the activities conducted in integrated manner between the two is defined as collective learning.

Transformational leadership style is believed to lead more to the female character (Stempel et al., 2015). If a political leader is a woman, her feminine character prioritizes interpersonal communication ability, discussion, compromise, warmth, helpfulness, and empathy (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). Feminine character is also identical with negotiation to achieve consensus

without conflict, understanding, attempting participation and empowering others as the typical characteristic of transformational leadership style (Buch et al., 2016; Siangchokyoo et al., 2020; Mendis & Silvia, 2017).

### **Gender and Politics**

Perhaps, a certain class of readers has not been aware of the difference of sex from gender. The word "sex" identifies biological difference between male and female. The word "gender" usually represents the difference constructed socially in the context of certain community related to the social role considered as male and female spaces. The word "sex" in this article is written using quotation mark to emphasize that the meaning of word is not limited to male and female but it can involves broader scope like intersex and transgender. In other word "sex" represent different biological characteristics, while gender is a social perception resulting from the biological difference felt by certain community (Sjoberg, 2009).

Social gender can be classified into masculinity and femininity. Masculinity is commonly associated with the character featuring manliness, power, and strength while femininity features gentle womanhood. Thus, masculinity and femininity can be seen

from expectation of behavior, stereotype, and various rules specified by community and enacted commonly (Enloe, 2010). Gender will change in social political context but generally femininity subordination still becomes a constant feature in social political life.

Politics is the gendered activity that can be done by everyone who can make decision. The traditional focus of politics is inseparable from power, control, influence, authority, and distribution like who gets what, where, when, and how, or shortly the allocation of authoritative value (Celis et al., 2013). Governmental engine, in accordance with traditional focus of politics, makes the role of women invisible, despite the importance of involving women to achieve humane welfare. Equality or sensibility dimension allows the more in-depth understanding on personal interaction arising in the power relation between the leader and those led. A number of arguments surfaces, one of which states that leadership is gender biased, while if the women are entrusted she will show off her high-quality ability (Sjoberg, 2009; Dewey, 2004; Singh, 2005). From the argument aforementioned, it can be concluded that the presence of women in politics is very desirable to give different more humane touch, love without conflict

based on empathy not only relying strength or manliness.

### **Gender and Transformational Politics during Crisis Period**

Political leadership in traditional perspective is still biased gender, by avoiding or excluding women. To bridge the gap, feminism is present to show off the construction of gender identity by posing normative idea about the domain that can be performed by male and female. Transformational political leadership leads more to the female character (Stempel et al., 2015). If a political leader is a woman, her feminine character prioritizes interpersonal communication ability, discussion, compromise, warmth, helpfulness, and empathy (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). Feminine character is also identical with negotiation to achieve consensus without conflict, understanding, attempting participation and empowering others as the typical characteristic of transformational leadership style (Buch et al., 2016; Siangchokyoo et al., 2020; Mendis & Silvia, 2017).

Transformational political leadership belongs to a new perspective offering overlapping concepts, particularly the roles of leader and followers. There are some elements of transformational leadership: (1)

an ideal effect of leader. In this element, charisma an individual has becomes the follower's reason of trusting him/her; (2) the leader's inspirational motivation for his/her followers; (3) the leader's individual consideration through fulfilling the followers' need; (4) intellectual stimulation by giving the followers an opportunity of growing, developing, learning something new, corresponding to their creativity and innovation (Buch et al., 2016; Hur et al., 2011).

In critical situation colored with uncertainty and sudden unusualness requires considerably adaptation in order to respond to effectively. What are needed in extraordinary crisis are not only a leader responsive to the management as planned but also behavior and mindset that can prevent excessive reaction against the crisis. So far, politics is colored with anything identical with violence: power, conflict, and war. Heater Devere (2013) instead suggests that in unusual situation like crisis, a new color of political practice is required, by prioritizing friendship politics. He adds that friendship politics represents the equal relation created between leader and people, in which the leader is not symbolized as a hero. In the presence of equality between the

leader and those led, decision making (e.g. the policy issued by politicians) is in accordance with the people's interest.

In critical situation, the presence of optimistic leader who can manage emotional intelligence and emotional stability is desirable. On the other hand, empathy is prioritized to support the people in the crisis. During crisis, the leaders sometimes show their weaknesses, for example, communicating inadequately with the people they lead, and unprepared for making decision so that they are non populist. Meanwhile, influence, motivation, and interpersonal ability supported by cognitive and affective knowledge are instead highlighted as the manifestation of a good transformational leadership amid the crisis (Stefan & Nazarov, 2020). The crisis becomes so important for the political leaders to show off their ability of making positive transformation in many people's life. Building on the four basic components – truth, firmness, love, and technology mastery – the political leader with transformational leadership will be led to the success in suppressing the acceleration of pandemic and its effect (Johnson & Williams, 2020). Thus, transformational leadership in crisis period is expected to make transformation with innovation in

order to have an impact on the improvement of welfare.

A visionary leader is very desirable to deal with Covid-19 health pandemic and to recover the society's normal life by: 1) mitigating and socializing policy and program through communication; 2) improving the feeling of care for the community from their varying aspect of life; 3) collaborating and coordinating with stakeholder; 4) creating the management team by involving the members of community; 5) improving dialogue with members of society and stakeholders; 6) improving emotional abilities (accepting, understanding, empathetic) (IACP 2020). The problems occurring within society due to economic crisis situation need an appropriate strategy as humanistic solution to support economic resilience by involving and empowering the people.

### **Research Method**

Descriptive qualitative is used to deeper understanding about this research. Locus of this research is Sragen Regency with subject Kusdinar Untung Yuni Sukowati as a leader region. Object research is policy and programs of Sragen Regent to overcome economy problems as the impact of Covid-

19. Data were collected from library browsing and documentations.

### **Portrait of political leadership during Covid-19 pandemic**

The transmission of Covid-19 so rapidly entering into nearly all states becomes a new challenge to the heads of state. The acceleration of transmission and exposure to Covid-19 as well as its effect is not homogeneous between one state and another. Covid-19 pandemic becomes a distinctive experience giving different color. Indonesia as one of states affected by Covid-19 transmission modifies lockdown policy into Large-scale Social Restriction (Indonesian: *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* or PSBB) in the first wave, the assessment of which is specified by central government through the Ministry of Health. The rule regulating the implementation of PSBB is contained in Government Regulation (Indonesian: *Peraturan Pemerintah* or PP) No.21 of 2020 about Large-scale Social Restriction (PSBB). In addition, the rule concerning PSBB is also contained in Presidential Decree (Indonesian: *Keputusan Presiden* or Keppres) Number 11 of 2020 about the assignment of Public Health Emergency. PP and Keppres were signed by President Joko

Widodo on March 31, 2020.

Technically the PSBB policy is enacted to restrict the type of public activities governed in the Minister of Health's Regulation (Indonesian: Peraturan Menteri Kesehatan or PMK) No.9 of 2020 about Guidelines of PSBB as the Acceleration of Covid-19 management, including stopping temporarily the teaching-learning activities and working activities in the office or economic activities, restricting religious activities, restricting the activities in public space, and restricting social-cultural activities, transportation mode, and other activities related to security defense aspect. In its implementation, PSBB policy is local in nature, adjusted with the severity in provincial, regency or municipal regions, Regional Government can be defined as the caretaker to know better the problems encountered by the people in a region. During Covid-19 pandemic, some Regional Heads in Indonesia attempt to show their innovation and creativity as the proof of their performance in coping with pandemic. As suggested by Heater Devere (2013), when unusual situation like health crisis occurs, a new color is required in political practice by prioritizing friendship politics, representation of the equal relation created between the leader and the people.

In practice, friendship politics represents the character of visionary leader. A visionary leader, according to International Association of Chiefs of Police, is desirable to overcome Covid-19 pandemic and to recover the normal community life by means of: 1) mitigating and socializing the policy and the program through communication; 2) improving the feeling of care for the people in various aspects of life; 3) collaborating and coordinating with stakeholders; 4) establishing management team by involving the people (community); 5) improving dialogue with members of society and stakeholders; 6) improving emotional abilities (accepting, understanding, empathetic) (IACP 2020). Considering the argumentation aforementioned, during pandemic, a leader is required and challenged to be adroit, responsive, and appropriate-target in establishing policies and programs, thereby corresponding to the problems arising within the society he/she leads.

During critical period or unusual situation, double bond of political gender seems to reflect the characteristic of female leader and speculation about the role of leader's gender in reducing the adverse effect of pandemic. The characteristics include leader's skill to listen to the voice of the people led, tendency to find out database and

to relying on communication for getting necessary input to decision making. Gender double bond in political leadership can also be seen from the women's leading ability in performing risk management without generating conflict (Windsor et al., 2020). The women's power structure in political domain when unusual situation occurs is important to be the pillar to do mitigation. Intervention made by the women occupying the position as political leader include: 1) synergizing local social cultural norm, 2) allocating resource and making appropriate policy, 3) facilitating the access to right information (Eerdewijk & Brouwers, 2014).

Considering the hierarchic status prevailing in Indonesian governmental system, regional government is the representative of central government functioning to do certain affairs occurring in its region. Regional government has autonomous authority in organizing and taking care of their domestic affairs (Pratiwi, 2021). Such hierarchical pattern in its implementation belongs to and has a goal in political and economic fields. In political field, a regional head is authorized to strengthen its position as the leader of regional government and to maintain national integration in the framework of Unitary State of Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). In

economic field, it aims to provide public service to the public in order to achieve its people's interest and welfare.

The economic effect generated by Covid-19 pandemic is not only defined as private issue dependent on individual resource. Pandemic situation becoming the problem to date indicates that economy is not only personal problem but it is an international problem, so that it cannot be underestimated. The economic problem is getting worse when personal movement is restricted, while not every member of society can move and produce in digital world. The economic problem arising needs a characteristic touch from the regional leader. Such situation leads to a reality that political leadership highly affects a region's way of dealing with pandemic that is of course different between men and women. The fact also shows that the women's political leadership gives important lesson in dealing with Covid-19 pandemic through love, truth, firmness, and technology mastery. The four components lead a number of female regional heads to give solution to economic problem by means of empathy and care for all classes of society. Nevertheless, in national scope, there are only few regions led by a woman due to a number of bonds inseparable from patriarchy.

A woman's ability of being a regional head is inseparable from gender stereotype becoming a part of gender construction and her ability of breaking the patriarchic environment still affecting some cultures in Indonesian areas. In patriarchic culture, some women do not show of their self identity bravely so that they are still fettered by gender inequality experienced in their daily life. Weak, emotional, infirm and sentimental personalities are a series of characters usually inherent to women. Thus, when a woman successfully occupies the position of political leader and makes decision, it indicates her ability of crossing glass ceiling in patriarchic environment. In any environment, women should face various challenges to keep stepping forward because of their status as female rather than based on inadequate education, experience or skill (Sunaryo, 2019).

Covid-19 pandemic is a time highlighting more the women's life. Pandemic is a challenge that should be addressed responsively by a regional head, particularly the female one. Politics is an arena into which women enter difficultly because it absolutely becomes a man-oriented position line. Politics become masculine job, while women also have qualification equal to that of men (Sunaryo, 2019). Women's political leadership is

colored by power within relying more on the collective power and stepping movement. High risk faced by female leader during crisis, for example, is a way of authenticating her dedication and ability (Glass & Cook, 2016) and even giving service totally to the community (Sabharwal, 2015; Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

### **Women's Political Leadership in Covid-19 Pandemic**

Sragen Regency is one of regions in Central Java Province encountering a substantial increase in poverty rate during Covid-19 pandemic. The press release issued by the Head of Government and Human Development Division of Research and Development, Regional Planning Agency (Bappeda Litbang) of Sragen Regency with Solopos local media (17/12/2020) indicates that the poverty rate of Sragen Regency is 13.38% during Covid-19 pandemic. It increases by 0.59% compared with that in previous year making Sragen Regency occupying the first rank in Solo Raya region and the 28<sup>th</sup> rank out of 35 regencies/cities in Central Java.

Sragen City under Kusdinar Untung Yuni Sukowati's leadership needs new touch in overcoming the economic problem. As a female regional head with physician or doctor

background, she has distinctive challenge in overcoming economic problem in her region. As suggested by Johnson and Williams (2020), crisis becomes an important moment to political leaders to show their ability of making positive change in many people's life. The four components – truth, firmness, love, and technology mastery - lead the political leader with transformational leadership style to suppress the acceleration of pandemic as well as its impact. Thus, transformational leadership during crisis is expected to make transformation with innovation in order to have impact on the improved of welfare.

As suggested by Buch (2016) and Hur et al (2011), there are some elements of transformational leadership: (1) an ideal effect of leader. In this element, charisma an individual has becomes the follower's reason of trusting him/her; (2) the leader's inspirational motivation for his/her followers; (3) the leader's individual consideration through fulfilling the followers' need; (4) intellectual stimulation by giving the followers an opportunity of growing, developing, learning something new, corresponding to their creativity and innovation. Considering the ideas of some scholars aforementioned, it can be seen that the policy and program established by the

Regent of Sragen to overcome the economic effect of Covid-19 include 1) a breakthrough made by employing the people losing job to be courier of people's need to reduce unemployment rate due to the Covid-19 pandemic. 2) To maintain traditional market sustainability, the Regent of Sragen uses online market through three applications: Go Shop, Pasarmu, and Pasar Online based on traditional market. Thus, the sellers in traditional market still can operate their business by implementing health protocol. 3) The Regent of Sragen gives recovery fund to reduce unemployment rate and to help increase family income. 4) The Regent of Sragen holds training for the citizens in the form of Micro-, small-, and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs) along with cooperative and supermarket (Indomaret). 5) To empower unemployed women or those losing job, some aids are granted and training is provided with easy requirements. The positive effect generated is, among others, the women can produce handicraft having economic values. This activity also educates the wide society to comply with health protocol through producing such handicrafts as plaited bag and doormat with the theme inviting the people to comply with health protocol in order to face the transmission of corona virus. In addition, women

empowerment is also directed to produce premium-class masks that can be sold to national market.

Thus, individual charisma of Kusdinar Untung Yuni Sukowati as the Regional Head of Sragen Region is still recognized by her people. Individual motivation and consideration of a leader supported by all elements of society can create intellectual stimulation exerting positive effect. Despite the challenge during Covid-19 pandemic, Sragen people still survive through the pro-people programs implemented by their leader.

### Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic is not only a surprise to health globally but also revives and re-civilizes gender norms in everyday life. Households that usually become black boxes around domestic affairs become a tight surveillance room. Household resilience has bargaining power that requires cost and opportunity time, one of which depends on political decisions taken by a leader. The regional head is not the capacity as a leader served but during Covid-19 is actually demanded and challenged through its performance to overcome the economic problems of its citizens. The gait shown by the regent sragen Kusdinar Untung Yuni

Sukowati is not only able to break the patriarchy but his popular leadership becomes one of the answers to the problems faced by his people.

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