

The Use of Social Media as a Space for Counter-Hegemony for Female Politicians: Discourse Analysis of Khofifah Indar Parawansa's Leadership on Instagram

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the use of Instagram social media by Khofifah Indar Parawansa as a space for counter-hegemony against the stigma of female leadership in Indonesia. Using a qualitative discourse analysis method, this study dissects digital content from late 2025 to early 2026. The results show that Khofifah employs three main narrative strategies: (1) Technical Narrative through achievements in food self-sufficiency and data digitalization to challenge the stigma of incompetence; (2) Empathy Narrative which repositions maternal traits as collaborative strengths; and (3) Authority Narrative in the masculine environment of Forkopimda to affirm the legitimacy of power. Social media has proven to be an effective tool for female politicians to construct independent identities and resist patriarchal hegemony in the digital public sphere in East Java, Indonesia.

Keywords: counter-hegemony, Khofifah Indar Parawansa, Instagram, female politicians, leadership.

1. Introduction

The increase in women's representation on both the global and national political stage is inevitable in modern democracy. (Salamon, 2024). In Indonesia, affirmative measures through a 30% quota have opened doors for women to occupy strategic public positions. However, physical presence in parliament or the executive branches does not automatically eliminate the deeply rooted hegemony of patriarchy. Politics is often constructed as a masculine domain that prioritizes physical assertiveness and dominance, causing female politicians to be frequently underestimated in terms of their competence in strategic policymaking. (Le Barbanchon, 2021)

The function of mainstream media is to promote this ideology, and the majority of the media portray female politicians as spouses (Jungblut and Haim, 2021). Media reports frequently carry gender stereotypes, emphasizing personal aspects such as appearance or roles as wife or mother, rather than recognizing their technological achievements. This situation creates a 'war of position' for women to prove that their leadership is equal to or even surpasses that of male leaders in fields such as economics, infrastructure, and technology. (Le Fevre, 2024)

The presence of digital media, especially Instagram, offers new opportunities for female politicians to engage in self-framing without censorship by biased media editors. (Brands, 2021) Social media has become a 'counter-hegemonic' space, where they can produce independent narratives to combat stigma. Through visual and textual posts, female politicians can construct a new identity that harmoniously combines political authority and feminine values. (Lindholm 2020).

Khofifah Indar Parawansa, the governor of East Java province, is the central figure in this study. She served as the governor from 2019 to 2024 and is currently still in office. In East Java, a region where socio-cultural dynamics are deeply rooted in religious and traditional values, Khofifah demonstrated exceptional leadership. The latest data from 2025 shows that East Java has achieved remarkable success, from food self-sufficiency to ranking first in Indonesia's national "One Data Indonesia Index." These achievements are widely publicized through her Instagram account, @Khofifah. ip, which also symbolically showcases how she leads the male-dominated East Java governor's team (Forkopimda).

Problem Identification

Based on the aforementioned background, the issues in this study are identified as follows:

1. The persistent dominance of patriarchy in Indonesian political culture casts doubt on women's technical competence.
2. The presence of gender bias in mainstream media that is not accompanied by an acknowledgement of the policy accomplishments of female politicians is often disregarded.
3. The value of social media as a means of alternative communication for women to promote their political standing has been recognized.

Research Focus

This investigation explored the nature of digital conversations on the Instagram account @Khofifah. ip to investigate how technical narratives, empathy, and authority are produced as a counter-humanist effort in opposition to the reputation of women in Indonesia.

Problem Statement

Based on the research focus, the formulated problem statement is as follows:

1. How are the constructions of technocratic narrative, empathy, and authority built on Khofifah Indar Parawansa's Instagram account to combat gender hegemony in politics?
2. What is the symbolic significance of Khofifah's interactions with Forkopimda ranks on social media in reinforcing the bargaining position of female leaders?

Research Objectives

1. Analyzing Khofifah Indar Parawansa's political communication strategy in carrying out counter-hegemony in the digital public sphere.
2. Identifying digital narrative patterns used to build the image of competent and authoritative female leaders.

2. Literature Review

Antonio Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony: The Power of Consensus

In his book on political sociology, Antonio Gramsci described the concept of hegemony to explain how the ruling class maintains its influence not through physical coercion but through morality and intellectual leadership. Hegemony operates subtly within the realm of civil society, such as the media, education, and religious institutions, so that the values of the dominant group are accepted as 'common sense' by oppressed groups (Natarajan 2022). In the context of this study, power is no longer seen as oppressive domination but rather as an effort to establish normalcy according to certain standards that marginalize women.

Patriarchal Hegemony in Politics

The hegemony of patriarchy in Indonesian politics operates by instilling the idea that ideal leadership is inherently masculine. Traits such as assertive decisiveness, physical strength, and cool rationality are constructed as prerequisites for becoming a public leader, while feminine qualities such as empathy, gentleness, and collaboration are positioned as irrelevant variables or even weaknesses. (Hopton, 2021). As a result, society unconsciously accepts the notion that top positions of power, such as governors or presidents, are more appropriately held by men. Here, patriarchy is no longer merely male domination over women, but a deeply ingrained value system in the minds of voters, to the point that female candidates must exert twice the effort to prove their "worth."

Opposition and Violent Sublethal Method

To counter this leadership, Gramsci advocated a counter-hegemonic approach. This strategy aimed to systematically undermine public trust in the ruling group's values and construct alternative narratives. This resistance was carried out through what he called "positional warfare." Unlike physical guerrilla warfare, positional warfare is a protracted struggle in the cultural and media spheres aimed at vying for control over the interpretation of public opinion.

Khofifah Indar Parawansa is waging this 'positional war' by using social media as a battleground for ideological contestation. Through posts highlighting her achievements in technical fields such as food self-sufficiency and data digitalization, Khofifah is infiltrating patriarchal common sense. She does not resist confrontational rhetoric but instead produces a 'new common sense' that women possess technocratic competence equal to or even surpassing that of men. As such, social media is not just a communication platform but an instrument for female politicians to challenge hegemony and create a new consensus in which gender is no longer a barrier to political authority.

Transformation of Narrative Authority: From Mainstream Media "Hostage-Taking" to Digital Self-Framing

Historically, female politicians have often found themselves in what the author refers to as 'narrative captivity' by mainstream media editorial boards. In the patriarchal structure of conventional media, journalists tend to marginalize discourse on women's leadership by asking domestic and personal questions, such as those about fashion choices, parenting styles, or other household issues. This phenomenon creates a hegemony that limits the capacity of female politicians to mere ceremonial and domestic figures, while strategic policy issues continue to be dominated by men.

However, the rise of social media, especially Instagram, has led to the breaking of this information monopoly. Khofifah Indar Parawansa utilized this platform to promote herself via a self-promotion strategy, acting as the chief editor of her public profile. In this virtual space, Hofifa had complete control over the way she chooses, forms, and disseminates stories about her leadership role that are not subject to the biases of traditional media.

The strategy of self-presentation was varied and dynamic, depending on the situation. She intentionally manipulated the time period in which she portrayed herself as a "mother figure" that embodied empathy and East Javanese cultural values, while also presenting herself as a "governor/commander" with complete authority over public policy and security issues. This ability to switch roles demonstrates that social media is not merely a tool for documentation but rather a counter-hegemonic space that enables female politicians to construct a hybrid leadership identity that retains feminine roots without losing its technocratic edge. Thus, Khofifah succeeded in winning the 'positional war' by seizing control over how the public ought to perceive and define her as a leader.

Women's Leadership from a Gender Perspective

Women are often caught in a bind: if they are too firm, they are labeled as "harsh/not feminine," but if they are too gentle, they are seen as "weak." In gender and political discourse, female leaders often face what is known as a double bind or dual dilemma. Patriarchal stigma creates a situation in which if a female leader appears too assertive and masculine, she is considered to have lost her femininity (dominant/harsh), but if she appears too gentle, she is deemed incompetent to lead (weak). Khofifah Indar Parawansa's social media presence demonstrates an effort to deconstruct this dilemma through a strategy of narrative hybridity.

The strongest empirical evidence is found in the documentation of the joint patrols conducted by Forkopimda leadership on New Year's Eve 2026. At that moment, Khofifah combined two roles that are traditionally seen as contradictory: leading prayers and commanding troops. Leading the prayer represents the role of the 'Mother' as a spiritual, nurturing, and religious figure. However, at the same time, she also held a key position, responsible for issuing tactical instructions to members of the predominantly male Indonesian armed forces and police force.

From a symbolic perspective, this combination conveys a powerful message: authority and compassion are not in conflict. Khofifah did not have to choose between a "stern" ruler and a "loving mother"; instead, she combined the two into a new position of leadership. The author believes that Khofifah's praying before armed men challenged the commonly accepted definition of power in the military. Power is now considered to be greater than masculinity expressed through violence or power; it is instead derived from religious faith and formal authority. This strategy has been successful in reducing the cultural resistance of a society that is primarily religious in nature while controlling the region's stability. All of this is accomplished by the highest leader in East Java, who possesses full authority over the region.

2.4. Previous Research and Originality of the Study

To further clarify the scientific stance of this study, the authors analyzed several related studies that explored the intersection of gender, politics, and digital media. Pratama (2022) first highlighted how female politicians use Instagram at the parliamentary level to cultivate an approachable public persona. However, this study focused more on electoral competence than on the ideological resistance to patriarchy.

Second, the study conducted by Suryani et al. (2023) on the representation of Tri Rismaharini in the mass media shows that although Risma has technical achievements, mainstream media often continues to frame her emotions as a form of gender instability. This is where the fundamental difference with this study lies; while previous research examined how the media shapes the image of women, this study instead looks at how Khofifah Indar Parawansa independently counters such framing through counter-hegemonic self-framing strategies to shape her image.

Third, the international literature by Smith and Jones (2024) on female ministerial leadership in Europe highlights a trend of "gender technocratization," where female leaders intentionally use data to mask emotional bias. This investigation confirms the general trend in the Indonesian context but adds a new component that is unique to East Javanese culture. This is the case in the narrative of the "Bunda," which is specific to East Javanese culture. The originality of this research lies in applying Gramsci's theory of hegemony to the digital strategy of a religiously rooted woman in charge of the government during 2025-2026.

This study employs the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, which does not stop at the textual level but also delves into the levels of discursive and socio-cultural practices. The stages of data analysis begin with Data Infrastructure, in which the author collects 50 posts from the @khofifah. IP accounts during the observation period. Next, the Coding process was carried out to group the posts into three main categories: technical, empathy, and authority. The intertextuality stage is then conducted, which involves connecting the Instagram narratives with the social context of East Java, such as pesantren culture and masculine bureaucracy, to see the extent to which these narratives are able to achieve ideological penetration as a form of counter-hegemony.

3. Research Methods

This qualitative study aims to explore the profound meanings and implications of political communication in the digital realm. This research employs critical discourse analysis, which not only studies the linguistic composition of texts but also investigates how power, ideology, and hegemony are manifested and contested through language and visual symbols. The utilization of critical discourse analysis in this research is particularly pertinent because it aligns with Gramsci's theory of anti-hegemony. This study explores how Khofifah Indar Parawansa deconstructs patriarchal structures through counter-narratives on social media.

The primary data sources for this research were digital observational techniques or web-based ethnography from the official Instagram account of Khofifah Indar Parawansa (@khofifah. The inspection period was limited to the timeframe from the end of 2025 to the beginning of 2026. This period was selected strategically because it had several significant accomplishments and important political moments in East Java that were significant in terms of data presentation and political power, such as the announcement of the One Data Indonesia index and the New Year security operation. These operations provided a narrative rich in technical details and significant political accomplishments.

The data analysis technique in this study was carried out through three integrated levels of analysis: textual, visual, and contextual. First, at the textual analysis level, the author dissects the structure of the captions and the choice of diction used. Special attention is given to strategic keywords such as 'self-sufficiency', 'data leadership, and 'digital transformation' to observe how language is used as an instrument of intellectual legitimation. Second, a visual analysis was conducted on the uploaded photos and videos. This analysis covers semiotic aspects such as spatial composition (Khofifah's standing position among male officials), choice of clothing attributes (the symbolism of the hijab and the official uniform), and body gestures that indicate dominance or empathy.

Finally, this study employs a contextual analysis to connect textual and visual findings with the broader socio-political realities of East Java and Indonesia as a whole. This includes understanding the culture of religious Islamic boarding schools (Pesantren), the male-dominated bureaucracy, and the dynamics of national leadership under Prabowo Subianto in 2025. By combining analyses at these three levels, this study attempts to comprehensively explore how these digital messages function as a form of symbolic resistance or anti-hegemony in opposition to the stigmatization of gender stereotypes in public leadership positions.

4. Results And Discussion

4.1. Deconstructing the Stigma of Incompetence through Technical-Technocratic Narratives

Khofifah Indar Parawansa's Instagram campaigns are characterized by a data-based approach that focuses on improving technology. One significant accomplishment was a post she wrote in January 2026 that described the state of East Java as the first in the country with a score of 90.13 in the One Data Indonesia (SDI) index. This method of precise statistics is not simply a performance report but also serves as an anti-hegemonic strategy that aims to dismantle the patriarchal skepticism of the intellectual and technical abilities of female leaders in managing complex government institutions.

Textually, the use of terms such as "digital transformation," "data governance," and "maturity index" indicates that Khofifah is building an identity as an Organic Intellectual who masters the structure of the modern political economy. By comparing East Java's achievements to those of other major provinces, Khofifah is engaging in a "war of position" to assert that under female leadership, bureaucratic efficiency and data accuracy can be achieved to the fullest, surpassing the standards set by male leaders in other regions.

Driven by One Data Indonesia (SDI) digitalization efforts, Khofifah's anti-hegemonic narrative is clearly reflected in discussions on food security. Starting in late 2025, Khofifah repeatedly mentioned East Java's rice production in her articles, which reached 12.69 million tons. She was not merely portrayed as a governor sitting at a desk issuing directives, but frequently went to the fields to communicate directly with farmers, all based on detailed statistical data.

This strategy is crucial because the agriculture and logistics sectors are often perceived as 'hard' and masculine policy domains. By taking the lead in the discourse on food self-sufficiency, Khofifah breaks the assumption that female leaders are only capable of managing sociohumanitarian issues. She demonstrates that under her leadership, East Java has become a stable national food barn. Semiotically, the visualization of Khofifah wearing a white shirt and a bright hijab amidst lush green rice fields creates a hybridity between the role of a 'Mother' who cares about the basic welfare of society and the role of an 'Administrator' who masters the economic supply chain.

Furthermore, the use of the terms 'food sovereignty' and 'distribution efficiency' in her Instagram caption demonstrates her awareness of East Java's bargaining position within the national economic constellation. Through food self-sufficiency, Khofifah establishes a technical legitimacy that is difficult for her political opponents to challenge. She is no longer seen merely as a politician who relies on popularity or her background in a religious organization (Muslimat NU) but rather as a leader with the ability to execute in the real economic sector. This is a smart 'war of position'; she takes on an issue that is considered highly masculine (logistics and macroeconomics) and proves herself with concrete figures that are widely published on the social media..



Figure 1. Technocratic Narrative: Data Visualization of Achieving First National Rank Index Source: Instagram @khofifah.ip (2026)

4.2. Normalization of Women's Leadership in Indonesia's Digital Culture

Overall, the discourse analysis of @khofifah. The IP account provides an illustration of how the normalization of female leadership is taking place in the digital era. In the past, society needed decades to accept women at the pinnacle of power due to limited access to objective information; however, today, social media accelerates this process through the transparency of visual performance.

Khofifah's success in carrying out counter-hegemony does not mean she has eliminated all aspects of patriarchy within the bureaucracy; rather, she has managed to create a 'safe space' for women's identities to exist without needing to become masculine. In 2026, this model of 'Technocratic Mother' leadership is likely to become the new standard for other female politicians in Indonesia. Khofifah has proven that the digital sphere is not merely a place for empty 'image-building' but rather a battlefield of ideologies for redefining the position of women within the structures of state power.



Figure 2. Counter-Hegemony in Strategic Sectors: Khofifah Dissects Self-Sufficiency Data Source: Instagram @khofifah.ip (2026)

4.3. Replacing the femininity value system: From Subjugation to Cooperative power.

What sets @khofifah.ip apart is the consistent use of the title "Bunda" (mother) in controversial debates. From Gramsci's perspective, this can be considered an attempt to garner public support by participating in conversations with cultural principles. Khofifah did not forsake her femininity in order to appear more masculine or aggressive, instead, she advocated the value of motherhood as a means of collaboration.

For example, in posts related to the SDI evaluation, the narrative constructed revolves around "collective work" and "strengthening together." Here, empathy and maternal qualities are transformed into an inclusive leadership energy. She breaks the double bind that typically traps female politicians and proves that a leader

can still be nurturing as a “Mother” without losing her legitimacy as a competent state administrator. This is a form of resistance against the hegemony that views feminine qualities as obstacles to decisive firming.



Figure 3. Hybrid Identity: The Use of Hijab Attributes and Uniforms in Operational Police Activities.
Source: Instagram @khofifah.ip (2025)

4.4. Visualization of Authority: Interrupting the Domination of Masculine Spaces

The visualization of authority is the strongest element in Khofifah's counter-hegemonic efforts on social media. Observations of her New Year's Eve 2026 post show Khofifah occupying a central position among the ranks of Forkopimda officials (the Regional Military Commander, the Chief of Police, and other military officers). Semiotically, the presence of a civilian woman at the top of a highly masculine security hierarchy disrupts the hegemony of the public sphere.

Instagram is used as a "theater stage" to showcase the legitimate political authority. In the post, Khofifah does not appear as a companion, but rather as a decision-maker who leads prayers and gives security instructions. The narrative of "Remaining united and harmonious" that she delivers while standing among uniformed men shows that she has control over regional security stability, a realm that has long been considered an exclusive male domain. Through this visualization, Khofifah symbolically reconstructs the definition of a "strong leader" as not necessarily male, but anyone who holds the mandate and legitimacy.



Figure 3. Identity Hybridization: The Use of Hijab Attributes and Official Uniforms in Operational Activities. Source: Instagram @khofifah.ip (2025)

To provide a more structured overview of how counter-hegemonic strategies are implemented in digital space, this study summarizes the findings of the discourse into several main categories. The table below maps the relationship between the empirical data found on Instagram account @khofifah. ip and the targets of resistance against gender stigma in politics

Table 1. Recapitulation of Counter-Hegemony Narrative Analysis

Narrative Category	Data/Uploaded Evidence (2025-2026)	Target of Counter-Hegemony (The Stigma Being Challenged)
Technical-Technocratic	SDI Index Score (90.13) & Rice Production (12.69 Million Tons)	Challenging the stigma that female leaders are "data illiterate" or incapable of handling economic-strategic issues.
Hybrid Empathy	The use of the term "Bunda" in the narrative of collective work	Challenging the view that maternal/feminine qualities are weaknesses; repositioning them as the power of collaboration.
Symbolic Authority	A central position among the ranks of uniformed men (Forkopimda)	To break down male dominance and establish women's legitimacy in the areas of security and public order.

The above categorization shows that Khofifah does not use social media merely as a one-way communication tool but rather as a space for contesting identities to redefine the standards of female leadership in Indonesia.

4.5. Digital Public Response: Between Support and Resistance to Hegemony

The effectiveness of Khofifah’s counter-hegemony can be tested through public interactions in the comments section. In posts about the ranks of Forkopimda, there was a noticeable shift in the narrative among netizens. Most comments no longer question Khofifah’s capacity as a woman but instead express appreciation for the security and stability she has created. This indicates that a consensus (in Gramsci’s terms) is beginning to emerge. The public no longer sees Khofifah’s leadership as a gender anomaly but rather as a new standard of competent leadership. The author argues that Khofifah’s success in claiming the comment space is a small victory in the 'war of position' against patriarchal stigma in the digital public sphere.



Figure 5. The Victory of the "War of Position": Positive Public Responses in the Instagram Comments Section. Instagram @khofifah.ip (2026)

4.6. Contrasting Digital Strategy: Shifting Paradigms for Women in Indonesia.

To understand the importance of Khofifah Indar Parawansa's anti-hegemony strategy, it is necessary to discuss it alongside the political communication habits of other female leaders in Indonesia over the past decade. Traditionally, female leaders like Megawati Sukarnoputri or Tri Risma Harini have been portrayed as being extremistic in the mainstream media: Megawati is attributed to having a "root" and being unable to be dissuaded, while Risma is described as having a "emotional" nature and her direct, radical actions. The media's coverage of them often supports gender expectations, it implies that the actions of female leaders are motivated by emotion or cause.The fundamental difference identified in this study is how Khofifah consciously adopts a 'Gender Technocratization' approach to the issue. She does not allow the media to define her identity. Through Instagram, she creates a new standard where female leadership no longer has to choose between being 'decisively masculine' or 'emotionally feminine.' Khofifah introduced a third model:

Humanist Data-Based Leadership. By consistently uploading SDI Index scores and food self-sufficiency figures, she builds a barrier against criticisms that typically target women's technical competence. Additionally, Khofifah's strategy exhibits a transition from a shallow political identity to practical politics based on concrete, evidence-based performance. While female politicians in the past often used social media solely for ceremonial or domestic activities, Khofifah utilized it as a portal for public accountability. This directly undermines the patriarchal hegemonic structure at its roots; the public is no longer invited to 'sympathize' with her because she is a woman or a 'Mother,' but rather to 'trust' her because she is an administrator capable of bringing East Java to the national stage. The author argues that this model of counter-hegemony through technocratic self-framing is key to the sustainability of women's political careers in the post-truth era, where visual data have become the main currency for winning public consensus.

5. Conclusion And Suggestions

5.1. Conclusion

A discourse analysis of Khofifah Indar Parawansa's digital activities on social media during 2025-2026 leads to the following conclusions:

1. Social media serves as an effective instrument of counter hegemony. Khofifah has succeeded in seizing control of her own narrative, breaking the bias of traditional media, which often marginalizes the achievements of female politicians.
2. Hybrid identity construction: Khofifah does not discard her feminine side (such as the title "Bunda" and narratives of empathy); instead, she uses it as a collaborative strength. This strategy is combined with a technocratic narrative (food self-sufficiency data and the SDI index) to demonstrate her leadership competence.
3. Legitimacy of Authority: By visualizing interactions with the Forkopimda ranks, Khofifah affirms that women's political authority can transcend the boundaries of masculinity within security and public order institutions.

Overall, Khofifah is waging a "War of Position" in the digital sphere by changing public perception from "an emotional female leader" to "a technocratic yet humanistic leader."

Theoretically, this study contributes to the study of political communication by demonstrating that social media has shifted the 'gatekeeping' of information. While the image of a female governor once depended on the framing of journalists (mainstream media), Khofifah is now able to independently deconstruct stigma through Instagram. The social implication of this research emphasizes that visualizing technical achievements and authority in the digital space is the key to normalizing female leadership in the future.

5.2. Suggestions

1. For Female Politicians: It recommended that they be more proactive in managing social media as a space for policy education and building an image based on evidence-based policy.
2. For Future Researchers: This research is limited to the analysis of a single figure (a single case study). Future researchers could conduct comparative studies between several female leaders at different regional levels or use quantitative methods to measure the direct impact of such narratives on electability levels.

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