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## Behavioral Orientation of Muslim Voters in the 2024 Gubernatorial Election in East Nusa Tenggara Province

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### Abstract

*This study, entitled “Behavioral Orientation of Muslim Voters in the 2024 Gubernatorial Election in East Nusa Tenggara”, aims to analyze the orientation of Muslim voters’ behavior through sociological, psychological, and rational approaches and to identify the dominant factors influencing voters’ considerations in selecting candidates for Governor and Vice Governor in the 2024 election in East Nusa Tenggara. This research employs a mixed-methods approach with an exploratory type and a sequential model. The findings reveal that, from a sociological perspective, Muslim voters in the 2024 East Nusa Tenggara election are influenced by social factors such as age, gender, region, ethnicity, and the influence of political figures. Voters tend to prefer candidates with a strong track record, integrity, and credibility, although religious identity also plays a role in decision-making. From a psychological perspective, voters favor candidates over party identity, showing high recognition of major parties such as Gerindra (80%), PDIP (80%), and Golkar (88%). Voters tend to support parties with ideological and historical proximity, such as PKB and Golkar. The voters focus on social, economic, and political issues, prioritizing poverty, education, healthcare, and corruption. Muslim voters’ preferences in the 2024 gubernatorial election lean toward Benny K. Harman (24%) and Melki Laka Lena (23%). Interviews with community leaders reveal that support is influenced by religious identity, political experience, and the influence of senior figures. From a rational approach, key issues that candidates must address include poverty, unemployment, limited job opportunities, and corruption. Voters prioritize economic issues (97%), followed by healthcare and education (93%), and anti-corruption efforts. The most dominant factor influencing voter behavior is candidate personal attributes (93%), followed by the candidate’s educational background (61%). Although religion and ethnicity still play a role, they are less influential than candidate qualities and education. In conclusion, based on the sociological approach, Muslim voters focus on practical change, especially those with lower educational backgrounds. The psychological approach shows that voters are becoming more critical of religious symbols, emphasizing concrete policies and candidate integrity. The rational approach highlights the primary issues in the 2024 gubernatorial election: education, healthcare, economy, social welfare, infrastructure, and interreligious tolerance.*

**Keywords:** Behavioral Orientation, Muslim Voters, 2024 Gubernatorial Election, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT).

### Introduction

The election of Governors and Deputy Governors is a manifestation of democracy that provides space for the public to directly determine their leaders. In this context, understanding voter behavior becomes a crucial aspect of political contestation, especially in ensuring fair and democratic political representation (Firmansyah, 2010). Voter behavior is influenced by various

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factors, ranging from social and psychological to rational aspects. In political science, voter behavior is often analyzed using three main approaches: the sociological approach, the psychological approach, and the rational choice approach. The sociological model emphasizes that individuals tend to vote based on socio-economic factors, religion, and place of residence (Firmanzah., 2010). Meanwhile, the psychological model focuses on the influence of party identification, candidate orientation, and political issues in voter decision-making (Liddle and Mujani, 2000). The rational choice theory posits that voters act as individuals who consider benefits and risks in making their electoral choices (Downs, 1957)

The province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) possesses unique characteristics in the context of electoral politics. According to BPS data from 2019, the Muslim population in NTT accounts for only 9.05% of the total population. Politically, this figure is less promising for nominating candidates for Governor and Deputy Governor in the 2024 regional election (Pilkada). Since the implementation of direct local elections, there has never been a gubernatorial or deputy gubernatorial candidate from the Muslim community. This condition raises significant questions regarding the political orientation of Muslim voters in NTT during the 2024 Pilkada. As a minority group within a political landscape dominated by non-Muslim voters, the voting behavior orientation of Muslims in the 2024 gubernatorial election in NTT becomes an intriguing phenomenon to explore. This study seeks to examine how the political preferences of Muslim voters are influenced by local social, religious, and political dynamics (Liddle and Mujani, 2003).

In examining Muslim voter behavior in NTT, this research refers to several major theories in political science. The sociological approach explores how social environments shape voter preferences, while the psychological approach highlights factors such as party identification and candidate preferences (Campbell et al., 1960). Meanwhile, the rational choice approach assumes that Muslim voters in NTT will consider the electoral advantages they may gain based on the policies and political promises of candidates (An-Naim, 2008). Several previous studies have examined voter behavior in various contexts, both at national and regional levels. For instance:

1. Noor Hamid Khan Mahsud and Husnul Amin (2020), in their study *Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Voting Behaviour: A Comparative Analysis*, examined the three main approaches to the study of voting behavior: the sociological model, the psychosocial model, and the rational choice model. This study asserts that voting is an essential part of democratic participation, with each approach offering a unique perspective in understanding voter behavior. In contrast to this study, the present research focuses more specifically on how the Muslim minority in NTT adapts to a political system dominated by non-Muslims (Mahsud and Amin, 2020).

2. Ferdian et al. (2019), in *Perilaku Memilih Masyarakat, Malpraktik Pemilu, dan Pelanggaran Pemilu*, found that voting behavior is influenced by variables such as religion, race, region, and ethnicity (sociological), orientation toward candidates and party identification (psychological), as well as economic interests (rational). While their study emphasized electoral malpractice, the current research focuses more on how Muslim voters confront the practice of money politics in the 2024 NTT Pilkada (Ferdian et al., 2019).

3. Simanjuntak & Fernandes (2022), in *Perilaku Pemilih Masyarakat Etnis Tionghoa dalam Pemilu Legislatif di Kota Padang*, found that factors such as ethnicity, religion, emotional connections, political parties, and community organizations influence the voting behavior of ethnic Chinese voters. This study highlights minority voting patterns within a majority

environment, which is relevant to this research in understanding the experience of Muslim voters in NTT (Simanjuntak and Fernandes, 2022).

4. Frans Bapa Tokan (2019), in *Analisis Perilaku Memilih pada Pilkada Kota Kupang 2017*, showed that sociological factors have the most dominant influence on voter behavior in Kupang City. This study provides an overview of how social factors affect voters within a local political setting (F. B Tokan, 2019).

However, these studies mainly focus on voter dynamics within national contexts and do not specifically address the role of Muslim voters as a minority in regions such as NTT. Some studies that do discuss Muslim voters, such as those by An-Naim (2008) and Adnan (2017), tend to emphasize the relationship between Islam and politics from a theoretical perspective without delving into how Muslim minorities adapt within a predominantly non-Muslim political system.

In the province of East Nusa Tenggara, research on Muslim voter behavior remains scarce. Most studies have centered on general political dynamics without investigating how minority status influences the political preferences of Muslim voters in this region. Therefore, this study presents unique contributions in several respects: (1) It focuses on Muslim voters and Muslim candidates in the NTT Pilkada, where democratic space is often marginalized by the majority-minority dichotomy, as well as the tyranny of the majority and minority that obstructs socio-political rights. (2) While studies on minority voter behavior exist, in-depth research specifically on Muslim voters in NTT is still lacking. (3) This research explores the behavioral orientation of Muslim voters within a predominantly non-Muslim society during the 2024 gubernatorial election in NTT. (4) This study applies Roth (2009) theory, which explains that voter behavior can be understood through several approaches, including the sociological approach known as *The Columbia School of Electoral Behavior*, the psychological approach according to Gaffar, and the rational choice approach as posited by (Downs, 1957). These approaches have not previously been applied in studies examining the behavioral orientation of Muslim minority voters within the Catholic-majority context of NTT.

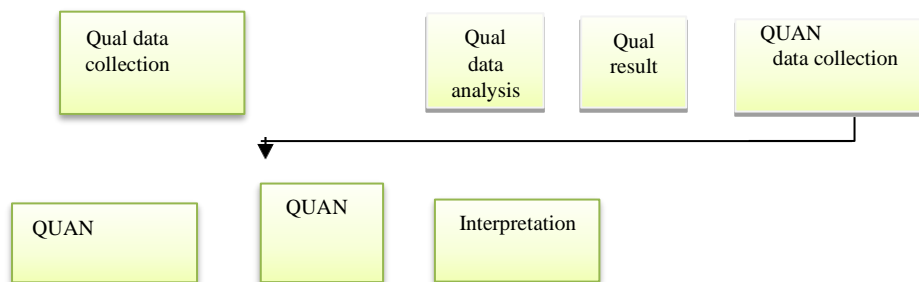
The relevance of this research lies not only in contributing to the field of political science but also to the domain of political communication. From a political communication perspective, understanding Muslim voter preferences can offer valuable insights into effective political communication strategies for candidates seeking support from minority voter groups (Noor Hamid Khan Mahsud & Husnul Amin, 2020). Furthermore, this study may serve as a reference for political parties in formulating more inclusive policies for all segments of society. Based on the above background, this study aims to identify and analyze the factors influencing Muslim voter behavior in the 2024 East Nusa Tenggara Governor and Deputy Governor election and to understand how the three approaches—sociological, psychological, and rational—contribute to shaping their political decisions.

## Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed methods approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. According to Creswell (2007), mixed methods is a research approach that focuses on the collection, analysis, and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study or conducted sequentially. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem compared to using only one method.

There are four main types of mixed methods: embedded, explanatory, exploratory, and triangulation Creswell (2007). In this study, the researcher adopts an exploratory sequential

design, which begins with a qualitative approach to explore in-depth information, followed by a quantitative approach to test the hypotheses that have been formulated.



The following is an overview of the exploratory design procedure in the mixed methods model: This study was conducted in the province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), which consists of 22 regencies/cities. The location was selected based on considerations of accessibility and relevance to the research topic. The study took place from August to December 2024, beginning with the proposal development phase and ending with the final report completion.

Data in this study were collected through a structured questionnaire survey consisting of closed-ended questions measuring sociological factors (religion, ethnicity, social class, and social environment), psychological factors (party identification, voter loyalty, emotional closeness to candidates), and rational factors (considerations of candidate programs, visions, and policies) (Liddle and Mujani, 2000). Additionally, a literature review was conducted by examining relevant previous studies from both national and international journals to strengthen the theoretical foundation and data interpretation of this research (Liddle and Mujani, 2003)

In the first phase, the qualitative approach was used to explore the factors influencing the political preferences of Muslim voters. Data were obtained through two main techniques:

1. **Document analysis**, which involved collecting theories from experts, official government documents, statistical data, meeting minutes, and other secondary references. This documentation focused on five areas with significant Muslim populations, namely Lembata Regency, Ende Regency, West Manggarai Regency, Kupang City, and East Sumba Regency.
2. **Interviews** were conducted with key informants consisting of academics, religious leaders, election organizers, and voters. These interviews were based on the three main approaches to voting behavior: the **sociological approach**, which analyzes the influence of social factors such as ethnicity, region, gender, and education level; the **psychological approach**, which examines individual orientation toward political parties, candidates, and political issues; and the **rational choice approach**, which views elections as political markets in which voters consider the offers of candidates and political parties.

The population of this study includes all Muslims eligible to vote in the 2024 NTT Regional Election. According to data from BPS NTT (2022), the eligible voting population is 423,925 individuals. From this population, a sample was selected using non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling method. The sample consisted of 132 individuals divided into two main groups: 100 Muslim voter respondents, drawn from various regions in NTT considering factors such as education level, occupation, and political engagement; and 32 key informants, including gubernatorial candidates, party leaders, election organizers, religious leaders, and academics. These informants were selected to provide broader perspectives in understanding the factors

influencing Muslim voter behavior.

The informants interviewed in this study include various parties directly involved in the 2024 NTT Regional Election. They consist of voters aged 17 years and above or those already married, prospective/governor and deputy governor candidates, political party leaders in NTT, religious leaders, traditional leaders, kings, political figures, academics, representatives of civil society organizations, as well as election organizers such as the NTT General Elections Commission (KPU NTT) and the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu NTT). After the interview data were collected, the results were transcribed, described, and compared with the results of the quantitative questionnaire distribution (Campbell et al., 1960).

No	Key Informant Source
1	Prospective/Candidate Governor/Deputy Governor for 2024
2	Chairpersons of Political Parties Supporting the 2024 Gubernatorial Candidacy
3	Representatives of KPU NTT
4	Representatives of Bawaslu NTT
5	Muslim Religious Leaders, Academics, Political Figures, Muslim Youth Leaders, Muslim Mass Organizations
6	Muslim Voter Representatives
<b>Source: Compiled by the Researcher, 2023</b>	

Table 3.3. Key Informants

In the second phase, the quantitative approach was used to test the hypotheses formulated during the qualitative stage. The quantitative data collection technique was conducted using a questionnaire designed with a Likert scale and distributed to 100 Muslim respondents aged at least 17 years or married. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on factors such as education, occupation, and political involvement. According to Sugiyono (2012:98), the Likert scale is used to measure attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of individuals or groups toward social phenomena. The scoring for the questionnaire responses using the Likert scale is as follows:

No	Scale	Score
1	Strongly Strongly Agree (SSA)	5
2	Strongly Agree (SA)	4
3	Agree (A)	3
4	Disagree (D)	2
5	Strongly Disagree (SD)	1

Table. Scoring of Questionnaire Responses Using the Likert Scale

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using statistical methods, including validity and reliability tests, multiple regression analysis, and descriptive statistics to illustrate the behavioral patterns of Muslim voters. In this study, the researcher used a percentage formula to derive answers from the completed questionnaires. This formula refers to the opinion of Suharsimi Arikunto (1992:33) as follows:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

P = Percentage

F = Frequency

N = Total Sample

100 = Constant Multiplier

## 1. Results and discussion

### Result

#### Analysis of Voter Behavior Orientation

##### Sociological Approach

The sociological approach to voting behavior, developed by scholars from Columbia University (Columbia School), assumes that individuals are embedded in social circles such as family, workplace, and residential environment. Voters tend to conform to their group, so voting behavior is influenced by the political predispositions of their social environment. Three main influencing factors are socio-economic status, religion, and place of residence. Mujani, Liddle, and Ambardi (2018) identified sociological factors such as social class, religion, ethnicity, and gender, but concluded that these factors had become less significant between 1999 and 2004. In contrast, King and Baswedan argue that religious orientation, particularly stream-based politics, remains relevant in determining voter choice, with divisions between *santri* and *abangan* parties and voter base affiliations with Islamic, nationalist, and Christian parties (An-Naim, 2008).

The orientation of Muslim voters in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) during the 2024 Gubernatorial Election exhibits variation based on educational level. The majority of voters had completed undergraduate education (45.5%), followed by high school graduates (28.3%), elementary school (8.1%), junior high school and diploma holders (6%), postgraduate education (5.1%), and those without formal education (1%). Voters with higher education levels tend to have better political awareness and are more actively engaged in elections. Dahlgren & Fahlen (2023:54-71) found that educated voters are more involved and make more informed decisions. Raja & Iqbal (2023:54-71) also asserted that secondary education represents a critical point in shaping political views. Conversely, lower education levels may decrease political awareness and voter participation (Bennion & Nickerson, 2023:271-284). This analysis supports the Socio-Economic Status (SES) theory, which posits that education level influences political understanding and electoral participation (Adnan, 2017)

The occupational distribution of respondents indicates that the majority of voters come from the unemployed or not-yet-employed sector (21%), followed by farmers (18%), civil servant teachers and private employees (16%), and other professions in smaller numbers. According to Buchanan & Graham (2022), occupational sector greatly determines political orientation, as each professional group holds distinct economic and social interests. This is reinforced by an interview with a Muslim community figure in Kupang who stated:

"Pemilih Muslim di NTT, terutama yang bekerja sebagai petani dan nelayan, lebih cenderung memilih kandidat yang memiliki program konkret dalam pemberdayaan ekonomi berbasis

komunitas."

This statement shows that employment factors influence the political decision-making of Muslim voters, especially in relation to policies directly impacting their welfare.

Most respondents were aged 31–41 (38%), followed by the 21–30 age group (30%). These age groups are considered productive and actively engaged in social and political activities, as well as having broader access to political information. An interview with prospective NTT gubernatorial candidate, Yohanis Fransiskus Lema, revealed that Muslim voters in NTT tend to consider a candidate's track record more than other factors such as status or wealth. This aligns with the Experience and Track Record theor (Inglehart, 1977), which explains that voters prefer candidates with proven backgrounds and achievements (Huntington, 1996).

In addition, from an age perspective, Inglehart (1977) highlights that younger generations tend to possess progressive mindsets and openness to change, whereas older voters are more conservative and prioritize political stability. This trend is evident in this study, where voters aged 17–30 are more flexible in assessing leadership candidates, while those over 40 years old prefer candidates with strong track records.

This study focuses on the orientation of Muslim voters in the 2024 NTT Gubernatorial Election across five regions: Lembata, Ende, West Manggarai, East Sumba, and the city of Kupang. A total of 100 respondents participated, with the following distribution: Lembata (21), Ende (20), West Manggarai (20), East Sumba (17), and Kupang (22).

Interviews with various figures revealed that Muslim voters in NTT are familiar with a range of political figures, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Several figures mentioned in interviews as widely recognized include Viktor Bungtilu Laiskodat, Esthon Foenay, Emi Nomleni, Josef A. Nae Soi, Melki Laka Lena, and Ansi Lema. Bapak Ahmad Atang, seorang akademisi dari Universitas Muhammadiyah Kupang, menyebutkan:

"Viktor Bungtilu Laiskodat, Esthon Foenay, Emi Nomleni, Melki Laka Lena, dan Josef A. Nae Soi merupakan beberapa tokoh yang memiliki pengaruh dalam politik lokal di NTT."

According to voting behavior theory, voter decisions are influenced by *social identification* (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and the candidate's relevance to community needs (Lewis-Beck, 2008). In NTT, Muslim voters tend to consider both social identity and political rationality in making their electoral choices. An interview with Bapak Brigjend. Pol. Drs. Johanis Asadoma confirmed that Muslim candidates from the same region as the respondents have a higher support potential. A similar view was expressed by Bapak Esthon L. Foenay, who noted that geographic proximity influences voter familiarity with Muslim candidates. Likewise, Bapak Leonardus Lelo emphasized that geographic proximity correlates positively with voters' recognition of gubernatorial candidates for the 2024 NTT election.

Dahl's (2022) theory of pluralism suggests that ethnic diversity influences political preference because cultural identity shapes political choice. Ethnic identity plays a role in political preferences, with 14% of Bugis and 15.6% of Lamaholot voters tending to support candidates from their own ethnic groups. The data and interviews indicate that ethnic identity significantly shapes the orientation of Muslim voter behavior in NTT. Voters tend to favor candidates from the same ethnic group, as supported by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1986) and studies by Muthusamy & Mohamad (2022:235–250).

Interviews with political figures and Muslim voters confirm the importance of ethnic identity in

political preferences. KH. Abdul Makarim, former Chairman of MUI NTT, stated that ethnic-based political networks remain strong, as reflected in his relationship with Jefri Riwu Kore from the Sabu ethnic group. Haji Ahmad Yohan, Chairman of the PAN Regional Executive Board (DPW PAN NTT), affirmed that ethnic relations in politics are evident from his closeness with Hery Dosinaen and Johanis Asadoma. Youth leader Inrah, S.Pd., M.Kes., mentioned that figures such as Benny K. Harman, Adrianus Garu, and Boni Hargens serve as political representatives for the Manggarai ethnic group.

In the context of the 2024 NTT Gubernatorial and Vice-Gubernatorial Election, Muslim voter behavior orientation is heavily influenced by socio-personal factors, including expectations of candidates based on their track record, political party involvement, professional background, and status as religious or community leaders. Most Muslim voters emphasize the importance of a good track record in leadership candidates. As stated by Ahmad Atang (Academic at Muhammadiyah University Kupang), track record reflects the candidate's capability and integrity, more so than social status or wealth:

"Kalau saya, rekam jejak penting untuk memastikan kita memilih orang yang tepat, bukan hanya berdasarkan kekayaan atau jabatan. Rekam jejak menggambarkan potret sejati seorang kandidat."

This is also supported by Haji Muhammad Nasir, who highlighted that historical and ethnic factors influence Muslim voter decisions in Flores and Lembata:

"Saya mengedepankan pendekatan sosiologis dalam politik, mengingat pentingnya hubungan historis dan kesukuan di Flores dan Lembata. Rekam jejak, baik sebagai pengurus partai, profesional, atau tokoh agama, mencerminkan profesionalisme dalam membangun jejak positif."

Questionnaire data showed that 65% of respondents strongly agreed that leadership candidates must have a good track record, aligning with Responsibility Theory, which emphasizes the importance of experience and reputation in building voter trust (Dahlberg & Hult, 2023:75–89).

Only 34% of respondents agreed that candidates should come from professional backgrounds. Conversely, many voters considered the role of religious and community figures. KH. Abdul Makarim (former Chairman of MUI NTT) emphasized the importance of a leader who can serve without regard to ethnicity or religion:

"Yang terpenting, calon pemimpin harus dapat mengabdikan sepenuhnya untuk NTT, tanpa memandang agama atau suku."

This illustrates a strong voter preference for inclusive leaders who can embrace all communities, not just those sharing their...

### **Psychological Approach**

The psychological approach from the University of Michigan highlights three main factors in voter behavior, namely perceptions of candidates, issues, and party identification (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). This approach emphasizes that voter choices are influenced by both short-term and long-term factors, rather than social structures as emphasized in the sociological approach (Putnam, 2000). The psychological approach focuses on voters' emotional attachment to parties, candidates, and political identification. Research findings show that loyalty to a particular political party remains a major factor in voting decisions, especially among voters with a history of political involvement in their families. Emotional proximity to candidates also

influences political preferences, with voters tending to favor candidates perceived as actively engaged in the Muslim community (Liddle and Mujani, 2000).

Several other informants revealed varied preferences toward political parties. A Muslim politician from PKB, Dipo Nusantara Pua Upa, stated that he liked all political parties in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the Chairman of the NTT Election Commission (KPU), Jemris Fointuna, emphasized that political preference is subjective, though he tends to choose parties with nationalist ideologies. Academic Ahmad Atang stressed that the party system also affects voter choices. He stated:

*“Saya suka Golkar karena partai ini mengutamakan sistem yang matang, bukan hanya figur. Golkar adalah partai lama dengan sistem yang kuat, sehingga siapa pun yang turun, Golkar tetap solid.”*

The table below presents the results of a questionnaire regarding Muslim voter tendencies toward political parties.

Political Party	Percentage Agree (%)	Percentage Disagree (%)
Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa	91%	10%
Partai Gerindra	75%	15%
Partai Demokrasi Indonesia	68%	17%
Partai Golkar	78%	12%
Partai NasDem	69%	11%
Partai Buruh	66%	33%
Partai Keadilan Sejahtera	52%	22%
Partai Demokrat	91%	9%
PKS	63%	23%
PPP	63%	27%

Table: Questionnaire Results on Muslim Voters' Affection Toward Various Political Parties in 2024

*Source: Processed Data by Researcher, 2024*

The political party preferences of Muslim voters in NTT during the 2024 gubernatorial election demonstrate a diversity of choices influenced by ideology, party history, and the parties' alignment with the interests of the local Muslim community.

The questionnaire distributed yielded the following distribution of party choices:

Political Party	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. PKB	15	15.2
2. Partai Gerindra	6	6.1
3. PDIP	2	2.0
4. Partai Golkar	4	4.0
5. Partai NasDem	9	9.1
6. PKS	13	13.1
7. PAN	18	18.2
8. Partai Demokrat	18	18.2
9. Undecided	10	10.1

*Source: Processed Data by Researcher, 2024*

Interview results indicate a tendency among Muslim voters in NTT to favor parties with ideological and historical proximity to them, such as PKB and Golkar. This aligns with social identity theory, which explains how group identity can influence voter behavior (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1987).

### Factors Influencing Voter Choice

#### a. Party Ideology

Most respondents emphasized that ideology is the main reason for choosing a party.

Ketua KPU NTT, Jemris Fointuna, menyatakan:

“Saya memilih partai ini karena ideologinya, meskipun saya sadar ini subjektif. Saya sudah mengikuti partai ini sejak 1999, sejak lahirnya partai pasca-reformasi.”

Senada dengan itu, Bapak Dipo Nusantara Pua Upa menambahkan:

“Karena mempunyai ideologi agama.”

#### b. Charisma of the Leader

Some voters give more consideration to candidates with political charisma.

Haji Muhammad Gofar menegaskan:

“Figur punya karisma yang bagus, makanya saya pilih partai itu.”

Pandangan serupa juga diungkapkan oleh Bapak Inrah:

“Saya memilih karena figur punya kharisma politik. Menjadi daya tarik tersendiri bagi publik.”

#### c. Satisfaction with Work Programs

Some voters are more attracted to the work programs offered by political parties.

Ahmad Atang menyatakan:

“Senang dengan partai dan senang juga dengan caleg serta program kerjanya.”

#### d. Emotional Attachment

Certain voters feel connected to the history or values of specific parties.

KH. Pua Monto Uumbu Nay mengungkapkan:

“Saya menghargai partainya, bukan orang-orangnya, karena saya melihat masih ada kharisma Gus Dur yang mendirikan partai ini saat menjadi Ketua Umum PBNU.”

From the questionnaire results, the majority of respondents showed the following tendencies:

- 72% choose a party because they like it.
- 70% vote based on their preferred legislative candidates.
- 68% consider religious ideology.
- 65% base their choice on the political charisma of the figure.

Voter behavior theory states that voter decisions are influenced by various factors, including political identity, personal experience, and perceptions of the candidate. According to S. P. Huntington (1996) in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, cultural and religious identities play an important role in shaping individual political preferences.

Based on interviews and questionnaire results, it appears that the orientation of Muslim voters in NTT is influenced by considerations of the candidate's relevance to the region's socio-economic context and their ability to respond to community aspirations. This is in line with L. D. King and R. K. Matland's (2020: 22–24) findings in *The Effect of Candidate Identity on Voter Turnout*, which state that voters tend to favor candidates they believe can represent their interests and values.

Candidate	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Viktor Bungtilu Laiskodat	4.0	26.0	58.0	12.0
Benny K. Harman	1.0	16.0	63.0	13.0
Esthon Foenay	1.0	26.0	62.0	11.0
Emi Nomleni	1.0	25.0	62.0	12.0
Josef A. Nae Soi	2.0	29.0	59.0	10.0
Melki Laka Lena	1.0	22.0	62.0	11.0
Ansi Lema	1.0	24.0	61.0	11.0
Fary Jemi Francis	4.0	41.0	47.0	8.0
Jefri Riwu Kore	2.0	42.0	47.0	9.0

Table: Favorability Level Toward Political Figures in the 2024 NTT Gubernatorial Election

Source: Processed Data by Researcher, 2024

Voter behavior orientation is influenced by several factors, including ethnic identity, religion, and political experience. According to Putnam (2000) in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, strong communities tend to have solid social bonds that influence voter behavior. In NTT, the Muslim community can be seen as an entity possessing values and norms that foster solidarity in voting behavior.

To understand Muslim voter preferences, in-depth interviews were conducted with various figures including politicians, academics, party leaders, and voters from Lembata, Ende, West Manggarai, East Sumba, and the city of Kupang. Based on the data table provided, the following is the percentage distribution of voter preferences for candidates in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election:

Gubernatorial Candidate	Frequency	Percentage
1. Viktor Bungtilu Laiskodat	9	9.0%
2. Benny K. Harman	24	24.0%
3. Esthon Foenay	1	1.0%
4. Emi Nomleni	1	1.0%
5. Josef A. Nae Soi	4	4.0%
6. Melki Laka Lena	23	23.0%

7. Ansi Lema	11	11.0%
8. Johanis Asadoma	4	4.0%
9. Simon Petrus Kamlasi	4	4.0%
10. Sebastian Salang	1	1.0%

Table: Voter Preferences Toward Political Figures Running for Governor of NTT in 2024

Source: *Processed Data by Researcher, 2024*

### **Rational Approach**

The rational approach assumes that voters act based on a cost-benefit calculation in choosing candidates. In this context, the majority of Muslim voters in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) consider the programs and policies offered by candidates, such as economic policies and regional development (Bennion and Nickerson, 2023). However, there remain voters who are influenced by pragmatic factors such as political promises and social assistance from candidates. Questionnaire results indicate that the main factor in choosing political parties for Muslim voters is the party's programs, with 43% strongly agreeing and 21% agreeing. The percentage for other considerations is as follows:

1. Programs: Strongly agree 43%, Agree 21%
2. Candidate Figure: Strongly agree 49%, Agree 33%
3. Religious Edicts from Clerics/Religious Leaders: Strongly agree 20%, Agree 35%
4. Shared Religion: Strongly agree 21%, Agree 27%
5. Influence of Friends: Strongly agree 10%, Agree 21%
6. Influence of Family: Strongly agree 10%, Agree 27%

These findings are consistent with Downs' (1957) voter behavior theory, which posits that voters make decisions based on their personal interests in order to maximize benefits. Muslim voters in NTT tend to choose political party programs that are pro-people and aligned with religious values. (Henn et al., 2021) further emphasize that social identities, including religion, influence voter behavior. In this context, religious edicts (fatwas) from clerics serve as moral guidance that assists Muslim voters in making political decisions.

In the context of Muslim voter behavior in NTT, voter behavior theory helps explain how social background, economic status, and individual experience influence political choices. According to G. C. Edwards III (2018:75–92) in *Voter Decision Making in the 21st Century*, voter behavior is often shaped by perceptions of candidates and issues deemed significant.

Interviews with various figures in NTT reveal that the main issues faced by the community include employment opportunities, staple food prices, infrastructure development, education, as well as eradicating corruption and enhancing bureaucratic professionalism.

### **Employment Opportunities and Economic Development**

Many figures highlight the lack of job opportunities in NTT as a pressing issue. KH. Pua Monto Umbu Nay emphasized that:

"penting membuka lapangan kerja dengan menarik investor, seperti proyek tebu di Sumba Timur yang membuka banyak peluang kerja."

KH. Abdul Makarim added that:

"masalah lapangan kerja yang sangat terbatas menyebabkan banyak lulusan pendidikan kesulitan mendapatkan pekerjaan."

### **Staple Food Prices and Basic Needs**

Syafruddin Sira, Chairman of the Lembata DPRD, pointed out that:

"harga barang sembako yang diproduksi dari luar NTT harganya melambung tinggi, sedangkan hasil dari masyarakat justru turun dan tidak dikontrol oleh pemerintah."

Zainuddin Hobol stated that:

"perbaikan harga sembako tidak mudah karena harga barang dari luar daerah sulit dikendalikan tanpa kebijakan pemerintah pusat dan daerah."

### **Infrastructure and Human Resource Development**

KH. Pua Monto Umbu Nay emphasized the importance of:

"pembangunan infrastruktur seperti jalan, sekolah, dan irigasi untuk mempercepat pertumbuhan ekonomi dan mempermudah akses pasar bagi petani."

Zainuddin Hobol reminded that:

"pembangunan fisik memang penting, tetapi yang lebih krusial adalah peningkatan sumber daya manusia, mengingat Indeks Pembangunan Manusia (IPM) NTT masih rendah."

### **Education and Scholarships**

KH. Pua Monto Umbu Nay stated that:

"pendidikan perlu perhatian lebih, termasuk pemberian beasiswa agar generasi muda yang potensial tidak terhambat biaya."

Haji Ahmad Yohan highlighted that:

"peningkatan mutu pendidikan sangat penting agar anak-anak NTT dapat bersaing di tingkat nasional."

### **Corruption Eradication and Bureaucratic Professionalism**

Hamsari, S.IP, stressed that:

"yang utama adalah pemberantasan KKN, terutama korupsi, serta peningkatan profesionalisme birokrasi agar pelayanan publik lebih adil."

Zainuddin Hobol also emphasized that:

"pemberantasan KKN wajib dilakukan untuk memastikan birokrasi berjalan dengan baik dan profesional."

### **Other Social Issues**

Several figures also drew attention to issues related to fertilizer prices, ease of credit, crime, transportation fares, taxation, and access to clean water and PDAM services.

Haji Syukur A. Muhammad stated that:

"tingkat pengangguran yang terus meningkat dapat menyebabkan gejolak sosial jika tidak segera ditangani."

Melki Laka Lena, one of the gubernatorial candidates of NTT and a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) from the Golkar Party, stressed that:

"infrastruktur dan kebutuhan dasar seperti air serta listrik harus menjadi fokus utama pembangunan ke depan."

## Discussion

Findings of this study indicate that the voting behavior of Muslim voters in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) during the 2024 Gubernatorial and Vice-Gubernatorial Elections is influenced by a combination of sociological, psychological, and rational factors. In general, Muslim voters in this region do not solely consider ideological aspects in determining their choices, but also take into account other factors such as the charisma of the leaders, proposed work programs, as well as emotional ties with certain political parties.

Muslim voters in NTT demonstrate a tendency to vote based on a combination of social loyalty and rational evaluation of candidates. This is consistent with the results of interviews with several Muslim figures in NTT, such as *Dipo Nusantara Pua Upa* and the *Chairman of the NTT General Election Commission (KPU)*, who emphasized that religious ideology is the main reason in determining political choices. However, other factors such as the charisma of the leader also play a significant role. *Haji Muhammad Gofar* and *Emi Nomleni* stated that the appeal of the leader and the figure promoted by political parties have a major influence on voter preferences. Furthermore, there are rational considerations related to work programs, whereby voters tend to support candidates offering policies that align with the needs of the community. Emotional attachment to political parties also emerges as an undeniable factor, as expressed by *KH. Pua Monto Umbu Nay*, who highlighted the party's history and its emotional ties with the community as important factors in political decision-making.

### Respondents' Percentage Based on Reasons for Choosing a Political Party

Reason for Choosing Party	Agree Percentage (%)
Fondness for the party itself	72
Liking for the legislative candidate	70
Having religious ideology	68
Political charisma of the candidate	65

Source: Processed Data from the Researcher, 2024

The results of the questionnaire support the findings from the interviews. The data reveals that 72% of respondents chose a party based on their fondness for the party itself, while 70% stated that their preference for a particular legislative candidate was a major factor in determining their choice. In addition, 68% of respondents voted based on religious ideological alignment, and 65% expressed that the charisma of the leader influenced their political decisions. These results reinforce the view that sociological factors—particularly religion—remain a key element in the electoral decision-making process, although psychological and rational factors also play significant roles in shaping voter decisions.

In the context of Voting Behavior Theory, factors influencing voter behavior are not limited to rational aspects but also include social and emotional components. Rosenstone and Hansen

(1993) noted that voters do not rely solely on rational information when making decisions but are also influenced by social identity and emotional connections with a party or specific candidate. Garry (2021) emphasized that psychological factors—such as emotional attachment to the figure of a leader or party—also significantly affect voter behavior.

This study also corroborates earlier findings from studies conducted by Liddle and Mujani, (2003) and Tokan (2019), both of which indicate that social factors still exert a significant influence in local Indonesian politics. Liddle and Mujani (2003) research revealed that religion and ethnicity are primary considerations in voting behavior across various regions. Similarly, Tokan (2019) research on voter behavior in NTT indicated that social factors and group identity play a central role in shaping the political preferences of local communities.

Although ideological factors remain dominant in the decisions of Muslim voters in NTT, the findings of this study indicate that the personal attributes of the leader and proposed programs also have a significant impact. This suggests that in the context of regional head elections, voters are not solely concerned with ideological alignment with a particular political party but also assess candidates more broadly based on their leadership characteristics and policy offerings. Thus, this research provides further insights into the complexity of Muslim voter behavior in NTT and how various factors interact in shaping their political preferences.

Most informants emphasized that the issues and programs proposed by prospective leaders are the primary factors influencing their political choices. Based on a survey conducted among 100 respondents across five districts/cities in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), the following results were found:

**Survey Results in Table Form**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
Fatwa Ulama/Religious Leaders	26	16	35	4	Influential but not dominant
Candidate’s Issues/Programs	35	26	-	3	Most influential main factor
Family/Friends' Influence	21	10.5	41	5	Relatively minor influence
Money Politics	14	-	46	13	No significant influence
Other Factors	-	-	-	-	95% of respondents identified other unspecified factors

**Conclusion**

This study examines the behavioral orientation of Muslim voters in the 2024 Governor and Deputy Governor Election in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) using sociological, psychological, and rational approaches. From a sociological perspective, it is found that social characteristics such as occupation, position, and educational level influence voter behavior. Highly educated voters

tend to be more critical, rational, and focused on candidates' programs and capabilities, although they still consider religious values. Social grouping factors also have an effect, with ethnicity and region remaining dominant factors; however, generation-based political orientations are beginning to emerge, where younger voters are more progressive and open to social change. Socio-religious factors continue to be a primary consideration.

Muslim voters in NTT tend to choose candidates who have a track record of religious activities or who maintain good relationships with religious leaders. They also prefer candidates whose views align with the enforcement of religious values and interfaith tolerance. A novel finding in this study is that although religion remains the main determining factor, voters are increasingly critical of candidates who rely solely on religious symbols without substantive policies focused on social welfare. This indicates that a balance between religion and governmental programs is a major concern for voters. Additionally, socio-personal factors play a significant role, with voters paying close attention to candidates' personal character, especially integrity, honesty, and humanitarian values.

The psychological approach reveals that party identification remains a factor in shaping political attitudes, but the influence of religion-based politics is more dominant compared to loyalty to specific political parties. Muslim voters are more interested in issues related to religion, social justice, and economic development favoring the Muslim community, yet they are beginning to also consider infrastructure issues and access to public services. A new finding in this study is that despite strong party identification, religion-based political influence is more dominant in shaping the political attitudes of Muslim voters than party loyalty alone. This suggests that Muslim voters are more attached to religious issues than to loyalty to particular parties.

The rational choice approach shows that Muslim voters in NTT tend to make decisions based on rational evaluations of the political issues presented by candidates and the benefits they expect to gain. Education and social welfare issues are the primary focus, followed by infrastructure and economic development. However, a new finding of this research is that Muslim voters are increasingly critical of unfulfilled political promises and prefer candidates with proven track records and real commitments. They prioritize candidates offering concrete, realistic programs and social changes that are directly experienced by the community.

This study finds that Muslim voters in NTT prefer candidates with concrete programs that directly impact social welfare, such as improvements in education, infrastructure, and economic empowerment of the Muslim community. Candidates for the 2024 Governor and Deputy Governor Election in NTT need to formulate programs focused on local needs, such as infrastructure development in Sumba and Manggarai, equitable access to education, community-based economic development, and enhanced health services to attract Muslim voter support.

Transparency in political promises is also an important aspect that must be considered. Candidates are expected to be more open in conveying their vision and the track record of previous programs so that voters can assess their commitments more objectively. Furthermore, the utilization of social media and technology should be enhanced as effective communication tools, especially in reaching young and Muslim voters to increase electoral participation.

From a theoretical perspective, future research should expand the rational choice theory by incorporating socio-cultural factors unique to NTT, such as social relationships between ethnic groups and the role of religion in daily life. Sociological and psychological approaches can also be integrated to gain deeper understanding of how psychological factors such as political trust,

socio-religious identification, as well as cognitive and emotional conflicts influence Muslim voters' decisions.

Social structure also plays a role in voter behavioral orientation, where factors such as occupation, education, and social status affect their political preferences. Therefore, subsequent research could accommodate concepts of social mobility and access to education in analyzing voter behavior. Moreover, the socio-religious perspective in electoral policy should be given attention considering that religious identity significantly influences political choice.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that candidates in the 2024 Governor and Deputy Governor Election in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) develop and communicate clear, concrete programs that address the specific local needs of Muslim voters, particularly focusing on social welfare improvements such as education, infrastructure, economic empowerment, and health services. Transparency and openness about political promises and past performance are crucial to build voter trust and enable critical evaluation. Candidates should also actively engage with religious leaders and communities to align their platforms with socio-religious values while avoiding reliance solely on religious symbols without substantive policies. Additionally, leveraging social media and technology to reach younger and more progressive Muslim voters can enhance electoral participation. For future research, integrating socio-cultural factors unique to NTT with existing rational choice theories and considering social mobility, education access, and socio-religious influences will deepen understanding of voter behavior and support more effective electoral strategies.

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