

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE AS POLITICAL CAPITAL: A STUDY OF WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICS IN KEDIRI CITY

INTELIGÊNCIA SOCIAL COMO CAPITAL POLÍTICO: UM ESTUDO SOBRE AS MULHERES NA POLÍTICA LOCAL NA CIDADE DE KEDIRI

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Abstract

This study explores the role of social intelligence as political capital for women in local politics in Kediri City. Despite the implementation of a 30% gender quota policy, the effectiveness of female politicians in performing legislative functions varies considerably. This research aims to identify the dimensions of female politicians' social intelligence, analyze how social intelligence is transformed into political capital, and explain the strategies through which it is utilized in everyday political practice. Employing a qualitative approach with a Creswell case study design, the study involved 20 informants, consisting of 8 female members of the Kediri City Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) and 12 supporting informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that 5 out of the 8 female legislators demonstrated high levels of social intelligence, which they effectively employed in negotiations with communities and other political parties through empathy-based approaches, relational communication, and trust-building. These legislators converted social intelligence into political capital through the cultivation of trust, the construction of collective identity, and

Resumo

Este estudo explora o papel da inteligência social como capital político para as mulheres na política local na cidade de Kediri. Apesar da implementação de uma política de cotas de gênero de 30%, a eficácia das mulheres políticas no desempenho de funções legislativas varia consideravelmente. Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo identificar as dimensões da inteligência social das mulheres políticas, analisar como a inteligência social é transformada em capital político e explicar as estratégias através das quais ela é utilizada na prática política cotidiana. Empregando uma abordagem qualitativa com um desenho de estudo de caso de Creswell, o estudo envolveu 20 informantes, consistindo em 8 mulheres membros da Câmara Regional dos Representantes (DPRD) da cidade de Kediri e 12 informantes de apoio. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas em profundidade, observação participante e análise de documentos, e foram analisados usando o modelo interativo desenvolvido por Miles, Huberman e Saldaña. Os resultados indicam que 5 das 8 legisladoras demonstraram altos níveis de inteligência social, que empregaram efetivamente em negociações com comunidades e outros partidos políticos por meio de abordagens baseadas na empatia, comunicação relacional e construção de confiança. Essas legisladoras converteram a inteligência social



emotionally grounded patron–client networks. In contrast, the remaining 3 legislators exhibited low levels of social intelligence and relied heavily on party structures, resulting in weak substantive representation. This study contributes to Bourdieu’s theory of political capital by identifying social intelligence as a form of compensatory psychological capital and by balancing structural perspectives with agency in the gender and politics literature. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening social intelligence capacities through targeted training programs, political party recruitment reforms, and substantive capacity-building policies that complement gender quota regulations.

Keywords: Social Intelligence. Political Capital. Women Politicians. Local Politics. Substantive Representation.

em capital político por meio do cultivo da confiança, da construção de uma identidade coletiva e de redes patrono-cliente baseadas na emoção. Em contrapartida, as 3 legisladoras restantes exibiram baixos níveis de inteligência social e dependeram fortemente das estruturas partidárias, resultando em uma representação substantiva fraca. Este estudo contribui para a teoria do capital político de Bourdieu, identificando a inteligência social como uma forma de capital psicológico compensatório e equilibrando as perspectivas estruturais com a agência na literatura sobre gênero e política. Na prática, as conclusões sublinham a importância de reforçar as capacidades de inteligência social através de programas de formação específicos, reformas no recrutamento dos partidos políticos e políticas de capacitação substantivas que complementem os regulamentos relativos às quotas de gênero.

Palavras-chave: Inteligência Social. Capital Político. Mulheres Políticas. Política Local. Representação Substantiva.

1 INTRODUCTION

Women’s involvement in local politics in Indonesia has undergone a significant paradigm shift, moving beyond purely administrative roles to become influential actors in decision-making processes. In Kediri City, this transformation is evident in the increasingly prominent role of women in strategic policymaking at the local level. However, their presence has not emerged effortlessly; it has been shaped by persistent struggles against deeply rooted gender stigma within societal structures (Hidayat & Pratama, 2023). Examining this participation is therefore essential to understanding how women negotiate public interests within a political arena still largely dominated by masculine power relations.

From a theoretical perspective, women’s political representation is often constrained by limited access to conventional forms of political capital. Substantial financial resources and strong backing from patriarchal party structures frequently constitute major barriers for women seeking political advancement. Consequently, alternative forms of capital that are more closely tied to personal capacities yet capable

of generating broad collective impact are required. In this context, social intelligence emerges as a critical instrument for offsetting inequalities in access to material political capital (Nasution, 2024).

Social intelligence in the political sphere extends beyond mere friendliness; it represents a strategic capacity to understand, manage, and act wisely within interpersonal interactions. For female politicians in Kediri City, social intelligence serves as a vital asset for transcending formal bureaucratic boundaries and engaging directly with constituents at the grassroots level. The ability to listen actively and empathize with the concerns of marginalized communities often proves more politically effective than rigid, one-directional campaign approaches (Sari et al., 2023).

Kediri City's socially diverse population, while deeply rooted in local values, demands a flexible leadership style. Within this context, women often possess an advantage through the use of soft power. Social intelligence enables them to build strong networks without resorting to confrontational strategies, which are generally more acceptable to local communities that tend to avoid open conflict (Wulandari & Saputra, 2024).

Moreover, social intelligence functions as a crucial negotiation tool within the legislative arena. Policies addressing key issues such as maternal and child health, education, and microeconomic development are frequently enacted through persuasive, relationship-based approaches. Female politicians with high levels of social intelligence are able to map the interests of various stakeholders and identify common ground that advances the public good (Hidayat & Pratama, 2023).

Nevertheless, the use of social intelligence as political capital also presents internal challenges. Social competence may be misinterpreted as weakness or dismissed as unprofessional emotionality associated with women. As a result, women engaged in local politics in Kediri must strike a delicate balance between genuine empathy and principled assertiveness in order to maintain their authority and credibility in the public sphere (Nasution, 2024).

Case studies from Kediri City reveal that women's political success is closely linked to the intensity and consistency of their social engagement. Rather than appearing solely during election periods, successful female politicians continuously cultivate social capital by participating in cultural and religious community activities. This approach

fosters more stable and enduring constituent loyalty compared to strategies that rely solely on short-term incentives (Sari et al., 2023).

Furthermore, political digitalization has opened new avenues for the application of social intelligence. In Kediri, female politicians increasingly utilize social media platforms to engage directly with citizens, project a more humanized public image, and respond swiftly to public concerns. This socially intelligent management of digital presence strengthens public perceptions of leaders as accessible, responsive, and genuinely concerned (Wulandari & Saputra, 2024).

Academically, this study seeks to address a gap in the literature concerning how social intelligence is transformed into tangible political capital. Research on local politics has largely been dominated by discussions of money politics and patronage. By emphasizing psychosocial dimensions, this study offers an alternative perspective on the sustainability of women's political careers, one that foregrounds personal qualities rather than material dominance (Hidayat & Pratama, 2023).

In conclusion, examining the experiences of female politicians in Kediri City is expected to provide insights applicable to other regions. Understanding how social intelligence can be optimized demonstrates that politics is not solely about intense power struggles, but also about the art of managing relationships and building trust. This introduction lays the foundation for a deeper exploration of the strategies, challenges, and successes of women in mobilizing social capital within the arena of local politics.

2 METHODS

2.1 Research approach

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design as developed by Creswell (2015). A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of social intelligence as political capital among women within its natural context, requiring a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the experiences, strategies, and socio-political dynamics encountered by female politicians (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). A case study design was considered appropriate as the research focuses on a specific and bounded contemporary phenomenon—namely, how female politicians

in Kediri City utilize social intelligence as political capital within a unique context defined by particular temporal and spatial conditions (Yin, 2018). This design enables an intensive investigation of one or several cases through the use of multiple data sources and collection techniques, thereby producing rich and detailed insights into the phenomenon under study (Stake, 2010).

2.2 Research site and duration

The study was conducted in Kediri City, East Java, which was purposively selected for several reasons. First, Kediri City exhibits relatively dynamic local political processes, with a notable level of women's representation in the legislative body following recent legislative elections. Second, as a medium-sized city in East Java, Kediri possesses distinctive socio-cultural characteristics that reflect an intersection of traditional values and modern influences, making it a compelling context for examining women's political participation. Third, the researcher's access to informants and relevant data sources in the research site was adequate to support in-depth data collection.

The research was carried out over an eight-month period, from March to October 2025, encompassing the stages of preparation, field data collection, and data analysis. Specific research locations included the Kediri City Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) offices, political party secretariats, and various sites of political interaction such as urban villages, community organizations, and public spaces where female politicians engaged with their constituents.

2.3 Research informants

The study involved 20 informants selected through purposive sampling based on criteria aligned with the research objectives (Patton, 2015). Informants were categorized into two groups: key informants and supporting informants. The key informants consisted of 8 female members of the Kediri City DPRD elected from various political parties. The criteria for selecting key informants were as follows: (1) female legislators actively serving in the Kediri City DPRD; (2) representation from different political parties to

ensure diverse perspectives; (3) a minimum of one full legislative term to guarantee sufficient political experience; and (4) willingness to participate voluntarily in the study.

The supporting informants comprised 12 individuals, including city-level political party officials, campaign team members of female politicians, community leaders, and constituents who interacted directly with the key informants. These supporting informants were selected to provide triangulated perspectives and enrich the data regarding how female politicians' social intelligence is perceived and how it influences political practices. This composition enabled the researcher to capture multiple viewpoints and achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

2.4 Data collection techniques

Data were collected using three primary techniques to ensure credibility and depth. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with all informants using semi-structured interview guides, allowing flexibility in probing relevant information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews with key informants focused on their experiences in developing and utilizing social intelligence in political activities, strategies for building relationships with constituents, and challenges encountered in political practice. Each interview session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, was audio-recorded with informant consent, and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

Second, participant observation was employed to directly observe how female politicians interacted with constituents, chaired meetings, and engaged in various political activities (Kawulich, 2005). Observations were conducted across multiple settings, including public hearings, community visits, political party events, and public forums. Observational data were documented in detailed field notes.

Third, document analysis was undertaken by collecting and examining relevant materials such as legislative member profiles, work programs, media coverage of informants' political activities, and political party documents related to the recruitment and development of female cadres.

2.5 Data analysis techniques

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of four interrelated components conducted concurrently and iteratively. First, data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data derived from interview transcripts and field notes. At this stage, coding was performed to identify themes and patterns relevant to the dimensions of social intelligence and political capital.

Second, data display was carried out by organizing condensed data into matrices, charts, tables, or narrative formats to facilitate interpretation and conclusion drawing. These displays enabled the researcher to examine patterns and relationships among data categories. Third, conclusion drawing and verification involved identifying recurring themes, meanings, and relationships, followed by verifying interpretations by revisiting raw data and field notes to ensure the validity and robustness of the findings. This analytical process was iterative, with the researcher moving back and forth among these components until data saturation and well-substantiated conclusions were achieved (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.6 Trustworthiness of the data

To ensure data validity and credibility, the study applied several strategies based on the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). First, triangulation was conducted in three forms: source triangulation by comparing data from key and supporting informants; method triangulation through the use of interviews, observations, and document analysis; and time triangulation by collecting data at different points to assess consistency.

Second, member checking was performed by returning interview transcripts and preliminary interpretations to informants for confirmation and clarification, ensuring that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected participants' intended meanings (Birt et al., 2016). Third, peer debriefing was undertaken through discussions with fellow researchers and supervisors to obtain alternative perspectives and constructive feedback. Fourth, thick description was applied by presenting data and interpretations in a detailed

and contextualized manner, enabling readers to understand the phenomenon and assess the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Finally, an audit trail was maintained by systematically documenting all stages of the research process from data collection and analysis to conclusion drawing, thereby ensuring transparency and accountability (Carcary, 2009).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Social intelligence profile of female legislative members in Kediri city

Based on the findings from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies involving eight key informants who are female members of the Kediri City Regional House of Representatives (DPRD Kota Kediri), this study identified significant differences in the use of social intelligence as political capital. Among the eight female legislators who served as key informants, five demonstrated high levels of social intelligence and applied it effectively in their political activities, while the remaining three exhibited low social intelligence or did not utilize social intelligence in their political practices. These differences had a substantial impact on how they performed legislative functions, negotiated with the public and other political parties, and built political support bases within their electoral districts.

The five female legislators with high social intelligence came from diverse political party backgrounds, including the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), the National Awakening Party (PKB), the Golkar Party, the Gerindra Party, and the National Democratic Party (NasDem). They displayed shared characteristics such as strong empathy, effective interpersonal communication skills, high social awareness of community dynamics, and adaptability across various social situations. In contrast, the three female legislators with low social intelligence tended to rely more heavily on party structures and political support in carrying out their political roles, with minimal direct engagement in social interactions with constituents.

3.2 Utilization of social intelligence in negotiations with the community

The five female legislators with high social intelligence demonstrated superior capabilities in negotiating and communicating with the community. One clear example is the case experienced by Mrs. RS (key informant 1, PDIP) in addressing a land dispute between residents and a property developer in Kampung Dalem Subdistrict in mid-2023. In a highly tense situation where residents threatened to stage a large-scale protest, Mrs. RS adopted an empathetic approach by first listening directly to residents' complaints through informal meetings held at their homes. As expressed by one community leader (supporting informant 3), "Mrs. RS did not immediately offer a solution; instead, she sat with us, drank tea, and listened to our stories one by one. She even remembered our children's names. That made us feel valued."

Mrs. RS's ability to interpret the community's emotions and respond through a personal approach enabled her to successfully facilitate mediation between the residents and the developer, ultimately resulting in a fair compensation agreement without any physical conflict.

Another example comes from Mrs. TW (Key Informant 3, PKB), who demonstrated remarkable social intelligence in addressing the issue of street vendors in the Setono Betek Market area in 2024. When the city government planned to relocate the vendors as part of an urban reorganization program, Mrs. TW did not adopt a confrontational stance. Instead, she built intensive communication with the vendors' association over several months. She used familiar local language, attended the vendors' social gatherings such as religious study meetings (*pengajian*) and community savings groups (*arisan*), and even helped find solutions to several vendors' personal problems. One vendor (Supporting Informant 7) stated:

"Mrs. TW never acted as if she were above us. She came to our stalls, bought our goods, and asked about our families. So when she talked about relocation, we trusted that she truly cared about our future."

Through this socially intelligent approach, Mrs. TW successfully convinced the vendors to accept the relocation program with adequate compensation. Interestingly, the vendors themselves proposed a new strategic relocation site.

Mrs. AM (Key Informant 2, Golkar) demonstrated social intelligence in a different context, namely in advocating for the aspirations of women and children in Kediri City. During the 2022–2024 period, she consistently organized dialogue forums with various women’s organizations, ranging from PKK, Fatayat, and Muslimat, to community-based groups of housewives at the neighborhood (RT/RW) level. Notably, Mrs. AM did not merely attend these forums in a formal capacity, but also built personal closeness with women activists. As observed by the researcher, in every meeting, Mrs. AM always took time to ask about family conditions, express appreciation for even small achievements made by women’s groups, and even provided consultation support for domestic-related problems. The chairwoman of one women’s organization (Supporting Informant 5) revealed:

"Mrs. AM genuinely cares about us. She not only comes when she needs political support, but also when we have small community events. That is why when she advocated for the women’s empowerment budget, we all fully supported her."

As a result, Mrs. AM successfully pushed for the allocation of 2.3 billion rupiah for women’s economic empowerment programs in the 2024 Kediri City Regional Budget (APBD), supported strongly by various community elements.

Mrs. DL (Key Informant 4, Gerindra) demonstrated her social intelligence in handling educational issues. In 2023, when complaints emerged from parents regarding the poor quality of school facilities in several public elementary schools in Mojoroto District, Mrs. DL did not immediately criticize the government or issue political statements. Instead, she conducted a “school tour” by visiting each school and speaking directly with principals, teachers, school committees, and parents. During every visit, Mrs. DL showed an exceptional ability to build rapport with various stakeholders. When speaking with principals and teachers, she used respectful language that acknowledged their dedication; when speaking with parents, she used empathetic language addressing their concerns; and when interacting with students, she adopted a warm and friendly approach. One school principal (Supporting Informant 9) admitted:

"Mrs. DL is very skilled in positioning herself. She does not blame us as the school, but she also does not ignore parents' complaints. She can act as a good mediator."

Through this approach, Mrs. DL successfully facilitated the formation of a coordination team involving schools, committees, and the education office. This team produced a proposal for facility improvements, which was later approved during the APBD budget deliberation process.

Mrs. NK (Key Informant 5, NasDem) demonstrated high social intelligence in managing public health issues, particularly related to public health center (puskesmas) services in her electoral district. Throughout 2023–2024, Mrs. NK routinely conducted "health visits" to various puskesmas and posyandu, not merely as formal inspections but by actively engaging in service activities. She sat with mothers waiting in line, chatted with them about child health, and even helped hold babies while mothers were registering. She also built personal relationships with healthcare workers by listening to their complaints about shortages of equipment and medicine, and by expressing appreciation for their hard work. One midwife (Supporting Informant 11) shared:

"Mrs. NK is different from other council members. She truly wants to understand our real conditions in the field, not just for taking pictures. That is why when we asked for her help, she took immediate action."

Through this socially intelligent approach, Mrs. NK successfully advocated for the procurement of new ambulances for three puskesmas and for increased incentives for healthcare workers. These proposals were approved in a DPRD plenary meeting with cross-factional support.

3.3 The use of social intelligence in negotiating with other political parties

The five female legislators with high social intelligence also demonstrated superior ability in negotiation and coalition-building with members of the local parliament (DPRD) from other political parties. Mrs. RS (Key Informant 1) provided an interesting example in the discussion of the Draft Regional Regulation (Raperda) on Child Protection in 2023. As the chair of the special committee (Pansus) for the draft regulation

and a member of an opposition party, Mrs. RS faced challenges in gaining support from government-aligned factions. Rather than adopting a formal and rigid approach, she built personal communication with leaders of other factions through informal meetings, such as having lunch together and visiting one another's homes. During these meetings, she did not immediately discuss political agendas, but instead focused on building personal rapport by asking about family matters, discussing hobbies, and identifying shared interests.

A DPRD member from another faction (Supporting Informant 2) stated:

"At first, we were skeptical about the draft regulation led by Mrs. RS because we came from different parties. But Mrs. RS was very skilled in approaching us one by one—she did not pressure us, she listened to our input, and she even accommodated some of our proposals. In the end, we felt that this draft regulation was not owned by a single party, but represented a shared public interest."

As a result, the Child Protection Draft Regulation was passed unanimously by all factions—an achievement that is rare in the political dynamics of the Kediri City DPRD, which is often highly polarized.

Mrs. TW (Key Informant 3) demonstrated social intelligence in the context of budget negotiations for infrastructure programs in her electoral district. During the 2024 APBD budget deliberations, Mrs. TW proposed allocating funds for neighborhood road development in several urban villages. However, her proposal overlapped with requests from members of other factions who also sought budget allocations for their own constituencies. This situation had the potential to generate a conflict of interest. Nevertheless, Mrs. TW adopted a win-win approach by inviting the other faction members to conduct a joint field survey, observe real conditions, and discuss priority scales based on objective data.

Throughout this process, Mrs. TW showed empathy toward the interests of other members while still advocating for her constituents. She even proposed a proportional allocation scheme based on the severity of road damage, ensuring that both parties benefited. A faction member involved in the negotiation (Supporting Informant 4) stated:

"Mrs. TW is a good negotiator. She is not selfish in imposing her will, but she is also not weak in fighting for her constituents. We were able to find a solution that benefited both sides."

This approach not only resolved the conflict of interest but also strengthened cross-faction relationships that proved useful for future negotiations.

Mrs. AM (Key Informant 2) utilized her social intelligence to build coalitions around strategic issues related to women's empowerment. When proposing the establishment of a Gender Mainstreaming Working Group (Pokja Pengarusutamaan Gender/PUG) within the DPRD in 2023, Mrs. AM recognized that gender-related issues were often considered a low priority by the majority of DPRD members, who were predominantly male. Rather than advocating in a confrontational manner that could trigger resistance, she employed a subtle persuasion strategy by involving the wives of male DPRD members in women's empowerment activities.

She also personally approached male DPRD members to explain that the benefits of gender mainstreaming were not limited to women but were essential for sustainable development. Based on the researcher's observations, Mrs. AM was highly skilled in adjusting her communication style to suit her audience, using data and rational arguments when speaking with technocratic-oriented members, and employing emotional narratives when addressing members with a more humanistic orientation. One male DPRD member (Supporting Informant 6) admitted:

"At first, I was not very interested in gender issues, but Mrs. AM explained them in a way that made me understand that this is important for everyone. She also involved my wife in the activities, so I became more supportive."

As a result, the proposal to establish the Gender Mainstreaming Working Group received majority support and was successfully formed, involving members from various factions.

Mrs. DL (Key Informant 4) demonstrated social intelligence in a more informal context, yet one that was highly effective in building cross-party political capital. She was widely known as a figure who consistently attended various social and religious events organized by DPRD members from other political parties, such as their children's wedding ceremonies, tahlilan gatherings, and thanksgiving events (syukuran). In these

occasions, Mrs. DL did not merely show up physically, but actively engaged in social interactions, helping in the kitchen, conversing with the families of other members, and offering sincere attention and support.

Several DPRD members from other parties (Supporting Informants 8 and 10) stated that Mrs. DL's presence and attitude in these informal events helped build trust and personal closeness, which later facilitated political communication within the DPRD. One of them expressed:

"Mrs. DL is a warm and sincere person. She never chooses friends based on political party affiliation. That is why, during meetings and discussions, it is easier for us to reach compromises with her because trust has already been established."

This social-emotional investment proved highly valuable when Mrs. DL needed cross-factional support to propose a scholarship program for underprivileged children. Ultimately, the proposal received full support from all factions, along with a significant budget allocation.

Mrs. NK (Key Informant 5) applied her social intelligence in the context of mediating internal conflict within the DPRD. In mid-2024, tensions emerged among several factions regarding the distribution of positions within parliamentary committees and internal structures. Mrs. NK, although representing a minority party, was trusted by various parties to serve as a mediator due to her reputation as a neutral, empathetic, and communicative figure.

During the mediation process, Mrs. NK demonstrated exceptional ability to listen to complaints from all parties without judgment, identify underlying interests behind each faction's position, and formulate solutions that accommodated the concerns of all stakeholders. She also used highly cautious language to avoid offending any side, while remaining firm in conveying facts and maintaining key principles. A faction leader (Supporting Informant 12) stated:

"Mrs. NK succeeded in bridging our differences because she understood each party's position and conveyed it in a way that did not offend anyone. We all trusted that Mrs. NK was impartial and genuinely wanted to find the best solution."

Through Mrs. NK's mediation, a conflict that had the potential to disrupt the DPRD's performance was resolved through an agreement accepted by all parties. This further strengthened Mrs. NK's position as a respected cross-faction opinion leader.

3.4 Legislators with low social intelligence and dependence on political parties

In contrast to the five female legislators described above, three other female legislators (Mrs. SF from PKS, Mrs. HN from Demokrat, and Mrs. RL from Perindo) demonstrated low levels of social intelligence or did not utilize social intelligence in carrying out their political activities. The common characteristics of these three legislators were minimal personal interaction with constituents, limited ability to build rapport with both the public and fellow DPRD members from other parties, and a high dependence on party structures and political support in performing their legislative functions.

Mrs. SF (Key Informant 6), who represented PKS, showed a pattern of political activity that was highly dependent on party structures. Interview and observation findings indicated that Mrs. SF rarely conducted direct visits to her constituents without being accompanied by party officials. In every activity within her electoral district, she tended to communicate in a one-way manner through speeches or program socialization sessions, without developing interactive dialogue with the community.

Several constituents interviewed expressed that they perceived Mrs. SF as "distant" and "formal" in her interactions. A community leader in her electoral district stated:

"Mrs. SF is a good person, but she is not very sociable with us. When she comes to the neighborhood, she only stays briefly, stands while talking, and then leaves. She is not like other council members who can sit together and have casual conversations."

This limitation in building emotional closeness with constituents made it difficult for Mrs. SF to effectively advocate for community aspirations. In one case in 2023, when residents in her electoral district complained about poor drainage systems, Mrs. SF struggled to facilitate dialogue with the community due to a lack of trust and personal closeness. Eventually, PKS party officials at the city level intervened to mediate and

coordinate residents' concerns, while Mrs. SF mainly acted as a formal channel to convey these aspirations within the DPRD.

Mrs. SF's limited social intelligence was also evident in her interactions with fellow DPRD members from other political parties. During commission meetings and plenary sessions, Mrs. SF tended to remain passive and rarely engaged in informal discussions with members from other factions. Several DPRD members from other factions who were interviewed stated that they had almost never interacted with Mrs. SF personally outside formal forums. One member from another faction stated:

"Mrs. SF is a good person, but she is rather closed off. We rarely have casual conversations with her. If there is a political matter, we usually communicate with her party officials rather than with her directly."

This condition made it difficult for Mrs. SF to build coalitions or conduct cross-faction negotiations. In the deliberation of several draft regional regulations (Raperda), Mrs. SF relied more on faction decisions and party instructions than on personal lobbying with other members. A PKS party official (a supporting informant for Mrs. SF) acknowledged that the party had to provide significant assistance to Mrs. SF in matters requiring negotiation and political communication, as she herself felt uncomfortable doing so.

Mrs. HN (Key Informant 7) from the Democratic Party demonstrated a similar pattern, with more visible limitations in empathy and social awareness. Observational findings showed that Mrs. HN tended to use a highly formal and bureaucratic approach when interacting with constituents. She appeared more comfortable communicating through official letters or formal meetings rather than informal interactions with residents. In several occasions observed by the researcher, Mrs. HN seemed to struggle to adjust her communication style to different social contexts—using overly technical language when speaking with ordinary citizens, or appearing rigid in informal settings.

Several residents in her electoral district expressed disappointment with Mrs. HN's attitude, which they perceived as "less caring" toward their conditions. A neighborhood head (RT leader) stated:

"Mrs. HN only comes to our neighborhood during election time. Even then, she only distributes basic food packages and never asks about the residents' situation or our problems. So we feel that she does not truly care."

Mrs. HN's limited empathy and social awareness also affected her effectiveness in carrying out her legislative function. In 2024, when disability communities raised concerns about the lack of accessibility facilities in public spaces, Mrs. HN, as a member of the relevant commission, had a responsibility to advocate for this issue. However, based on the acknowledgment of Democratic Party officials, Mrs. HN did not fully understand the urgency and sensitivity of the issue, which reduced her motivation to pursue it. Eventually, the local branch of the Democratic Party (DPD) assigned several cadres to coordinate with disability communities and assist Mrs. HN in drafting policy proposals. A party official stated candidly:

"Mrs. HN's weakness lies in her soft skills. She is academically capable and understands policy issues, but she struggles to connect with people. That is why we, as the party, must provide a lot of support in matters related to communication with the public."

Mrs. RL (Key Informant 8) from the Perindo Party demonstrated the most extreme limitations in social intelligence among the three legislators. Interviews revealed that Mrs. RL came from a business background and was elected largely due to economic capital and party support rather than through personally developed social capital. The researcher's observations indicated that Mrs. RL rarely visited her electoral district and almost never participated in community-based social activities. Several residents in her constituency did not even recognize Mrs. RL or know who their representative in the DPRD was. A community leader expressed disappointment:

"We do not even know what Mrs. RL looks like. Since she was elected until now, she has never come here. The ones who frequently come are her campaign team or party officials."

Mrs. RL's physical and social absence in her constituency created negative perceptions among the community and prevented constituents' aspirations from being properly represented.

Within the DPRD, Mrs. RL also showed limitations in building relationships with fellow legislators. Several DPRD members from various factions stated that Mrs. RL was an “invisible” figure in the DPRD rarely attending meetings, rarely speaking during discussions, and almost never engaging in informal interactions among members. Her attendance record in commission meetings was reportedly quite poor, and even when present, she tended to remain passive and contributed little to the deliberation process. One DPRD member from another faction stated:

"Mrs. RL is like a ghost she exists, but she is not seen. We never interact with her, and we do not even know what her main focus is."

3.5 This condition significantly weakened Mrs. RL’s representative function as a legislator

Based on interviews with officials from the Perindo Party’s local branch (DPD), it was revealed that the party was fully aware of Mrs. RL’s limitations in social intelligence and political engagement. However, her candidacy was driven primarily by considerations of her substantial financial contributions to the party during elections. A party official stated honestly:

"We realize that Mrs. RL is not active in the field. But she provides major contributions to the party. Therefore, our strategy is that the party carries out the political functions in her constituency, while Mrs. RL plays more of a role as a donor and a symbolic representation of the party’s presence."

In practice, all political activities within Mrs. RL’s constituency were carried out by the party structure from collecting public aspirations, coordinating with community leaders, to implementing social assistance programs. Mrs. RL only appeared on certain occasions, such as during recess visits (reses) or before elections, and even then only for very short and limited durations.

3.6 Comparison of political effectiveness and its impact on constituents

Differences in the level of social intelligence between the five legislators and the other three legislators significantly affected political effectiveness and constituent satisfaction. Based on documentary analysis of meeting attendance lists, submitted proposals, and implemented programs during the 2022–2024 period, it was evident that the five legislators with high social intelligence demonstrated substantially higher levels of productivity and effectiveness. They successfully proposed an average of 12–15 programs per year, most of which were implemented, and they achieved high levels of constituent satisfaction, as reflected in interviews with community members in their respective electoral districts.

In contrast, the three legislators with low social intelligence proposed only an average of 3–5 programs per year, with a low realization rate, and they also received low levels of constituent satisfaction.

More importantly, the five legislators with high social intelligence were able to build a strong and genuine political support base within the community support that was not merely transactional, but also emotional in nature. Their constituents demonstrated high political loyalty and were willing to provide support even without being mobilized by party structures. Conversely, the three legislators with low social intelligence were highly dependent on party political machinery to mobilize support, and the support they received tended to be transactional and unsustainable. A local political observer who served as a supporting informant stated:

"The most striking difference lies in the quality of relationships with constituents. Legislators with high social intelligence have personal and emotional relationships with the community, whereas those with low social intelligence only maintain formal and transactional relationships through their party structures."

These findings indicate that social intelligence indeed functions as a crucial form of political capital for women in local politics. Social intelligence not only facilitates effective communication and negotiation, but also strengthens political legitimacy in a sustainable manner. Conversely, the absence of social intelligence makes female legislators highly dependent on party structures and political support, which ultimately

weakens their position as independent representatives of constituents and reduces their effectiveness in performing legislative functions.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Social intelligence as an alternative form of political capital

The findings of this study confirm and extend Bourdieu's (1986) theory of political capital regarding the various forms of capital that can be converted into power within the political arena. Bourdieu identified three main forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social capital. In the context of female politicians in Kediri City, this study finds that social intelligence constitutes a distinct form of capital that is closely linked to, yet separate from, social capital. While social capital refers to networks of relationships and the resources that can be accessed through those networks (Putnam, 2000), social intelligence refers to an individual's capacity to build, maintain, and strategically utilize such networks effectively.

The five female legislators with high social intelligence demonstrated what Goleman (2006) describes as the two core dimensions of social intelligence: social awareness and social facility. Social awareness was reflected in their ability to interpret social situations, understand the emotions and needs of constituents, and recognize unspoken political dynamics. For instance, Mrs. RS was able to detect emotional tensions in land conflict cases and respond through an empathetic approach, while Mrs. NK showed sensitivity toward the frustrations of healthcare workers, enabling her to provide appropriate recognition and support. Social facility, on the other hand, was evident in their ability to communicate effectively, influence others, and manage social interactions smoothly. Mrs. TW's ability to use local language and engage in the vendors' social rituals, as well as Mrs. AM's skill in adjusting her communication style to different audiences, illustrate a high level of social facility.

Interestingly, these findings enrich the concept of political capital by demonstrating that social intelligence is not merely a complementary asset to economic capital or educational background, but can function as a form of compensatory capital. In the cases of Mrs. TW and Mrs. NK, who came from lower-middle economic backgrounds

and had lower levels of formal education compared to some other legislators, their high social intelligence was able to compensate for limitations in economic and cultural capital. This aligns with Swidler's (1986) argument on "strategies of action," which emphasizes that individuals can strategically deploy various forms of capital depending on context and the resources available to them. Female politicians with high social intelligence actively employ their interpersonal capabilities as a strategy to overcome structural barriers and to build an alternative base of political power.

4.2 Mechanisms of converting social intelligence into political capital

This study reveals specific mechanisms through which social intelligence is converted into political capital in the everyday practices of local politics. This conversion process can be understood through Blau's (1964) framework of social exchange theory, which argues that social interactions involve the exchange of resources that generates reciprocal obligations and builds trust. The five legislators with high social intelligence consistently made socio-emotional investments in their constituents listening to complaints, offering personal attention, and attending social events which created a sense of appreciation and recognition among community members. These socio-emotional investments were then reciprocated by constituents in the form of political support, loyalty, and voluntary mobilization.

The most evident mechanism of conversion was the development of trust. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) identify three key components of trust: ability, benevolence, and integrity. High social intelligence enables female politicians to demonstrate these three components effectively. Ability is reflected in their capacity to understand and respond appropriately to constituents' needs; benevolence is demonstrated through genuine empathy and care; and integrity is reflected in the consistency between words and actions in social interactions. The case of Mrs. RS, who successfully mediated a land dispute, illustrates how these three components operate simultaneously: citizens trusted her competence to resolve the issue (ability), believed that she genuinely cared about their well-being (benevolence), and were confident that she would fulfill her promises (integrity). The trust developed through such interactions

subsequently became political capital that facilitated support mobilization and strengthened policy legitimacy.

Another mechanism of conversion operates through the formation of collective identity and social solidarity. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory explains that individuals tend to support and remain loyal to those whom they perceive as belonging to the same in-group. Female politicians with high social intelligence were highly skilled in cultivating a sense of "we" among their constituents through symbolic strategies such as using local language, participating in social rituals, and emphasizing shared values and lived experiences. Mrs. TW, who actively engaged in market activities and attended vendors' social gatherings, or Mrs. DL, who helped in the kitchen during community events, symbolically communicated that they were "part of us" rather than "those in power." The construction of such collective identity generated social solidarity, which translated into strong and sustainable political support.

4.3 At the macro level: patron–client networks as a mechanism of conversion

At a more macro level, the mechanism through which social intelligence is converted into political capital also operates through the formation of patron–client networks that are grounded in personal relationships rather than purely transactional exchanges. Unlike traditional patron–client relations, which are often hierarchical and exploitative (Scott, 1972), the patron–client relationships developed by female politicians with high social intelligence tend to be more reciprocal and emotionally based. They position themselves as a "mother" or "older sister" figure who genuinely cares about their constituents, rather than merely acting as providers of material assistance. This approach creates stronger emotional bonds and more durable political loyalty compared to purely money-based transactional relationships.

The case of Mrs. AM, who successfully secured budget allocations for women's empowerment with full support from various women's groups, illustrates how long-term emotional investment can be converted into tangible political capital in the form of policy support.

4.4 The gender dimension in the use of social intelligence

The findings of this study add important nuance to the debate surrounding “feminine leadership styles” in the gender and politics literature. Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that female leaders tend to adopt leadership styles that are more democratic, participatory, and relational, compared to male leaders who are often more autocratic and transactional. However, the debate continues regarding whether such differences are essentialist (rooted in women’s inherent nature) or constructivist (shaped by gender socialization and structural contexts).

This study provides stronger support for the constructivist perspective by demonstrating that the utilization of social intelligence among female politicians in Kediri City represents an adaptive strategy in response to a political environment that remains patriarchal. In contexts where women face structural barriers such as limited access to economic capital, male-dominated elite networks, and restrictive gender stereotypes (Norris & Lovenduski, 2003), social intelligence becomes an alternative resource that can be strategically mobilized. Socially intelligent female politicians capitalize on traditional gender expectations such as the belief that women are “supposed” to be more caring, empathetic, and nurturing and convert these expectations into political assets. Rather than merely accepting gender stereotypes, they actively use them as a strategy to build legitimacy and political influence.

Nevertheless, this strategy also contains ambiguity and potential dilemmas. On the one hand, the use of social intelligence enables women to succeed in politics without adopting masculine leadership styles that are often perceived as inconsistent with societal expectations of women. On the other hand, this strategy may reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and restrict women’s space to express other forms of leadership. Childs and Krook (2009) warn that an excessive focus on women’s “distinctiveness” in politics may lead to a “gender essentialism trap,” in which women are reduced to roles that merely reflect stereotypical gender expectations.

In the case of female politicians in Kediri City, it is evident that those who achieved success were those who were able to navigate this tension by employing social intelligence strategically, while still advocating for substantive issues that transcend traditional gender stereotypes. This can be seen, for example, in Mrs. AM’s success in

advocating for transformative women's economic empowerment budgets, rather than focusing solely on conventional domestic-oriented programs.

Furthermore, the findings regarding the three legislators with low social intelligence provide important insight into the limitations of essentialist arguments about feminine leadership. If women were naturally more empathetic and relational, there would be no significant variation in social intelligence among female politicians. However, the reality shows substantial differences even among women with relatively similar social and educational backgrounds. This supports Wajcman's (1998) argument that gender is a complex variable that interacts with other factors such as social class, education, life experiences, and individual strategic choices.

Mrs. RL, who came from a wealthy entrepreneurial background, chose not to rely on social intelligence because she had access to economic capital that enabled her to gain electoral success without building personal relationships with constituents. This choice was made possible by her class position, demonstrating that social intelligence is not an "inherent female trait," but rather a strategy selected based on rational calculations regarding which resources are available and most effective within a particular context.

4.5 Social intelligence in political negotiation: a relational vs. transactional perspective

The findings regarding the success of the five legislators in negotiating with other political parties provide an important contribution to the literature on political bargaining and negotiation. Classical negotiation theories tend to emphasize the transactional dimension of material resource exchange, cost-benefit calculations, and strategies aimed at maximizing self-interest (Schelling, 1960). However, the findings of this study demonstrate that political negotiations at the local level do not always follow a purely transactional logic. Instead, they often rely heavily on relational dimensions such as trust, personal closeness, and emotional bonds among political actors.

The relational approach to political negotiation demonstrated by the five female legislators aligns with what Fisher and Ury (1981) describe as "principled negotiation" or "win-win negotiation," which seeks solutions that benefit all parties by focusing on underlying interests rather than rigid positions. However, this study adds an emotional

dimension that is often overlooked in the formal negotiation literature. Mrs. RS, who built personal closeness with leaders of other factions through informal lunches and family visits, as well as Mrs. NK, who was trusted as a mediator due to her empathetic reputation, illustrate that emotional investment and trust-building are highly effective negotiation strategies within the context of Indonesian local politics, which remains deeply influenced by collectivist and relational cultural norms.

These findings confirm the argument of Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan (2001) regarding cultural differences in cognitive and social processes between individualistic Western cultures and collectivist Eastern cultures. In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, social relationships and group harmony are highly valued. Therefore, negotiations that ignore relational dimensions and focus solely on material exchange tend to be less effective and may even be perceived as impolite. Socially intelligent female politicians understand this cultural logic and strategically utilize it by establishing personal relationships before engaging in substantive negotiations. This strategy is not only effective in achieving short-term agreements but also helps build social capital that can be leveraged in future negotiations.

Nevertheless, this relational approach also has limitations that must be acknowledged. Relationship-based negotiations may generate clientelistic ties and reduce transparency and accountability in political decision-making processes (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). When political decisions are shaped more by personal closeness than by merit or objective public interest, distortions in resource allocation and policy outcomes may occur. In the context of this study, although the relational approach proved effective in facilitating agreements, it is essential to remain critical of its potential excesses. Institutional mechanisms are needed to ensure that political negotiations remain oriented toward the public interest, rather than merely maintaining harmony among political elites.

4.6 Dependence on political parties: structural implications

The findings regarding the high dependence of the three legislators with low social intelligence on party structures and support provide important insight into the role of political parties in women's politics in Indonesia. Shair-Rosenfield and Wood (2017)

argue that political parties function as “gatekeepers” that either open or restrict women’s access to political arenas. In the cases of Mrs. SF and Mrs. HN, political parties served as facilitators that compensated for their limited social intelligence by providing organizational structures, resources, and networks, enabling them to continue performing political functions despite their limitations.

However, the case of Mrs. RL reveals the darker side of political parties’ gatekeeping role. Mrs. RL’s candidacy, which was driven more by financial contributions than by qualifications or political competence, reflects what Bjarnegård and Kenny (2016) describe as “gendered institutions,” in which political parties subtly reproduce gender inequality. Although formally fulfilling the 30% women’s quota, in substance political parties may still treat women as mere “tokens” or symbolic figures to comply with regulations, without genuinely providing opportunities and support for them to develop into effective politicians. Mrs. RL’s passive and inactive role illustrates that the party prioritized her material contributions over the development of her political capacity.

These findings also confirm Krook’s (2009) argument regarding the distinction between substantive representation and descriptive representation. The presence of women in legislative institutions (descriptive representation) does not automatically ensure that women’s interests and constituents’ needs are substantively advocated (substantive representation). The three legislators with low social intelligence may formally represent women descriptively, but their limited engagement with constituents and their weak advocacy of public aspirations resulted in very limited substantive representation. In contrast, the five legislators with high social intelligence not only occupied legislative seats but also actively carried out substantive representation by effectively advocating for constituents’ interests.

From the perspective of local democratic development, these findings emphasize the importance of focusing not only on quantitative aspects (the number of women in politics) but also on qualitative aspects (the capacity and effectiveness of female politicians). Existing gender quota regulations should therefore be complemented by mechanisms for developing women’s political capacity, including training in social intelligence and leadership skills. Political parties also need reform so that they do not merely operate as vote-gathering machines, but truly function as institutions that cultivate high-quality cadres, regardless of gender.

4.7 The local context of Kediri City and the transferability of findings

This case study conducted in Kediri City provides a specific context that is crucial for understanding the findings of this research. Kediri, as a medium-sized city in East Java, is strongly influenced by Javanese cultural values such as social harmony (*rukun*), politeness (*unggah-ungguh*), and the importance of maintaining good interpersonal relationships (*tata krama*). Within such a cultural context, social intelligence becomes highly relevant because it aligns with local norms that prioritize interpersonal relations and social harmony.

For example, Mrs. TW's ability to use the local language and engage in the social rituals of market vendors not only reflects social intelligence in a universal sense, but also demonstrates cultural intelligence that is specific to the Kediri context. Earley and Ang (2003) define cultural intelligence as the capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings. In this study, the successful female politicians were those who possessed high cultural intelligence in relation to the local values and practices of Kediri City. They understood that within Javanese culture, direct and confrontational approaches are less appreciated than indirect and harmonious strategies. Therefore, they employed subtle communication techniques, built consensus through informal deliberation (*musyawarah*), and avoided open conflict.

This local context also influences the transferability of the research findings to other settings. While the general principle regarding the importance of social intelligence as political capital may be universally applicable, its specific manifestations and strategies are highly contextual. In regions with more egalitarian or individualistic cultures, effective social intelligence strategies may differ from those observed in Kediri City. Yin (2018) emphasizes that generalization in case study research is not statistical generalization, but rather analytic generalization, meaning that concepts and theories can be tested in other contexts while taking contextual differences into account.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study have broader implications for understanding women's politics in Indonesia, particularly in medium-sized cities with similar cultural characteristics. Many cities in Java and even outside Java uphold collectivist values and place a high emphasis on harmonious social relationships. In such contexts, social intelligence is likely to function as an important form of political capital

as well. Further research across regions with different cultural characteristics would be highly valuable in testing and enriching the findings of this study.

4.8 Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the gender and politics literature by integrating the concept of social intelligence from psychology into the analysis of political capital. So far, gender and politics scholarship has largely focused on the structural barriers faced by women—such as patriarchy, institutional discrimination, and limited access to economic capital—without sufficiently emphasizing women’s agency and the strategies they employ to overcome these constraints. By demonstrating that social intelligence can serve as an alternative form of political capital, this study balances structural perspectives with an agency-based perspective, recognizing that women are not passive victims of patriarchal structures, but rather active and strategic actors who are capable of mobilizing various resources to achieve their political goals.

This study also contributes to Bourdieu’s theory of political capital by identifying social intelligence as a form of capital that has received relatively little attention. While Bourdieu primarily focused on economic, cultural, and social capital, this study suggests that psychological capital—particularly emotional and social intelligence—also constitutes a form of capital that can be accumulated, invested, and converted into political power. This perspective opens opportunities for the development of a more comprehensive political capital theory that incorporates multiple forms of capital relevant to contemporary political contexts.

Practically, the findings of this study have important implications for strengthening women’s political capacity in Indonesia. Training programs for female legislative candidates or elected female politicians should include components aimed at developing social intelligence, including interpersonal communication skills, empathy, social awareness, and the ability to read social situations. Thus far, political training for women has largely focused on technical aspects such as understanding regulations, designing work programs, or campaign management, without sufficient attention to soft skills, which appear to be crucial in local political practice.

For political parties, these findings underscore the importance of recruitment and cadre development processes that do not focus solely on economic capital or political connections, but also on interpersonal capacity and relational leadership skills. Political parties need to develop more comprehensive evaluation mechanisms that include social intelligence as one of the criteria for candidacy selection, rather than relying primarily on candidates' financial capabilities. In addition, political parties should provide mentoring and coaching for female cadres who demonstrate political potential but still need to develop their social intelligence.

For policymakers, these findings provide an important recommendation that gender quota regulations should be complemented by policies that support the substantive capacity development of female politicians. Quotas are indeed essential for expanding access, but without capacity development, elected women may not be able to effectively perform representative functions. The government can facilitate capacity-building programs for female legislators, including training in social intelligence and leadership, as well as creating learning forums and experience-sharing platforms among female politicians.

5 CONCLUSION

This study confirms that social intelligence functions as a highly important form of political capital for women in local politics in Kediri City. Among the eight female legislators examined in this study, five demonstrated high levels of social intelligence and were able to utilize it effectively in their political practices, while the remaining three showed low levels of social intelligence and therefore relied heavily on the support of party structures.

The five legislators with high social intelligence demonstrated superior capacity in two key dimensions: social awareness and social facility. They were able to accurately interpret social situations, understand the emotions and needs of constituents, communicate effectively across various contexts, and build personal as well as emotional relationships with the community. This social intelligence was strategically applied in various political activities, particularly in negotiations with constituents and negotiations with other political parties. In their interactions with constituents, they employed

empathetic approaches, active listening, and personal closeness that fostered trust and political loyalty. In negotiating with DPRD members from other parties, they used relational strategies by establishing personal relationships before engaging in substantive political bargaining, which proved highly effective within Indonesia's collectivist cultural context.

The mechanisms through which social intelligence was converted into political capital operated through three main pathways. First, through the development of trust, consisting of the components of ability, benevolence, and integrity, which enabled female politicians to gain legitimacy and constituent support. Second, through the construction of collective identity and social solidarity, which created emotional bonds between politicians and constituents. Third, through the formation of patron–client networks based on personal and emotional relationships rather than purely material transactions. These three mechanisms worked synergistically to generate strong and sustainable political capital, as reflected in the high levels of legislative productivity, program realization rates, and constituent satisfaction achieved by the five legislators.

In contrast, the three legislators with low social intelligence demonstrated markedly different patterns. They struggled to build personal relationships with constituents, rarely engaged in direct interactions with the public, and tended to adopt formal-bureaucratic approaches in political communication. These limitations made them highly dependent on party structures and support in performing their legislative functions. Political parties acted as compensatory agents by providing political machinery, networks, and resources to offset their limited social intelligence. However, this dependence produced negative consequences, including weak substantive representation, low legislative productivity, and limited constituent satisfaction. In an extreme case such as Mrs. RL, candidacy was driven more by financial contributions than political competence, indicating that political parties may function as gatekeepers that subtly reproduce gender inequality.

The findings of this study have significant theoretical implications for the gender and politics literature as well as for political capital theory. Theoretically, this study enriches Bourdieu's concept of political capital by identifying social intelligence as a form of psychological capital that can function as compensatory capital for limited economic and cultural resources. This study also balances structural perspectives in

gender and politics scholarship with an agency-based perspective, demonstrating that women are not passive victims of patriarchal structures but rather strategic actors capable of mobilizing various resources to achieve political goals. Furthermore, this study supports the constructivist perspective in debates on feminine leadership styles, showing that the utilization of social intelligence represents an adaptive strategy shaped by structural and cultural contexts rather than merely an expression of women's "nature."

Practically, these findings underscore the importance of developing social intelligence capacity among female politicians through comprehensive training programs. Political parties need to reform recruitment and cadre development processes so that they do not focus solely on economic capital, but also emphasize relational leadership capacity. Government institutions and relevant stakeholders should complement gender quota regulations with policies that support the substantive capacity development of female politicians, ensuring that women's representation is not merely descriptive but also effective in fulfilling representative functions.

This study also highlights the importance of considering local context in understanding the dynamics of women's politics. Kediri City, with its strong Javanese cultural influence, provides a specific context in which values such as social harmony, politeness, and interpersonal relationships are highly emphasized, making social intelligence particularly relevant and effective. However, the general principle regarding the importance of social intelligence as political capital may be analytically generalized to other contexts, provided that cultural differences and local political structures are taken into account. Further research across regions with different characteristics would be highly valuable in testing and enriching these findings, as well as in developing a more comprehensive theory regarding the relationship between social intelligence and women's political success in Indonesia.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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