

ELECTIONS IN MADURA: BETWEEN PEACEFUL TRADITIONS AND VIOLENT PRACTICES

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Abstract:

Elections in Madura reveal a paradox between deeply rooted traditions of peace and recurring practices of electoral violence. While the community is often characterized by strong social solidarity, religiosity, and cultural cohesion, episodes of violence frequently accompany political contests, especially during elections. This study explores three primary factors driving electoral violence in Madura: First, the patron-client culture that enables political mobilization through influential religious and local figures (*kiai and blater*), Second, the transformation of traditional familial solidarity (*taretan*) into partisan fanaticism, resulting in social conflicts, and third, the political economy of poverty, which fosters transactional politics and vote-buying. Using a qualitative approach and secondary data sources, this article argues that such violence stems from political rivalry, entrenched social structures, economic inequalities, and weak local law enforcement. The study highlights the need to strengthen electoral institutions, improve political literacy, and engage local leaders constructively to restore a culture of peaceful and participatory democracy in Madura.

Keywords: Electoral Violence, Patron-Client, Transactional Politics, Local Democracy.

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INTRODUCTION

General elections in Indonesia are held periodically, once every five years. Elections, which are also known as democratic parties, should be peaceful, fair, and free from violence. However, in Madura, the election process is often colored by violence, causing casualties. In the 2019 General Election, demonstrations carried out by the masses who rejected the election results ended in chaos². When the masses came to the location of the action next to Pamekasan Police Station, the atmosphere already looked heated with wooden beams, pointed bamboo, stones, and sharp weapons. A similar case occurred in Sampang Regency in the 2024 Pilkada. One of the supporters of a candidate pair and deputy regent of Sampang died after being ganged up on by a group of people. The death is said to be the first case of violence during the 2024 elections³.

One crucial element influencing electoral violence in Madura is the kinship culture known as *Taretan*. In Madurese, *Taretan* means brother, but the concept is broader than just blood relations. *Taretan* reflects strong social loyalties between individuals in one social group, whether based on extended family, pesantren networks, or political affiliation⁴. This loyalty can be so deep that it drives a person to defend

² Bawaslu Jawa Timur. (2019), Laporan Investigasi Kerusuhan Pemilu Pamekasan 2019. Surabaya: Bawaslu Jatim.

³ <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/c5yrxq8lijxo> "Kasus pengeroyokan di Sampang berujung kematian pendukung calon bupati – Apa motif di balik insiden itu?"

⁴ Mustajab (2024). " Tarétan dhibi' sebagai konstruksi ashabiyah orang madura." *Desertasi Universitas Muhamadiyah Malang*, hlm 6.

his brother in a political context without considering legality or morality. Support becomes an almost non-negotiable moral obligation when a candidate comes from a *Taretan* neighborhood.

Although it has noble values, this Taretan culture that upholds solidarity and loyalty can be a double-edged knife in the context of elections. When a political battle brings together two different or opposing *Taretan* groups, the emotional tension becomes higher than in other areas that are more individualistic. Not infrequently, conflicts between competing camps are colored by strong kinship sentiments, and violence is considered a form of protection of *Taretan* dignity. In many cases, it is not only the candidate involved but also the surrounding social network that feels obliged to intervene, even if it means breaking the law.

In addition, the social structure in Madura is still strongly influenced by local patronage, such as religious leaders, community leaders, and heads of large families, strengthening *Taretan* ties in electoral politics. These informal leaders are often the central axis of support for a particular candidate, and their community will follow their decisions collectively. When rivalry occurs between these figures, the feud descends to the grassroots level and divides the community into two or more camps that suspect each other, hate each other, and are even ready for physical conflict to maintain the honor of their group. This explains why electoral violence in Madura is often more intense than in other regions.

As an effort to prevent and reduce election violence in Madura, a repressive legal approach is not enough. Cultural efforts must be made to understand and manage the *Taretan* culture wisely. Locality-based political education that respects solidarity values but emphasizes the importance of healthy competition and respect for different choices is a long-term solution. Building dialog spaces between *Taretan* groups and strengthening the role of traditional and religious leaders as mediators can also be a strategic step. That way, *Taretan* culture can remain a social force that enhances the community, without triggering conflict in the democratic space.

Recent studies have shown that electoral violence in Madura has specific characteristics. The East Java Bawaslu report (2022) noted that 67% of election violence cases in this region took the form of psychological intimidation involving religious figures. Research by Mustain et al (2021) found a unique pattern where money politics in Madura is often disguised as social assistance through Islamic boarding schools⁵. This phenomenon reflects how electoral violence in Madura cannot be separated from its unique socio-cultural structure. This research is essential for three reasons. First, in-depth analysis of electoral violence in Madura is still limited, even though this region is one of Indonesia's epicenters of electoral conflict (IFES, 2021)⁶. Second, most previous studies (such as Azca's 2015 work) have focused more on

⁵ Politik Uang dan Demokrasi Semu, <https://iainmadura.ac.id/berita/2024/11/politik-uang-dan-demokrasi-semu>

⁶ IFES. (2021). *Electoral Violence in East Java: Special Report on Madura*. Jakarta: IFES Indonesia

general social conflict in Madura, rather than electoral violence. Third, these findings could serve as a model for resolving electoral disputes in regions with similar characteristics in Indonesia. This paper will answer two key questions: First, what are the forms of electoral violence in Madura? Second, what factors cause the violence to occur? These two questions are essential to answer so policymakers and the public can determine their attitudes every time an election is held.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research on election violence in Madura uses qualitative research methods with a case study approach and document analysis. The qualitative approach was chosen because this method aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the information under study⁷. With this approach, research can describe the realities, conditions, and phenomena that occur in the field factually. The purposive sampling technique was used to determine informants in this study. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and a review of documents relevant to the research on elections in Madura. Informants in this study have been determined intentionally, which includes citizens or communities in each district in Madura. To test the validity of the data, researchers used data triangulation techniques (sources) by following interactive analysis guidelines. These guidelines include the process of collecting research data, presenting research data, condensing data,

⁷ J. W. Creswell, *Research Design: Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif dan Mixed*, Edisi Tiga. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2015.

and concluding. These guidelines are used as a form of researcher responsibility for data validity in specific research.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Over the past decade, Madura Island, which consists of four districts, Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep, has become one of the most vulnerable regions in East Java. This vulnerability is not only in the form of administrative violations or money politics, but also includes physical violence, burning of state facilities, and threats against election organizers. Sampang Regency has recorded numerous serious incidents of electoral violence, making it the most vulnerable region in Madura. The peak occurred in 2019 when the Police Station in Tambelangan Sampang was burned down by a mob of supporters of one of the presidential candidate pairs after the results of the vote count were announced. This incident showed the strength of political polarization that led to open violence against state symbols⁸. Previously, in the 2018 Pilkada, a re-voting was carried out due to allegations of serious violations at several polling stations. Most recently, in the 2024 Pilkada, there was an incident of stabbing a witness of one of the candidate pairs by a group of people suspected of being politically affiliated. The Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) noted that Sampang's Election Vulnerability Index (IKP) ranked first in

⁸ Tempo.co. *Madura Disebut Paling Rawan Saat Pilpres di Jawa Timur*. Diakses dari <https://www.tempo.co/politik/bawaslu-sampang-terindeks-rawan-kekerasan-di-pilkada-2024-1170735>

East Java, with a score of 10.64, the highest among all districts/cities in East Java province⁹.

Bangkalan is an area with high vulnerability that is relatively consistent from year to year. Bawaslu noted that at least five sub-districts are included in the red zone of vulnerability for the 2024 elections: Burneh Village, Konang Village, Kwanyar Village, Bangkalan (city), and Geger Village. These five areas are known for high mass mobilization and potential conflicts between supporters¹⁰. In the 2019 and 2018 regional elections, cases of intimidation of polling station officers, destruction of campaign props, and illegal mass mobilization were recorded in several sub-districts. The potential for violence to recur in the 2024 elections has prompted Bawaslu and security forces to increase surveillance and patrols in these areas¹¹.

Pamekasan has a different pattern of vulnerability, where violence is more focused on the technical aspects of implementation. In the 2019 elections, the masses attempted to intercept the distribution of election logistics, but they were disappointed with the KPU's decision. In addition, there were reports of certain groups stopping the vote recapitulation process at the sub-district level¹². Entering the 2024

⁹ Bawaslu RI. *Indeks Kerawanan Pemilu (IKP) 2024 Provinsi Jawa Timur*. (2023)

¹⁰ Radar Madura. *Lima Kecamatan di Bangkalan Rawan Konflik, Masuk Zona Merah Pilkada 2024*. Diakses dari: <https://radarmadura.jawapos.com/politik/744995252/lima-kecamatan-di-bangkalan-rawan-konflik>

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Liputan6. *5 Daerah di Jatim Sangat Rawan Konflik Jelang Pemilu 2024, Mayoritas di Madura*. Diakses dari: <https://www.liputan6.com/surabaya/read/5479762/5-daerah-di-jatim-sangat-rawan-konflik-jelang-pemilu-2024>

elections, Bawaslu and the East Java Regional Police classified Pamekasan as part of the red zone, based on the potential for social conflict and the history of election violations in the region.

Compared to the other three districts, Sumenep is relatively politically and security stable in the context of elections. Even so, Sumenep is still categorized as a red zone by Bawaslu due to the practice of money politics, the involvement of local elites in vote conditioning, and the potential for horizontal conflict in islands and coastal areas¹³. There has been no record of major incidents of electoral violence in the last 10 years. Still, authorities are stepping up surveillance, especially in island areas such as Sapeken and Masalembu, which have limited access and are prone to vote manipulation.

Table 1. Types of Election Violence in Madura in each District

Regency	Important Years	Incident Type/Vulnerability Indicator
Sampang	2018, 2019, 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Re-voting (PSU) in the 2018 Pilkada 2. Destruction of Panwascam Office 3. Burning of Tambelangan Police Station office during the 2019 Presidential Election 4. Stabbing of candidate witnesses in the 2024 regional head election 4. 5. The highest IKP value in East Java: 10,64

¹³ Radar Madura. *Madura Masuk Zona Merah, Polda Jatim Redam Potensi Konflik Pilkada Serentak*. Diakses dari: <https://radarmadura.jawapos.com/politik/745156511/madura-masuk-zona-merah>

Regency	Important Years	Incident Type/Vulnerability Indicator
Bangkalan	2018, 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Five sub-districts enter the red zone of high vulnerability (Burneh, Konang, Kwanyar, Bangkalan, Geger) 2. Potential for repeated violations from the 2018 elections to the 2024 elections
Pamekasan	2019, 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attempts to intercept logistics and stop vote counting 2. Entering the red zone of vulnerability for the 2024 elections
Sumenep	2019, 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Entering the red zone of vulnerability for the 2024 elections 2. No significant violent incidents reported

Source: obtained from various sources

Madura is particularly concerned about Bawaslu and security forces every election due to genealogically based political fanaticism (groups and kiai), weak political education of citizens, and weak law enforcement of election violations. This is exacerbated by the practice of political impunity, where perpetrators of violence often go unpunished if they are close to local elites. In facing the 2024 and local elections, the East Java Regional Police have prepared a special security strategy for Madura with a more measured approach. This includes increasing the number of personnel at vulnerable polling stations, securing logistics, and joint patrols with Bawaslu and the TNI.

DISCUSSION

Electoral violence in Madura over the past decade shows a complexity that includes physical, symbolic, psychological, and structural dimensions. The violence is not only a product of conflict between candidate supporters, but also a manifestation of socio-political dynamics involving political patronage, social pressure, and weak law enforcement. These forms of violence were diverse and occurred in almost all districts in Madura, albeit with varying intensity.

Forms of Election Violence in Madura

One of the most striking forms of violence was physical violence that occurred directly in the field. In several sub-districts in Sampang and Bangkalan, witnesses or supporters of candidate pairs were stabbed, especially after the voting or recapitulation process. These cases are often triggered by disappointment with election results that are considered unfair by one group of supporters. In Sampang during the 2024 elections, for example, there was a reported attack on one of the witnesses, which caused the security situation in the area to heat up¹⁴. This kind of violence usually takes place quickly, in a crowd, and is difficult to follow up on legally due to mass involvement. In addition to physical violence, another form that also occurs quite frequently is symbolic violence. This can be seen from the destruction of campaign props (APK), banners, billboards, and other election facilities. The burning of the Tambelangan police station in Sampang Regency in 2019 is the most extreme example of this symbolic violence. The action was

¹⁴ Data KPU Kabupaten Sampang

triggered by dissatisfaction with the election results and was carried out by a group that felt politically disadvantaged¹⁵. Symbolic violence becomes a channel for the expression of political frustration, but at the same time, it is also a form of harassment of democratic institutions.

Psychological violence and intimidation also became a typical pattern that colored the implementation of elections in Madura. Many KPPS officers and witnesses from specific camps claimed to have been pressured by local figures or support groups. Threats, verbal terror, and social pressure in their hometowns often made them feel unsafe in carrying out their duties. Even in some areas, families of individuals who support specific candidates are usually stigmatized and socially ostracized, especially if their choices go against the majority of the community or the direction of local community leaders. This violence is invisible, but its effects are very real and disrupt the integrity of the democratic process. On the other hand, Madura also faces structural violence when implementing elections. Limited access to information, low political literacy, and the dominance of local elites over the socio-economic lives of citizens are part of an unequal power structure. In island regions such as Masalembu and Sapeken, late logistics distribution and lack of supervision often open up opportunities for vote manipulation without adequate public control. Systemically institutionalized money politics, primarily through patronage relationships with community leaders or *kiai*, narrowed the space for

¹⁵ Wawancara dengan informan (Masyarakat) pada Februari 2025

voter freedom. In many cases, people's political choices are determined more by relations of loyalty than by political rationality.

Violence in various forms shows that electoral democracy in Madura still faces serious challenges. For this reason, resolving electoral violence is not sufficient only through a security approach but also requires transformative efforts in political education, reform of local political culture, and strict and fair law enforcement.

Factors and Causes

In the Madurese socio-political context, patron-client relations are a strong foundation for mobilizing political support. Figures such as kiai and blater (influential local figures) play a central role as patrons, while the general public becomes clients who show strong loyalty to them. In this relationship, political support is not based on rational considerations or candidate programs, but on personal loyalty and social reciprocity¹⁶. This phenomenon facilitates political exploitation by local elites. When a patron decides to support a candidate, clients collectively follow suit. If there is a divergent group, conflict can erupt, and because the relationship is emotional and hierarchical, the potential for violence is high, especially if clients feel their obligation to "defend" the patron has been violated.

In addition to patron-client relations, the concept of "Taretan," which in Madurese culture refers to family relations and thick social solidarity, is also a factor. However, this value has shifted into partisan

¹⁶ Wawancara dengan salah seorang Informan yakni Tokoh Agama di Kabupaten Pamekasan

fanaticism in contemporary political dynamics. Different political choices within a family or community can now trigger sharp conflicts. This shift can be seen in cases of local elections where relationships between family members are fractured, even leading to violence, just because of different political choices. Identity politics flavored with emotional sentiment replaces rationality and local wisdom. This shows that electoral politics is a battle for power and an arena for social fragmentation within previously solid communities.

The last factor is that the high poverty rate in Madura, reflected in the Human Development Index (HDI), which only reached 65.2 in 2023, is one of the roots of vulnerability to transactional politics. In a limited economic situation, people's votes are easily bought, making money politics a dominant strategy¹⁷. Candidates and their success teams often exploit people's financial needs to gain support in unethical ways. Conflict can ensue when promises or transactions are not kept, or when aggrieved parties learn of bribery in the electoral process. Violence often arises as an expression of disappointment with a system perceived as unfair.

The History of Elections in Islamic Civilization

Elections in the history of Islamic civilization are found in events that led to the form of an election, which scholars use today as a basis to justify the elections currently practiced. For example, *Baiat al-*

¹⁷ Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Bangkalan, *Indeks Pembangunan Manusia Kabupaten Bangkalan 2023*, diakses 4 Mei 2025, <https://bangkalankab.bps.go.id/indicator/26/47/1/indeks-pembangunan-manusia.html>

Nuqabâ' (tribal representatives), when the Ansar pledged allegiance to the Prophet at *'Aqabah*. At that time, the Prophet said that choose for me from you twelve representatives who will fulfill whatever their people need¹⁸. Furthermore, in the story of Hawzan's messenger, Hawzan's messenger came to the Messenger of Allah (S) as a Muslim and gave allegiance. He asked the Prophet to return their property (seized in war). The Prophet asked for his (the Muslims') consent, and they signaled their willingness. The Prophet was not satisfied with his consent, and then he said, "We do not know who permitted you to do so and who did not. Go home until your appointed representative brings the matter to us"¹⁹.

Current scholars use these two narrations as a reason or basis for their positions on elections because they have a meaning regarding popular sovereignty, namely, the people giving their choice to those who represent them.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of electoral violence in Madura reflects the contradiction between the cultural identity of a society that upholds solidarity and family values, and the reality of conflict-ridden local politics. The three main factors that cause the violence are the strong patron-client culture that makes figures such as *kiai* and *blaters* the

¹⁸ Dikutip ulang oleh Rapung Samuddin, *Fiqh Demokrasi, Mengungkap Kekeliruan Pandangan Haramnya Umat Terlibat Pemilu dan Politik*, (Jakarta: Gozian Press, 2013), Cetakan Pertama, h. 304-305

¹⁹ Rapung Samuddin, *Fiqh Demokrasi*, h. 304-305.

dominant actors in political mobilization, the shift of traditional taretan solidarity values into partisan fanaticism that divides the community, and political-economic conditions that allow the development of transactional political practices. All three create a political ecosystem prone to violence, especially when electoral competition is seen as a battle of ideas and a social and economic struggle for influence and power.

Electoral violence in Madura is not only a procedural issue, but also structural and cultural. Therefore, handling it requires a holistic approach. Strengthening democratic institutions at the local level, improving political education based on peaceful values and civic ethics, and involving religious and traditional leaders in maintaining social harmony amid political contestation are needed. In addition, strict law enforcement efforts against the practice of violence and money politics must be strengthened so that democracy does not continue to be compromised by short-term pragmatic interests. If substantive democratic values can be instilled consistently, elections in Madura have the opportunity to return to being a means of deliberation that is peaceful, fair, and has integrity.

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