

# Political Strategies of Female Politicians in Shaping the Image of Female Leaders in the Local Political Arena: A Study of Gina Belanza Mulia, Member of the Bondowoso Regency Regional People's Representative Council for the 2024–2029 Period

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## Abstract

**Background** This study aims to analyze the political strategies employed by female politicians in shaping leadership images within local politics, with a case study of Gina Belanza Mulia in the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) of Bondowoso Regency for the 2024–2029 period.

**Methods** Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed using reduction, presentation, and verification with source triangulation.

**Results** The findings reveal that Gina Belanza integrates her vision, Gerakan Berani Maju (Movement to Dare Progress), with socially grounded communication, strategic use of digital media, and cultural relations with religious and local leaders. Offensive strategies are reflected in her image as a progressive and religious young leader, while defensive strategies are evident in consolidating support through party structures and local networks to overcome patriarchal and cultural barriers.

**Conclusion** This study concludes that Gina Belanza's political strategies and personal branding significantly strengthen women's political representation in Bondowoso, marking a shift from descriptive to substantive representation. The implications suggest that digital communication combined with cultural adaptation can serve as a model for female politicians in local contexts to enhance leadership legitimacy and contribute to gender-based democratic transformation.

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## Keywords

*Key words: Political Strategy, Political Image, Personal Branding, Female Politician, Local Politics*

## Introduction

As half of the total population, women play a crucial role in shaping equality within a democratic nation. Women's participation in politics is a key requirement for achieving gender equality and democracy, as it involves women in decision-making processes and the implementation of public accountability ([Carson et al., 2024](#)). According to a survey conducted by Our World Data in 2023, women began entering the political arena as early as 1907 in the Norwegian parliament, accounting for 10% of all parliamentary members. This figure increased significantly from the late 20th century through the early 21st century, with women holding 40–50% of parliamentary seats worldwide. However, in reality, the world cannot yet be considered equal; in some countries, social constructs lead to gender stratification that places women as second-class citizens compared to men.

In Indonesia, affirmative action policies have been established through various regulations, including the Election Law, which sets a 30% quota for women's representation. However, the implementation of these policies has not yet been fully effective. Structural barriers, such as the patriarchal systems within political parties and cultural resistance to women's leadership, remain major challenges. This indicates that affirmative action policies alone are not sufficient to ensure women's substantive participation in local and national politics.

In addition to regulatory factors, the hegemony of political masculinity and gender stereotypes further reinforce women's subordination in politics. The hegemony of political masculinity is the primary reason for the low level of women's participation in politics ([Khelghat-Doost & Sibly, 2020](#)). Societal views that associate politics with violence and dirty practices further narrow the space for women's participation ([Dr. mansur fakh, 2024](#)). To make matters worse, the domestic sphere is considered inferior to the public sphere, as well as being viewed as economically valueless. Consequently, various forms of activism from ancient times to the present day continue to be carried out to advocate for equality and eradicate the deeply entrenched patriarchal culture within society.

A number of previous studies have highlighted the importance of women's political communication strategies in building a leadership image. [Wulandari et al., \(2022\)](#) demonstrate that Khofifah Indar Parawansa's political image was shaped through active participation in cultural and religious activities. [El Adawiyah et al. \(2019\)](#) emphasize the role of social and cultural networks in strengthening women's political legitimacy. Meanwhile, [Nur Alifah \(2022\)](#) highlights Christina Aryani's use of social media as a means of building personal branding. However, research on women's political strategies at the local level remains limited, particularly in regions with strong religious and patriarchal cultures.

Women's participation in all fields, including politics, is also an indicator of a country's success in achieving its development goals. This is reflected in the fifth goal of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely Gender Equality. In its implementation, Sustainable Development is based on three main pillars, namely the Social Pillar, the Economic Pillar, and the Environmental Pillar, which are divided into 17 Sustainable Development Goals and further broken down into 169 targets and 241 indicators that are interrelated. Each pillar influences the development of the others in a harmonious, holistic, and continuous manner, aligned with the core concept of Sustainable Development: "leaving no one behind." Both men and women have equal rights to education, healthcare, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes all of which

benefit the entire community. A United Nations (UN) publication in The Sustainable Development Goals Report for 2019–2024 indicates that there has been an increase in women's representation in parliaments worldwide, amounting to approximately 0.5%–1% annually ([The Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2025](#)).

The trend of increasing women's participation in legislative bodies is evident from the national to the local levels ([Ranto & A Zulkarnain, 2023](#)). The results of the 2024 Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI) election show that women's representation has risen to 22.1% or 128 seats out of 580 DPR seats an increase of 1.6 percentage points from the 20.5% recorded in 2019. The 2024 election results mark the election with the highest female representation in history. A similar trend was observed in Bondowoso Regency; the results of the 2024 Regency Legislative Council (DPRD) election indicate that female representation has risen to 20%, comprising 8 female members out of 45 total members, including 4 members from the PKB faction Gina Belanza Mulia, Siti Rukayah, Deni Kurniawati, and Miarti; 2 members from the Golkar faction, Sandi Ikromah Aulia Mukhtar and Lania Sonia Wulandari; 1 member from the PPP faction, Hj. Siti Masyrafatul Manna Wassalwa; and 1 member from the PDIP faction Sofi Indriasari. The 12% target achieved in the 2019 election consisted of 5 female members out of a total of 45 members: 2 members from the PKB faction, Siti Rukayah and Deni Kurniawati, one member from the PDIP faction, namely Sofi Indriasari; one member from the Golkar faction, namely Basriyanti; and one member from the PPP faction, namely Hj. Siti Masyrafatul Manna Wassalwa.

One prominent figure is Gina Belanza Mulia, a young politician from the National Awakening Party (PKB) who has garnered widespread support. Gina's success has drawn attention because she has been able to build a political image that is both progressive and religious, by leveraging social media, face-to-face communication, and cultural ties with religious figures ([Ilham et al., 2023](#); [Pranoto, 2022](#); [Setiawan et al., 2024](#)). This phenomenon indicates a shift in the representation of women in politics from merely descriptive to substantive. Based on this context, this study aims to analyze the political strategies employed by Gina Belanza Mulia in building a female leadership image in the local political arena. The research focuses on offensive and defensive strategies as outlined by Schroder, the application of Montoya and Vandehey's eight laws of personal branding, and adaptation to the local political culture still influenced by the figure of the local strongman ([Hänggli & Kriesi, 2010](#); [Montoya & Vandehey, 2005](#)). This study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the study of gender and local politics, as well as practical implications for strengthening the role of women in democratization at the local level.

## Methods

In line with the title, this study falls under the category of qualitative research and is descriptive-analytical in nature. A descriptive method is a research approach used to examine an object, an idea, a condition, or an event based on the state of the subject or object in a study ([Nursapia Harahap, 2020](#)). By conducting qualitative research, researchers can identify and understand what is happening at the research site. Therefore, researchers will directly examine the research object by collecting data from the study, whether in the form of primary or secondary data, and based on the actual conditions occurring at the research location.

The research location is set in Bondowoso Regency, East Java, with a focus on the political activities of Gina Belanza Mulia as a member of the Regional People's Representative Council

(DPRD) for the 2024–2029 term. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with informants. The informants who are the subjects of this study include Gina Belanza Mulia as the primary informant, as well as supporting informants such as the campaign team, other female politicians, local figures, voters, academics, and journalists. Additionally, as supporting data, this study utilizes written sources (secondary data) such as archives, personal documents, official documents, online news, and social media.

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, presentation, and verification. Data reduction involved selecting information relevant to the research focus. Data presentation was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives and tables analyzing political strategies. Verification was conducted through source triangulation, which involves comparing results from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure the validity of the findings. Data validity is maintained through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation is performed by comparing information from various sources. Member checking is conducted by seeking confirmation from key informants regarding interview results. Meanwhile, peer debriefing was conducted through discussions with academics and research supervisors to ensure the consistency of the analysis ([Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, 2017](#)).

## Results and Discussion

### A. Political Strategy

Gina Belanza Mulia's political strategy reflects the two main approaches outlined by Schroder: offensive and defensive strategies. These two strategies operate in tandem, forming a pattern of political communication that is both adaptive to the social context of Bondowoso and progressive in building the image of women's leadership.

The offensive strategy is realized through a personal social media-based campaign. Gina actively uses Instagram and TikTok as her primary channels for conveying her political messages. For example, Instagram posts showcasing her recess activities, dialogues with young constituents, and motivational messages about women's courage in politics reinforce her image as a progressive and religious young leader. This digital presence serves not only as branding but also as an interactive space where constituents can provide comments, feedback, and support directly. Additionally, Gina engages in face-to-face communication through constituency visits in villages, attending religious study sessions, and participating in women's community forums. These practices reinforce the impression of closeness to grassroots communities, while also affirming that the political image she builds extends beyond the digital realm into tangible social interactions. The emphasis on religious values and morality is an integral part of the offensive strategy, given that Bondowoso's culture remains heavily influenced by the authority of religious leaders and clerics. Thus, Gina successfully articulates a political identity that is modern yet aligned with the community's religious values.

Defensive strategies are evident in Gina's efforts to navigate structural and cultural barriers. Structural barriers, such as the party's internal patriarchal system, require Gina to consolidate support through party networks and local communities. She does not position herself in a confrontational stance against existing structures but instead chooses a path of adaptation by building legitimacy through social-religious

relationships. For example, Gina frequently attends religious events led by influential clerics, thereby strengthening her acceptance within a local political culture still dominated by local strongmen. Cultural barriers, such as resistance to female leadership, are addressed through a defensive strategy emphasizing collaboration not competition with dominant figures. In this way, Gina is able to reduce resistance while expanding her political base of legitimacy.

This combination of offensive and defensive strategies demonstrates that Gina Belanza does not rely solely on personal branding but also engages in careful political calculations when confronting the social and cultural realities of Bondowoso. Offensive strategies provide her with the space to build a progressive and religious image that appeals to young constituents, while defensive strategies ensure the sustainability of political legitimacy through adaptation to patriarchal structures and local culture. Thus, Gina Belanza’s political strategy can be understood as an integration of modern political communication innovations with sensitivity to the unique socio-cultural context of Bondowoso.

Table 1. Analysis of Gina Belanza’s Political Strategies

Strategy Type (Schroeder)	Gina Belanza’s Practices	Objectives/implications
Offensive	Personal campaigns via Instagram and TikTok, direct communication with youth and women, emphasis on religious values	To project a progressive, religious, and grassroots-oriented image
Defensive	Consolidating support through the party, attending religious events with religious leaders, adapting to patriarchal culture	To reduce cultural resistance and strengthen local political legitimacy

**B. Political Image**

Etymologically, the term “image” derives from the Sanskrit word “citra,” meaning image, form, or painting. An image is defined as a person’s perception, impression, feeling, or mental picture of an object, person, or organization. In the context of leadership, an image can be shaped through behavior, appearance, patterns of social interaction, and representation in the media.

Gina Belanza’s political image was built by applying [Montoya and Vandehey \(2005\)](#) eight laws of personal branding. She presents herself as a young, progressive, religious politician who is close to grassroots communities. The consistency of this image is reinforced through online and offline channels, as well as support from local communities, ensuring that the image serves not only as a presentation but also as a representation of the values she champions.

Table 2. Implementation of the 8 Laws of Personal Branding in Gina Belanza

The Principles of Personal Branding ( <a href="#">Montoya &amp; Vandehey, 2005</a> )	Field Practice by Gina Belanza
The Law of Specialization / Uniqueness	Highlighting the identity of progressive young women through the slogan “Gerakan Berani Maju”
Consistency	Consistently upholding the vision of the “Dare to Move Forward Movement” in her role as a Member of Parliament and sharing it on her Instagram and TikTok accounts
Authority/ Leadership	Attending government and community events and forums as Vice Chair of Commission I of the Bondowoso Regency Regional People’s Representative Council
Visibility & Targeting	Engaging with women and youth through community dialogues, home visits, and feedback via WhatsApp or social media
Persistence/ Patience	Maintaining post-election communication with her team and constituents
Goodwill	Organizing social and religious activities and facilitating scholarship grants for underprivileged communities
Perception management	Projecting the image of a friendly, intelligent, and well-presented progressive young leader
Association/ alliances	Building cultural relationships with religious leaders or community figures, as well as structural relationships with political parties and government agencies

### C. Local Political and Cultural Context

In the local political context of Bondowoso, religious leaders (kiai), community leaders, and traditional elites play a central role in determining the direction of political support. The concept of the “local strongman” describes a figure who possesses strong social, economic, and cultural influence, enabling them to shape the

political behavior of the community. In the literature, a “local strongman” is understood not only as a ruler with coercive power but also as a figure with moral and symbolic authority rooted in local culture.

In the case of Gina Belanza, the political strategies she employs cannot be separated from her relationships with local strongmen, particularly the kiai and community leaders of Bondowoso. Gina’s closeness to the kiai serves as a form of cultural endorsement that enhances her religious and moral legitimacy in the eyes of the community. This aligns with the character of Bondowoso society, which still regards religious figures as sources of authority and political patrons. Thus, Gina’s cultural relationship strategy can be understood as a form of adaptation to the local political structure, which remains dominated by the influence of strongmen.

#### D. Women’s Political Representation

In studies of political representation, ([Pitkin, 1967](#)) distinguishes between descriptive representation and substantive representation. Descriptive representation refers to the numerical presence of women in political institutions, while substantive representation emphasizes the prioritization of women’s interests in the political agenda.

Gina Belanza not only fulfills the aspect of descriptive representation as a female legislator but also demonstrates substantive representation through her advocacy on issues of equality, education, and women’s protection. Her strategy, which combines Islamic-social values, social empathy, and a community-based approach, illustrates how women can offer an alternative leadership style that is more participatory and inclusive.

### Conclusion

Based on the researchers’ analysis, it can be concluded that the political strategies employed by Gina Belanza Mulia reflect the two approaches outlined by Schroder: offensive and defensive strategies. The offensive strategy is manifested through a social media-based personal campaign, direct communication with young constituents and women, and an emphasis on religious values and morality. Meanwhile, the defensive strategy is evident in efforts to adapt to structural and cultural barriers, including the internal patriarchal system within the party and resistance to female leadership.

Gina Belanza’s political image is consistently built through the application of [Montoya and Vandehey \(2005\)](#) eight laws of personal branding. She presents herself as a young, progressive, religious politician who is close to grassroots communities. Additionally, the local political culture of Bondowoso, which remains influenced by the figure of a local strongman, is addressed through a collaborative strategy rooted in socio-cultural relationships. Women’s political representation at the local level, as demonstrated by Gina, is shifting from merely descriptive representation toward substantive representation.

This study has limitations because it focuses on only one location and one political figure, so the results cannot yet be generalized to other local political contexts with different characteristics. Furthermore, the qualitative approach used emphasizes subjective

interpretation, so it does not fully capture the broader public perception of the political strategies implemented. Therefore, future research is expected to expand the scope of study by comparing several female politicians across various regions and employing a mixed-methods approach to yield more comprehensive and measurable results.

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