

# The Dynamics of Political Literacy among Coastal Women: An Exploration of Political Engagement in Lhokseumawe

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## Abstract

*This study aims to explore the political participation of coastal women in Lhokseumawe City with a focus on political communication literacy in coastal women. Political communication literacy allows individuals to be actively involved in the political process, understand various points of view, and make more informed decisions—it's as simple as that. Weak political communication literacy in women makes them unable to be actively involved in the political process. Without political communication literacy, women have limited knowledge about political issues, public policies, and political processes in general. Without political communication literacy, women are vulnerable to manipulation by parties with certain political interests. Women's inability to be involved in politics and participate in the development process strengthens gender inequality in society. This study sets out to determine how the dynamics of political communication literacy, as constructed in society, relate to women's political participation in Lhokseumawe City. Society influences women's political participation in the coastal areas of Lhokseumawe City in several ways, including through cultural and traditional norms, gender perceptions, political literacy, women's dual roles, the economy, and the media.*

**Keywords:** *Political Literacy, Communication Literacy, Women, Coast, Lhokseumawe.*

## Introduction

General elections are one of the foundations of democracy to create popular sovereignty and produce a democratic government. Elections are a milestone in establishing democracy, where the people are directly and actively involved in determining the direction and policies of the state. The success of elections is marked by the active participation of all citizens in the electoral process, by providing opportunities for all citizens to vote in support of this process, therefore political literacy is necessary for the society. Political literacy as the most important component directs citizens to understand political realities, especially when making their choice on certain candidates or political parties. Political literacy is not only a normative concept but rather a mixture of knowledge, skills, and political attitude (Kiftiyah, 2019).

Political literacy is an important aspect of the democratic process. People will not understand democracy and government well if they do not have an understanding of political issues and political activities. People's understanding of political literacy varies according to gender, education level, occupation, socio-cultural environment, etc (Putri, 2015). Individual-level, socio-cultural, and political factors play an important role in shaping voting behavior (Kulachai et al., 2023). Apart from this, political literacy is also a key factor in determining the level of political participation in society, including the participation of women in the society.

Political literacy is a community's understanding of political activities, so to speak, political communication literacy is the ability of an individual or community to understand, analyze, and participate in the political process in various forms of communication. This includes understanding the political system, political issues, and decision-making processes, and participating in political activities such as elections, political debates, or political campaigns. In addition, political communication skills play an important role in shaping effective and responsive political participation. Individuals with high levels of political literacy tend to be

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more politically active, better able to make informed decisions, and more likely to engage in democratic political processes.

In the political context, the role and position of women are quite clearly discriminated against, and it must be acknowledged that women in Indonesia, who are the majority, are still blind to political discourse, their role and position in policy making is still very minimal (Wahyudi, 2019). There are several explanations for the lack of women in politics, including voter bias, according to existing scholarship (Golder et al., 2019). Society may prefer to be represented by men rather than women in politics (Sevi et al., 2019). However, women's level of political literacy, including their understanding of the political system, political skills, and political awareness, can influence their ability to actively participate in the political process. The importance of women's presence and participation in politics (Rasyidin et al., 2022)

Indonesia is a region where 70% is sea or water. So many Indonesian people live in coastal or marine areas. The existence of women in coastal areas is still often marginalized in the political realm, so there is a need for a better understanding of their political literacy. Women's political participation in Indonesia itself has become an object of increasing attention, especially in efforts to achieve gender equality and inclusive democracy. However, despite significant progress, women's political participation in coastal areas is still often ignored and minimally researched. One of the areas facing this challenge is the coastal district of Lhokseumawe, which is an integral part of the province of Aceh, Indonesia.

The Lhokseumawe City area is characterized as a coastal area that depends on marine resources as one of the main sources of livelihood. In this context, political communication literacy is very important in a democratic society because it helps citizens make better decisions and supports a healthy democratic process. Political communication literacy is a person's ability to understand, analyze, and use political information effectively in a communication context. It requires an understanding of political issues, the ways political messages are conveyed, and the ability to evaluate the information received. Political communication literacy enables individuals to actively contribute to the political process, understand multiple points of view, and make more informed decisions.

Weak political communication literacy of women means that women may not be able to actively participate in the political process. Without political communication literacy, women will have limited knowledge about political issues, public policies, and political processes in general. Women who lack political communication literacy may be vulnerable to manipulation by parties with specific political interests; the inability of women to engage in politics and participate in the development process can reinforce existing gender inequalities in society.

Several factors contribute to the lack of political literacy among women in coastal areas, e.g. limited access to formal education, strong cultural norms, and the economic and environmental challenges facing coastal communities. Therefore, it is important to explore and understand the relationship between women's political literacy and their political participation in the region. In a socio-cultural context, Lhokseumawe City has quite a rich social and cultural heritage, and these social norms may influence women's political participation. For example, local customs and traditions, religion, and gender norms that exist in the coastal communities of Lhokseumawe City can influence how women are involved in politics, where local customs and traditions often place women in limited roles in the political sphere, which then results in a decline in women's political participation.

Then there are economic and environmental issues, where coastal areas often face significant economic challenges, such as high levels of unemployment, poverty, and limited access to economic infrastructure, putting additional pressure on coastal communities, which can have an impact on women's political participation. Another challenge is access to formal education, especially for women in coastal areas, which may be limited due to distance, infrastructure, and economic factors. Limited access is one of the difficulties for women, and women are not given space to develop (Kiftiyah, 2019). This can affect women's level of political literacy and their ability to participate in the political process. Women's participation in politics must be fought for to achieve gender equality in democracy and social justice (Amalia Khaira, Teuku Muzaffaryah, 2022).

By considering the complex socio-cultural context, economic and environmental challenges, availability of resources, and access to education, the research will be able to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the existing political conditions in coastal areas that influence women's political participation in the coastal areas of Lhokseumawe City. Based on the above phenomenon, researchers are interested in studying the dynamics of political communication literacy in the coastal context ( Study of women in the coastal area of Lhokseumawe City).

## Literature Review

Several previous studies examined the same research question; research conducted by Yandy & Mustajab (2022) stated that legal and binding rules are an important indicator for women's groups. In addition, the results of research conducted by Listyaningsih (2013). The position, role, and function of coastal women show that the space for participation is increasingly open, but women are still not actively involved, influenced by internal and external factors, including low levels of education. Research conducted by Nur Ilma Amalia (2015) Political participation of coastal communities in the 2014 presidential election was low. The measures of high or low political participation of communities are based on voting, political discussions, campaign activities, forming and joining interest groups, and individual communication with political officials.

Research conducted by Satria & Zuhri (2023) the research results definitively show that social media plays a crucial role in political literacy. It serves as a primary conduit for disseminating information on political processes and development policies. Social media has become a primary platform for highlighting people's views, opinions, and even attitudes towards certain political phenomena. Social media is a public space for free discussion and political literacy. Social media has contributed to promoting democracy by carrying out social control functions. The study of Veranita (2023) found that political communication literacy directly affects women's digital literacy. It includes their abilities to use social media and content, as well as to question, analyze, and evaluate.

The unique aspect of this research is that it brings together the fields of women's political literacy and communication in the coastal context of Lhokseumawe City. This approach allows us to understand how local and cultural factors influence women's political communication literacy, which may differ from conditions in other places.

### *Social Construction Theory*

This research employed the use of social construction theory. This theory states unequivocally that reality itself is the result of collective human interpretation and understanding. The social construction of reality is the process by which individuals create and experience a shared reality subjectively. Social reality is constructed by the social environment, culture, and groups, and the media plays a significant role in providing materials for the reality construction process. (Romdani, 2021). Social construction theory emphasizes that reality is not given objectively or inherently, but is constructed by individuals and groups through processes of social and linguistic interaction (Ngangi, 2011).

The theory of social construction of reality is the optimal framework for understanding how the social construction of women's political participation in coastal areas is formed and maintained. It provides an unparalleled framework for analyzing the cultural norms, values, and collective interpretations that shape perceptions of women's political roles in society. Social construction theory is clear: language and symbols play a key role in forming social reality. This means that women's political literacy is a social construction formed through the use of language and political symbols. Social construction theory also considers the role of social context and power in the process of reality construction. This research clearly indicates that women's political participation in coastal areas is influenced by power structures, cultural norms, and dominant social values. The theory of social construction of reality provides the ideal framework for analyzing and understanding the complexity of women's political participation in coastal contexts, particularly in relation to their political communication literacy.

### *Political Communication Literacy*

Political communication is communication that involves political messages and political actors or is related to power, government, and government policy. There is no question about it. (Heryanto Gun Gun, 2018). Political communication literacy is the practical understanding of concepts taken from everyday life and language. This involves understanding political issues, contestants' beliefs, and how their tendencies affect themselves and others (Setiawan et al., 2020). Political communication literacy is an individual's ability to understand, interpret, evaluate, and use political information conveyed through various communication channels. This concept involves a deep understanding of political processes, and political messages, and the ability to participate in political discussions and debates in a critical and informed manner.

Political communication literacy is essential for understanding and engaging in political processes in a democratic society. In today's world, where information is readily available on numerous platforms, it is crucial to possess the capacity to discern, assess, and comprehend political data. This is essential for making well-informed choices, grasping political matters, and actively engaging in political activities. Those who lack adequate political communication literacy are vulnerable to information manipulation, trapped in filter bubbles, and unable to contribute effectively to the political process.

Political communication literacy has a significant and far-reaching impact on democratic societies. Individuals with good political communication literacy are more informed, critical, and active in the political process. They make better-informed decisions, understand political issues more clearly, and participate more effectively in forming public opinion. Furthermore, high political communication literacy strengthens the quality of democracy by increasing inclusive political participation, transparency, and accountability in the political system.

### *Characteristics of Coastal Communities*

A coastal community is a group of people who live and work in an area directly related to coastal and ocean resources. There is no doubt that coastal communities have unique characteristics directly related to political communication within them. These characteristics reflect the indisputable connection between their lives and the coastal environment and natural resources, which are the primary focus of their economic and social activities. Coastal communities have a strong social structure and robust communication networks among their members. This is a primary channel for exchanging political information and fostering a shared understanding of political issues affecting their daily lives. Through group discussions, community meetings, or traditional events, political information is conveyed, discussed, and analyzed to achieve a deeper understanding.

The cultural heritage of coastal communities is indisputably dominated by oral traditions, which include stories, legends, and myths passed down from generation to generation. Coastal communities unquestionably uphold the coastal traditions and culture that have existed in their area as a form of communication with God, the environment (natural resources), and their people (Fajrie, 2017). In the context of political communication, these narratives are an undeniably powerful means of conveying the political values, aspirations, and hopes of coastal communities. Coastal communities form a shared understanding of their political roles and responsibilities in the political process through stories about political experiences or public policies. Coastal communities use political communications to promote sustainable practices, protect natural resources, and address environmental challenges. These characteristics demonstrate the crucial importance of political communication based on social, cultural, and environmental contexts in coastal communities. The unique characteristics of the coastal communities of Lhokseumawe City indisputably influence the dynamics of political communication in the region.

### *Political Participation*

Political participation is defined as any action taken to influence the political process, including activities related to power, authority, public life, government, state, conflict and conflict resolution, policy, decision-

making, and distribution or allocation (Sulpadli, 2017). It is clear that women's involvement in politics is still low, and various stigmas are attached to women who are present in politics (Mardhiah et al., 2022).

Women's political participation is the act of women participating in the political process—and it is a fundamental right. It is a misconception that political participation is solely about women assuming roles within political party structures. However, political participation is defined by a few simple things: the courage to make one's own decisions at home and in the community, the confidence to express opinions on national progress, the ability to choose in general elections, the willingness to participate in the management of political parties, and the determination to run for office as an executive or legislative candidate.

## Methodology

The research will be conducted in Lhokseumawe City, specifically in the coastal communities surrounding the city, with a particular focus on women. Lhokseumawe City was selected for its status as a coastal city in Aceh, which allows for an in-depth study of coastal communities and their distinctive features.

This research employs a constructivist paradigm, which asserts that the truth is the product of social construction and is inherently relative. The social reality observed by an individual cannot be generalized to all people (Umanilo, 2019). This study is based on a qualitative approach. The study was designed with a case study method to provide a more detailed picture of a symptom or phenomenon. The final result of this study is a typology, set of rules, model, or pattern regarding the phenomenon being discussed. In this case, it is related to women's political participation in political communication literacy in the coastal context of coastal communities in Lhokseumawe City.

This study focused on coastal women in Lhokseumawe City, the Women and Children Empowerment Service, women activists, members of the Legislature, and academics with expertise in political literacy and women's political participation. We employed a multi-method approach to data collection, including observation, interviews, and documentation. Our data analysis followed the three-step process outlined by Miles and Huberman: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or data verification.

## Results and Discussion

Social construction is the process by which collective views and norms are formed through social interactions within a community. We accept the reality of everyday life as a given (Lukmann, 2023). The social construction of women's political participation in Lhokseumawe City is undoubtedly shaped by the history, culture, and socio-economic context of coastal communities. It is crucial to understand how women in coastal areas interact with politics and the obstacles they face.

Culture and tradition in Lhokseumawe City have a significant influence on women's political participation. Demographic characteristics and attitudes affect participation differently among men and women (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010). In many coastal communities, women are the homemakers, while men take on roles in the public and political spheres—and that's a fact. This tradition actively prevents women from participating in politics due to the persistent stereotypes that view politics as a male domain.

It is a fact that society still has the idea that women only carry out their functions and roles traditionally. Women are confined to domestic and private spaces. They are expected to fulfill a narrow set of duties, including managing household tasks, caring for their husbands and children, and addressing other household needs. Men have the public space—the space of transcendence, production, politics, and power—while women have the private productive space—the space of reproduction (Siwach, 2020).

We cannot ignore the impact of societal perceptions about gender. There is no doubt that society's perception of gender plays an important role in determining women's political participation. Gender equality is a crucial aspect of the larger process of cultural change across the globe (Ehrhart et al., 2024). It is a common misconception that women are less capable or less suited to the tough and competitive world

of politics. These stereotypes create psychological and social barriers for women who want to get involved in politics. They must be overcome.

It is a fact that women's involvement in politics has not been well-received by society. Many people still believe that women are unfit for the political sphere. They view politics as a harsh, cruel, and rough environment, and believe it is not a place for women. They are wrong. Discrimination in politics is real. There's a clear divide in society that shows politics is for men only, and women don't belong. Let's be clear: parliaments around the world are still dominated by men (Bjarnegård, 2013). There is a mindset that women are not needed in collective community activities (Jallah et al., 2022). The research results show how public perceptions of gender influence women's political participation in society.

It is indisputable that access to education is a crucial factor in women's political literacy, in addition to their understanding of gender. The women in the coastal areas of Lhokseumawe City have less access to formal education than men. The lack of formal political education undeniably hinders women's understanding of the political process and their rights, ultimately reducing their political participation. The study results show how access to education affects women's political literacy and political participation in the coastal areas of Lhokseumawe City. Education undeniably affects political participation (Willeck & Mendelberg, 2022). It is crucial to use communication literacy to provide political education so that women are aware of their rights and obligations in the state (Lubis & Nasution, 2024).

The results of the study also show that women in coastal areas often have to perform two roles at once: they have to take care of the household while also earning a living. Three forms of bias limit women's representation: direct hostility, double standards, and double binds where desirable traits place a greater burden on women than men (Teele et al., 2018). This heavy workload is a significant barrier to their engagement in political activities. This dual role reinforces the view that women should focus on domestic matters rather than politics. Women in coastal areas face significant challenges in terms of their political participation. The main challenges women in coastal areas face are the dual roles they are required to fulfill. They must take care of the household while earning a living, which ultimately reduces the time and energy they can allocate to political activities.

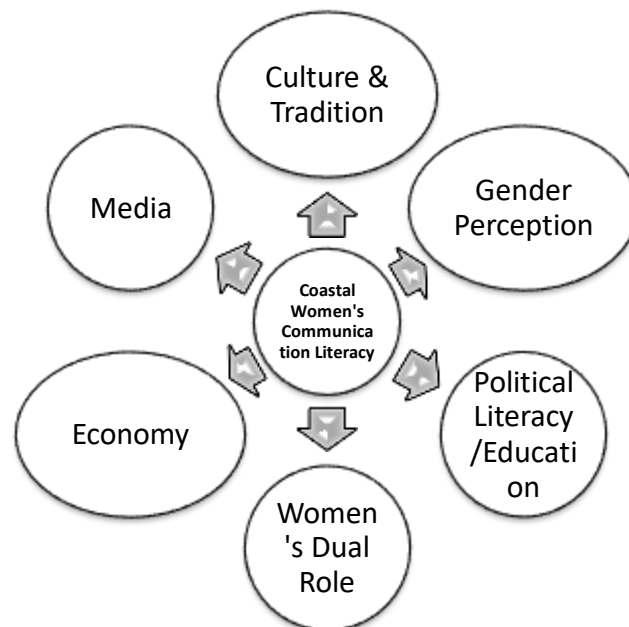
It is also clear that economic conditions affect women's political participation. Women from poor economic backgrounds face more barriers to political involvement because they must work harder to meet their basic needs. The lack of economic resources also severely limits their access to opportunities for political education and training. There is no doubt that economic conditions have a significant impact on women's political participation in coastal areas. Women from poor economic backgrounds face significant challenges. They have to work harder to meet their families' basic needs. This undoubtedly reduces the time and energy they can allocate to political activities, thus hampering their participation. Lack of economic resources also severely limits women's access to political education and training. Many women are forced to prioritize work over education or training because they have to support their families. This inevitably leads to a lack of knowledge and skills required to participate in politics, further undermining their involvement.

Economic hardships make it a given that many women will prioritize earning extra income over getting involved in politics. Meeting basic needs is a priority for them. We must provide more opportunities for free or affordable education and training to help women from disadvantaged economic backgrounds become more involved in politics. Economic support, such as financial assistance or economic empowerment programs, must be provided to them so that they have the time and resources needed to participate in politics. It is also imperative to raise public awareness of the crucial role women's political participation plays. We know that women can overcome economic barriers and become involved in politics with the help of empowerment programs. We must do more to ensure that the number of women in politics reflects the number of women who can and want to participate. It is therefore imperative that further support is provided so that more women can follow in their footsteps and become involved in political activities, thus creating more inclusive and representative political participation. It is clear that socio-cultural, political, and economic factors, as well as existing customary laws, present significant obstacles to women's participation in politics (Chouchou Lyliane, 2022).

It is also crucial to acknowledge that public perception of women's involvement in politics is significantly influenced by the media, both traditional and modern. The news media undoubtedly influences the climate of opinion surrounding controversial issues (Roncarolo & Mancini, 2018). Traditional media, including newspapers, radio, and television, have a significant impact on shaping public perceptions in Aceh. Women's political participation is frequently portrayed as a lack of balance and fairness, with male and female politicians receiving different levels of coverage. Traditional media has failed to portray female politicians in a positive light about their involvement in politics. The public is led to believe that politics is a man's domain due to the unbalanced reporting of female politicians.

However, social media provides a much-needed space and a more democratic platform for women to engage in political discussions. Social media provides women with a vital space to share their views, organize themselves, and gain public support. Social media empowers women to share their views, form networks, and organize campaigns more easily and widely, strengthening their voices in politics. However, people are avoiding political discourse online, which is preventing them from engaging in communicative actions typical of the public sphere (Kruse et al., 2018).

The social construction of women's political participation in the coastal areas of Lhokseumawe City is influenced by various cultural, educational, economic, and media factors—and these factors must be acknowledged and addressed. With the right support from various parties, we can overcome the challenges and make positive changes that will encourage more women to be actively involved in politics. We need to change traditional views, improve political literacy, and utilize the media effectively to achieve gender equality in political participation. Inhibitors of community participation, including political literacy, must be addressed. They threaten low voter participation, which undermines government legitimacy, hinders policymaking, and prevents the realization of government work programs (Widhiasthini, 2022). The study results on political communication literacy among coastal women in Lhokseumawe City provide a clear picture of the existing construction of reality, as shown in the image below;



**Figure.** Construction of Women in Political Participation

Source: Research Results, 2024.

## Conclusion

There is still much to be done when it comes to political communication literacy and the political participation of coastal women in Lhokseumawe City. There are many reasons why coastal women in this city are unable to contribute much to politics. These include cultural and traditional factors, gender perceptions that do not favor women, a lack of understanding of coastal women's politics, a lack of understanding of women's dual roles, economic factors, and the media used to understand political literacy.

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