
The Influence of Money Politics on the Political Choices of the Buduran District Community in the East Java Gubernatorial Election

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Abstract

In the context of the gubernatorial election in East Java, this study examines how the political choices of the public are influenced by money politics. Money politics in a democratic system often affects voters' decisions, raising concerns about the integrity and quality of the electoral process. This research employs a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews and surveys to explore how voters react to offers of money politics and the consequences for their attitudes and behaviors when casting their votes. The study finds that although many voters are aware of the negative impacts of money politics, many accept the proposals due to economic reasons and pressing needs. Furthermore, the practice of money-focused politics often diverts voters' attention from candidates' goals and visions to the financial incentives offered. The findings of this research emphasize that, to ensure fairer and higher-quality elections in the future, voter education and strengthened regulations are necessary to combat the practice of money politics.

Keyword: Money Politics, Gubernatorial Election, Political Choice

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INTRODUCTION

One of the important components of the system of democracy is the general election, where voters have the right to choose the person who will lead the government. However, in fact, many things influence the election process. One of them is money politics, which means the practice of using money or goods to influence voters, raises questions about the integrity and fairness of the election process.

The influence of money, as demonstrated by bargaining material from the candidate's head area, has become a phenomenon in politics that is increasingly increasing in Sidoarjo during the gubernatorial Election. This phenomenon shows practices that are not ethical and a lack of awareness among political voters. Many of them tend to determine choice only based on the money or goods they receive, without considering the background, vision, or record of the candidate leader.

For example, a survey conducted by the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM) in the District of The Cradle Sidoarjo shows that 65% of respondents confess to receiving money or goods from the candidate they voted for, and 75% of them state that the influence matters in their decisions. This situation challenges a strong and sustainable democratic process. Because voters must understand political issues and know what they are answering to choose a leader who can bring positive changes in their areas. Practices like this not only disrupt the election process but also damage the public's belief in the system of democracy itself.

By using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study aims to study how the choice of political voters in the District of The Buduran in Sidoarjo is influenced by political money. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide an in-depth and comprehensive picture of the behavior and motivation of voters. By using a descriptive approach, researchers can collect rich data from direct experience with voters. This approach describes the behavior and motivation of voters as a whole. This study will conduct interviews and observations to find out how voters in the District of Sidoarjo respond to money politics and how it affects their political decisions. In addition, this research will also examine factors that influence vulnerable voters to practice money politics, such as their background in the social economy and the level of their education.

Previous studies show that money politics can influence preference voters as well as bother legitimacy election (Mochamad, 2021; Rahman, 2022). In addition, research conducted by Santoso (2020) found that use of money in political can cause dissatisfaction voters after election because they feel trapped in transactions that are not fair. Other research by Widiastuti (2021) emphasizes importance education political in reduce impact negative money politics against voters. This research is expected can provide a better understanding of dynamics politics that occur in the sub-district area The cradle Sidoarjo by looking at context local Sidoarjo. This research is very different from previous research, which is usually of a general and not notice aspect special from the field. This research uses context local to explain the variables specifically affecting voter behavior in Sidoarjo. This research is expected can improve understanding We about behavior voters and make appropriate recommendations to strengthen integrity election general in Indonesia with the aim of increasing participation good and sustainable politics,

The consolidation of democracy in post-authoritarian Indonesia has been accompanied by persistent problems of clientelism and vote buying. These practices, commonly described as

money politics, continue to challenge the integrity of electoral democracy and weaken the connection between citizens and political institutions (Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019; Muhtadi, 2019). Despite electoral reforms and the establishment of oversight bodies such as the Election Supervisory Board (*Bawaslu*), the use of material inducements to secure votes remains widespread across Indonesia's local elections (*pilkada*) (Susanti, 2021).

In a democratic system, elections are ideally a reflection of rational choice and ideological preference. However, in many regions of Indonesia, electoral behavior is shaped less by programmatic evaluations and more by material incentives and patron-client networks (Hicken 2011; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). Money politics, therefore, represents not only an electoral irregularity but also a deeply embedded social phenomenon sustained by cultural norms of reciprocity, economic inequality, and political dependency (Arianto 2020; Rahmada 2017).

Buduran District in Sidoarjo, East Java, offers a striking microcosm of this phenomenon, as a semi-urban area with mixed socioeconomic demographics, Buduran displays how economic precarity and local cultural expectations converge to normalize vote buying. Reports from the 2018 East Java gubernatorial election suggest that financial or material incentives were distributed widely, ranging from direct cash transfers to household goods (Benigna 2019; Rozy et al. 2020). For many residents, such exchanges were not interpreted as bribery but as a legitimate or even expected form of political engagement. This normalization raises sociological questions about how individuals perceive, rationalize, and participate in money politics as part of everyday life (Hawing and Hartaman 2021).

Previous studies have primarily examined money politics through legalistic or political-economic lenses, focusing on the mechanisms of vote buying and its impact on electoral outcomes (Aspinall and Sukmajati 2016; Noor 2021). While these approaches are valuable, they often overlook the moral, symbolic, and cultural dimensions that sustain these practices at the grassroots level. In particular, little is known about how local voters internalize the practice of money politics and how such acceptance is shaped by historical experiences of economic dependency and social inequality (Scott 1976; Bourdieu 1977).

From a sociological standpoint, money politics cannot be understood solely as corruption or deviant behavior. Rather, it should be examined as a *socially embedded practice* that reflects a complex interplay of power, morality, and survival strategies. Voters' decisions to accept money are frequently driven by material necessity, as well as social expectations of reciprocity and mutual obligation within their communities (Amal 2022; Fionna 2017). These practices embody what Scott (1976) termed the *moral economy* of subsistence societies, where exchanges are legitimized through shared moral values rather than formal legality.

At the same time, the persistence of these practices indicates a *habitus*—in Bourdieu's (1977) sense—formed by historical conditions of marginalization and dependency. In this view, voters' participation in money politics is less an individual moral failure and more a manifestation of socially conditioned dispositions within unequal power structures. Understanding this *habitus* is crucial for explaining why money politics persists even among voters who recognize its ethical problems.

This study aims to investigate how money politics influences voter behavior in Buduran District during the East Java gubernatorial election, using a sociological approach that integrates clientelism, *habitus*, and moral economy theories. Specifically, it addresses the following research question: How do social structures, economic vulnerability, and moral reasoning shape

voters' engagement with money politics at the local level?

The significance of this research lies in its ability to bridge micro-level voter experiences with macro-level structures of political inequality. By situating money politics within its social and cultural contexts, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how democratic participation in Indonesia is both practiced and constrained by enduring patterns of clientelism and moral dependency. It seeks to move beyond normative condemnations of vote buying toward a more nuanced sociological explanation of why such practices remain resilient within Indonesia's evolving democracy.

This study offers a distinctive sociological contribution to the study of money politics by integrating clientelism theory, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and Scott's notion of moral economy to explain voters' engagement with transactional politics at the local level. Previous research has predominantly examined vote buying through political science or economic lenses, focusing on elite strategies, legal enforcement, or voter rationality. In contrast, this research highlights the social embeddedness and moral normalization of money politics within everyday life in Buduran District, East Java.

By analyzing how voters rationalize monetary exchanges through cultural logics of reciprocity and survival, this study reframes money politics not merely as electoral corruption but as a socially legitimate practice rooted in historical inequality and symbolic dependence. The qualitative approach—using in-depth interviews and participatory observation—provides new empirical insights into how local actors experience and justify political transactions. Thus, this research advances the sociological understanding of democratic behavior by revealing how material scarcity, moral reasoning, and political habitus interact to reproduce clientelism in Indonesia's local democracy.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to examine how money politics influences voter behavior in Buduran District during the 2018 East Java gubernatorial election. A qualitative method was chosen to capture participants' experiences, moral reasoning, and cultural meanings in their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018), focusing on depth and context rather than generalization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). A case study design was employed to explore this phenomenon within its specific social setting (Yin, 2018). Buduran District in Sidoarjo Regency was selected purposively due to its high political participation and reported cases of money politics. As a semi-urban area with economic vulnerability and dense social networks, it provides a suitable context for examining localized clientelistic interactions.

Participants were chosen through purposive sampling, targeting voters with direct or indirect experiences of money politics. Fifteen respondents—men and women from various educational and occupational backgrounds—were interviewed. Selection criteria included prior participation in regional elections and familiarity with campaign-related transactions (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data were collected through:

1. In-depth interviews to explore voters' attitudes and motivations;

2. Participant observation during community meetings and campaign events to capture social dynamics; and
3. Document analysis of local news, election commission data, and previous studies for triangulation (Flick, 2014).

This case study highlights how money politics operates within Sidoarjo's socio-political landscape, where culture, economy, and local politics shape voter behavior. Research subjects consisted of registered voters meeting criteria of prior election participation and knowledge or experience of money politics, either as witnesses or beneficiaries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found a number of important findings about how money politics influences voters' choices in Sidoarjo during the gubernatorial Election. Based on interviews and reviews conducted, results the main results are as follows :

Many voters say that the candidate's head area gives them money, basic necessities, and other goods before the election. These methods vary, ranging from giving straight to home to campaign events where the candidate presents.

Most of the voters involved in practice money politics has a tendency to consider the reasons behind their decision . They believe that getting money or goods is the right way to repay support. Many feel that candidate who provides assistance more sensitive to need public.

Many informant say that money politics influences their choice . Although a number of them still consider history candidates and their goals , choices end significantly influenced by offers of political money.

Voters Sidoarjo not enough aware politics , according to this study. Many voters do not know what should candidates do leaders , so they are more interested in instant bonus rather than a more work program wide.

There are some skeptical voters to practice money politics , but Because pressure their social and economic status is not can reject the proposal . This shows moral dilemma faced voters . This study shows that practice money politics in the sub-district The cradle Sidoarjo has a significant influence to decision politics made by voters . Previous studies show that money politics can change preference picky and annoying legitimacy election (Mochamad , 2021; Rahman, 2022). Diversity practice political money based shows method creative used by candidates to get support voters . Those who vote use rationalization to show that they are trying support action. Because need urgent economic and social problems. To overcome practice money politics , a method that targets the root of the problem, such as improving welfare society , must used .

Studies have show that there is a strong relationship between choice voters and choices material. This shows how importance education politics to raise awareness voters about importance choose candidate based on their vision and mission , not profit financial fast . Good political education can help voters make more choices informed and impactful term long. Awareness low politics among voters Sidoarjo is an obstacle big for the democratic process . Voters tend trapped in cycle practice politics that focuses on money if they don't understand position and responsibilities

answer leaders. Therefore, the development of socialization and education programs that can increase understanding political society is very important.

View skeptical to practice money politics shows that There is awareness will effect negative from practice This view also shows that voters face moral dilemma . Many people feel forced accept offer in a situation where they need money, even though they know it is not ethical. This requires attention more from government and institutions related to creating an enabling environment voters reject offer financial political without worry lost support

The study found that money politics has become woven into the moral and cultural fabric of everyday life in Buduran District. Community members described monetary exchanges during local elections as “common practice” or “part of the season,” indicating how transactional politics has been internalized within their social world. In local discourse, these acts were not equated with corruption but rather viewed as expressions of mutual respect and social reciprocity. This normalization corresponds with Aspinall and Berenschot’s (2019) concept of *everyday clientelism*, where the circulation of material resources maintains social networks and reinforces political loyalty.

Participants emphasized that receiving money did not constitute moral wrongdoing, but represented an acknowledgment of their political importance. This aligns with Scott’s (1976) *moral economy*, which interprets such acts through the moral logic of fairness and redistributive justice. For many villagers, accepting money or goods was seen as a legitimate compensation for their engagement in electoral processes, especially in a context where state benefits are scarce (Muhtadi, 2019; Noor, 2021). Thus, money politics emerges not as a corrupt aberration but as a socially embedded exchange sustained by shared norms of obligation and gratitude.

Clientelistic Relations and Local Authority. The local political landscape in Buduran reveals dense networks of clientelistic relations linking voters, community intermediaries, and political elites. Field interactions showed that local brokers—often *RT/RW* heads, religious teachers, or youth leaders—acted as cultural mediators who distributed incentives and translated them into socially acceptable forms. These brokers were not perceived as manipulative agents but as trusted connectors who ensured fairness in the distribution of campaign resources.

Such networks resonate with the argument by Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) that clientelism depends on personalized and reciprocal obligations rather than institutionalized rules. As Hicken (2011) observes, these ties are maintained through hierarchical but emotionally charged relationships. In Buduran, political loyalty was framed not as coercion but as moral debt (*utang budi*)—a relational ethic deeply rooted in Javanese cultural life. This cultural framing transforms what might appear as vote-buying into a morally acceptable gesture of care (Amal, 2022; Fionna, 2017).

Through the lens of Bourdieu’s (1977) habitus, these practices illustrate how dispositions toward dependency and reciprocity are internalized across generations. The acceptance of money becomes a “naturalized” act—a manifestation of an ingrained political habitus shaped by long-standing structural inequalities and symbolic hierarchies.

Habitus and Political Dependency. The findings indicate that political dependency functions as both a material condition and a cultural disposition. Community members often framed their engagement with money politics as pragmatic rather than ideological. They articulated that

“leaders should share their blessings,” reflecting a habitus molded by economic vulnerability and historical subordination.

Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of *symbolic violence* helps interpret how domination persists subtly through misrecognition. When elites distribute money, they reaffirm social hierarchies while concealing the transactional logic of power under the moral language of generosity. Such relationships mirror the *moral economy of subordination* identified by Sidel (2015) in the Philippines and Walker (2012) in Thailand, where electoral exchanges embody cultural reciprocity more than coercive control.

In Buduran, the moral dimension of giving and receiving is tied to everyday survival. The community interprets campaign assistance as part of the redistributive moral order, a practical adaptation to limited state welfare (Arianto, 2020; Nugroho, 2021). Thus, the act of taking money becomes both an economic necessity and a moral affirmation of belonging within the social hierarchy.

The Moral Economy of Reciprocity. Ethnographic observation showed that community members frequently justified their participation in money politics through moral narratives of fairness, politeness, and social harmony. Many expressed that it would be *impolite* to reject a candidate’s gift or that refusing would signal arrogance. These statements reflect Scott’s (1985) concept of the moral economy, where social behavior is governed not by market rationality but by communal ethics.

This finding echoes Crouch’s (2010) and Aspinall and Sukmajati’s (2016) analyses, which argue that money politics operates as a *social contract of mutual assistance*. Candidates provide temporary relief during elections, while citizens reciprocate through symbolic loyalty. In this sense, money politics functions as an informal welfare system compensating for the uneven reach of the state (Hadiz & Robison, 2017).

However, this moral economy also reproduces inequality. By transforming material dependency into moral virtue, political elites sustain legitimacy while deepening economic stratification. The exchange becomes self-reinforcing: moral obligation conceals material subordination, and community harmony perpetuates asymmetrical power relations (Hadiz, 2017; Warburton & Aspinall, 2019).

Trust Networks and Cultural Brokers. The role of local intermediaries emerged as central to sustaining political transactions. These actors, often well-integrated within social and religious institutions, mediated between candidates and communities. Their legitimacy stemmed from long-standing trust relationships, enabling them to convert political resources into social value (Berenschot, 2018; Aspinall et al., 2020).

The field observations showed that community members rarely engaged directly with candidates; instead, exchanges occurred through these intermediaries who personalized and moralized political transactions. This process exemplifies Putnam’s (2000) concept of *bonding social capital*, where tight-knit community relations foster cooperation but can also reinforce exclusivity and patronage.

Such reliance on brokers mirrors the dual nature of Indonesia’s democracy: procedurally open yet substantively mediated by informal networks (Hicken, 2011). This mediation transforms political participation from an act of autonomous citizenship into a relational practice rooted in familiarity, gratitude, and trust (Crouch, 2010; Noor, 2021).

Moral Ambivalence and Pragmatic Agency. Although money politics was largely accepted, traces of moral ambivalence were evident in conversations. Several informants described the practice as “inevitable but uncomfortable,” reflecting a tension between democratic ideals and economic realities. This ambivalence supports Pelizzo’s (2016) argument that citizens in transitional democracies navigate conflicting moral orders.

Interestingly, some participants admitted accepting money from multiple candidates yet voting according to personal preference. This pragmatic maneuver illustrates what Ong (2018) describes as *situational ethics*—the flexible negotiation of morality within constrained circumstances. In Buduran, such acts reflect both compliance and subtle resistance. By performing loyalty outwardly while preserving personal choice, individuals enact a form of quiet subversion within the clientelistic system (Ziegenhain, 2020).

Thus, money politics persists not simply because of coercion or ignorance but because it provides space for negotiated agency—a delicate balance between material benefit, moral expectation, and individual autonomy. The sociological meaning of money politics, therefore, extends beyond electoral manipulation. It represents an informal moral economy where redistribution, legitimacy, and loyalty intertwine within the lived realities of local democracy. Understanding this process requires moving from condemnation to comprehension, recognizing how morality, habitus, and structure co-produce Indonesia’s political life.

CONCLUSION

The practice of using money for political purposes has become a significant phenomenon during general elections, particularly in The Cradle District during the East Java gubernatorial election. This study shows that material offers from regional head candidates often influence people's political choices. Many voters prioritize immediate benefits over the candidate's track record, travel history, and track record. The collected data indicates that other factors making voters more susceptible to money politics are low political awareness and a lack of access to information.

This phenomenon poses a significant challenge to the sustainability of democracy because it can undermine the fairness of elections and erode public trust in the political system. Consequently, it is crucial for educational institutions, the government, and civil society organizations to work together to raise political awareness, strengthen regulations governing political money, and encourage broader public participation in elections. It is hoped that these actions will improve the quality of politics in Indonesia, particularly in The Slumber District. I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who contributed to this research. Your support and insights are invaluable.

The authors strive to understand political dynamics and support democratic principles in Indonesia. With a background in political science, they strive to encourage citizens to participate in the electoral process in an informed manner

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