

THE MEANING OF MONEY AS A DETERMINANT OF VOTING BEHAVIOR IN JEMBER: A PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

Haessa Lintang Rizkika ^{*1}, Iffan Gallant El Muhammady ²

¹Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Jawa Timur - Indonesia

²Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember, Jember, Jawa Timur - Indonesia

Corresponding author: Haessa Lintang Rizkika (haessa.lintang.rizkika-2023@psikologi.unair.ac.id)

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Abstract

In today's Indonesia, organizing a democratic party's general election (election) is commonly referred to as "money politics." A democratic party's political decision should ideally be based on a shared interest in the candidate's vision and goal, or on shared ideology, and carried out in accordance with societal values and conventions. However, money politics has become a common tactic in our elections as a means of gaining voters. This study attempts to discuss this phenomenon through a qualitative approach and a phenomenology study, with the results being a description of the meaning of money and the psychological reasoning behind vote-buying behavior on both sides. The findings show that 'giving', in the informant's opinion, is an alms, affection, and present that should be valued rather than a violation of the law or a negative thing. Second, giving is perceived as something that does not contradict one's or society's values and norms. The pattern of interactions between political candidates and voters in a vertical relationship develops a strong need relationship because the modeling process that results from this practice is done by many people and has been done for years. Third, voters have the resources and opportunities to engage in money politics or vote-buying activities. Where re-sources support the practice of money politics' long-term viability due to lax law enforcement and private-sector activities.

Keywords: money politics, voting behavior, phenomenology

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has held 13 elections since 1955. During this period, the Indonesian electoral system underwent various changes. The fundamental thing that changed in the reform era was the freedom to form parties and participate in elections. In Indonesia on its own, there were 514 regencies/cities, 7,277 sub-districts, 83,731 villages/sub-districts, and 820,161 polling stations, with 101,467,243 male voters and 101,589,505 female voters, for a total of 203,056,748 domestic voters in the 2024 election (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, 2023). This means that more than 75% of the total Indonesian population participates in the election process. Elections are one of the important characteristics of a democracy. The regular

holding of elections allows the change of power to be carried out peacefully. In addition, elections can also put pressure on power holders to pay attention to the interests of the general public. If so, government political figures or parties can be punished by not being re-elected in the next election (Sen, 1999). Not only in Indonesia, more than 90% of countries in the world choose their leaders through multi-party elections. (Buhanuddin Muhtadi, 2019)

In a general election, the thing that is quite interesting to note in the political participation of the community is the dynamics that occur in voting behaviour. Every society has their own preferences and interests to determine their choice in the election. This is why voters choose certain contestants and not other contestants. It can be said that the future of elected public officials in an election depends on the preferences of the people as voters. So scientists developed a study to look at this preference. Prediction of political election behaviour is a major task for social scientists and survey agencies. Even today, predictions of the outcome of major political elections in rich countries based on the best available algorithms are sometimes way off the mark. (Friese et al., 2016).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

From several studies that have been conducted, party attachment and loyalty are perhaps the most well-known factors that shape voter choice. After all, alignments are the strongest predictor of who a person chooses to be. But it's not just a matter of whether there is a particular party next to the voter's name. Voters who consider whether they feel closer to a particular party to be an important part of their identity are highly unlikely to vote for a candidate on the opposing side. However, if the level of affiliation is "weak," then it is likely to change to other parties and candidates. However, an interesting thing is found in the party IDs of the people in Indonesia. Based on the results of a national survey conducted by Indonesian Political Indicators (Salabi, 2021) shows that the party identity of the Indonesian people is low. This is indicated by the data that only 6.8 percent of the 1,200 respondents spread across all provinces in Indonesia stated that there were political parties that they felt were close to the respondents. The rest, 92.3 percent, answered no. Other findings were presented by the Saiful Mujani Research Center. A survey conducted by the Saiful Mujani Research Center (SMRC) in December 2017, stated that the level of proximity of Indonesian citizens to the party they believed in was only 11.7 percent. In a world comparative study, the survey results make Indonesia one of the countries with the lowest level of party identification in the world (Basrianto, 2018). The low party-ID in Indonesia so far has only been underestimated as a problem of democracy in Indonesia. If studied further, the low party-ID becomes the root of other derivative problems. There are some serious problems that are caused by the low party-ID in Indonesia.

Most notably, the low party-ID makes the political costs high. In Indonesia, the practice of political voluntarism that comes purely from citizen initiatives to win over

certain parties does not seem to have become entrenched. In the context of legislative elections, it is the candidates who have been working extra to find voters. One of the things that candidates often do is buy voters' votes. In a study conducted by (Muhtadi, 2020) the practice of buying and selling votes (money politics) in Indonesia is very widespread. In the 2014 general election, Muhtadi found that 33 percent of the total voters admitted that they had been offered bribes to vote for certain candidates. This means that, out of 187 registered voters, nearly 62 million people were targeted by the practice of buying and selling votes. With the fertile practices of money politics, it is indicated that corruption, particularly political corruption, has taken root and tends to be accepted by many people. The legitimacy of corrupt behaviour that indicates the influence of the environment or a form of compromise in social interactions makes money politics something "plural" and "congregational" in our society. As the theory of Laswell in (Matullesy, 2018) given that voting behaviour is influenced by both environmental and internal factors, it appears that money politics has a role to play in attracting voters in Indonesia. So that, researchers are interested in conducting further research on the meaning of money as a determinant of voting behaviour in elections. The goal is to describe the meaning of money in voting behaviour and be able to explain the conditions of reality in society that affect the occurrence of money in politics itself. So that later it can be used as reference material in handling and formulating policies for handling money politics in Jember and in Indonesia.

3. METHOD

This study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of voters with vote buying experiences. Phenomenology is chosen for its ability to uncover deep insights into the subjective perceptions and meanings that individuals assign to their experiences (Qutoshi, 2018). Jember is one of the cities in Indonesia which represents cultural diversity as a large pot or also known as Pandalungan. The socio-political dynamics in Jember Regency are very interesting as a background for the research focus because the people are quite active in participating in the political process, based on KPU data (KPU, 2024), more than 75% of the people voted in the 2024 legislative elections. Therefore, the locus of the research has been carefully chosen to align with the lived experiences of the participants in relation to vote buying. Informants will be selected based on their direct experience with vote buying in 2024 elections. A purposive sampling strategy will be utilized to ensure that participants represent a wide spectrum of perspectives within the phenomenon under investigation. Data will be collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, which will allow participants to express their thoughts and feelings related to their experiences. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this phenomenological research, ethical considerations are paramount. Participants will be fully informed about the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants. Privacy and confidentiality will be strictly maintained throughout the study, and personal identifiers will be removed or altered in the presentation of the data, in accordance with IRB guidelines and ethical research practices.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in phenomenology involves a detailed and systematic examination of transcribed interviews and observations. The analytical process follows a hermeneutic tradition, considering both the subjective meanings conveyed by participants and the broader cultural and societal contexts. Analysis will be iterative and recursive, involving coding of the data into themes, clustering of these themes into patterns, and seeking essences of the phenomenon. This process may be supported by qualitative data analysis software to enhance organization and thematic development. Constant comparison will be used to explore variance in experiences among participants, ensuring a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. The findings will be continuously referenced against the existing literature to anchor the insights within the established body of knowledge.

In conclusion, this phenomenological study will provide an in-depth understanding of vote buying phenomenon, guided by a structured yet flexible methodological framework that respects the complexity of lived experiences. The use of literature will not only serve to contextualize the findings but will also enable the study to contribute meaningfully to the academic discourse on vote behaviour. The ethical treatment of participants and the rigorous analysis of data will ensure the credibility and integrity of the study's findings.

4. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

a. Results

In this study, the authors involved five research informants. The demographic picture of the informants shows that their average level of education only reaches the primary education level. Then the work carried out is work with an average income below the minimum wage, generally at the middle age or middle age level.

Table1. Informants Roles

Informants	Gender	Position	Partisanship
A	Male	Voters	Partisan
J	Male	Voters	Partisan

K	Female	Voters	Partisan
M	Female	Voters	Non Partisan
T	Male	Voters	Non Partisan

From the table 1, partisanship commonly refers to strong, loyal support for a particular political party, often leading to a tendency to support party policies and positions without much consideration for alternative viewpoints. It can also contribute to polarization within the political climate, where there is less common ground between different political parties. Non-partisan refers to actions or initiatives that are not affiliated with any political party or ideology.

From the research results obtained, all informants stated that in choosing political candidates, money is still a very important factor in determining whether individuals choose to vote or not. In the context of general elections, voting behaviour is an individual action. This is due to the existence of full authority for individuals who have fulfilled special requirements as citizens to determine their own political choices, in this case, voting. Voting behaviour is one form of political behaviour in a general election. Voting behaviour is a person's behaviour in determining the choice he feels is the most preferred or most suitable (Muluk, 2012).

According to the interview results, giving money has a different meaning for each individual. For example, informant 'A' stated that money is interpreted as an alms from someone who will become a potential leader. Alms in the meaning of Islam (the majority of people in Indonesia are Muslim) have a positive connotation, which is the obligation of a Muslim to help others in the form of money or goods. On the other hand, 'T' and 'J' agreed that money was interpreted as a reward for those who exercised their right to vote. Due to the fact that most people prefer to work rather than vote at the polling station, money is considered compensation for not going to work. While the "gift" is stated both by 'K' and 'M', which means money as the appreciation of the community group, and must be carried out by political candidates.

The concept of money is often perceived as a universal and objective measure of value, but the interview results presented here demonstrate that money has different meanings for each individual. This phenomenological analysis aims to explore the subjective nature of money and its significance in various contexts.

The Lived Experience of Money

The interviews reveal that money is not just a means of exchange but is imbued with meaning and significance. For example, Informant 'A' views money as an alms from someone who will become a potential leader, reflecting the positive connotation of alms in the context of Islam. This interpretation highlights the importance of social responsibility and the obligation to help others.

The Experience of Voting

Informants 'T' and 'J' perceive money as a reward for exercising their right to vote. This interpretation is significant because it reveals the value placed on civic engagement and the importance of participating in the democratic process. The fact that most people prefer to work rather than vote at the polling station underscores the need for incentives to encourage participation.

The Gift of Money

Informants 'K' and 'M' view money as a gift, symbolizing the appreciation of the community group. This interpretation emphasizes the importance of community and the role of political candidates in fostering a sense of belonging. The expectation that political candidates must carry out this gift highlights the expectation of reciprocity and the importance of building relationships.

The diverse interpretations of money highlight the significance of context in shaping experiences and perceptions. The cultural and social norms that surround money can greatly influence how people understand and interact with it. The subjective nature of money is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is shaped by individual experiences, cultural norms, and social contexts.

b. Discussion

In a psychological approach, voter behaviour is determined by the power of psychological development that develops in voters—as a product of the socialization process. One's attitude here is a reflection of a person's personality, which is a determining variable in influencing political behaviour (Hadi & Susilo, 2006). Identify someone towards certain parties, which will then affect people's attitudes towards the candidates and the political issues that are developing. The strength and direction of party identification are key in explaining voter attitudes and behaviour (Muluk, 2012). The formation of attitudes does not just happen; it is a process of socialization that develops into a strong psychological bond between a person and a particular political party or candidate as well as the existing issues.

Azwar (2016) explains that an attitude is an evaluative response to an object. The response will only arise when the individual is faced with a stimulus that requires an individual reaction. The evaluative response means that the form of reaction expressed as an attitude arises based on an evaluation process within the individual that concludes the stimulus in the form of good-bad, positive-negative, pleasant-unpleasant values, which then crystallize as a reaction to the attitude object. From the results of the interview, it was found that the attitude possessed by the informant was positive towards the giving of money by political candidates. The attitude adopted consists of beliefs about the consequences of cognitive and affective behaviour. Cognitively, the informants believe that

money has positive benefits for them because they can directly feel the impact of giving money or goods.

The informant's perspective on vote buying highlights the complex interplay between personal needs, transactional politics, and the role of money in shaping their experiences. They feel that they can use money to meet their own and their family's needs, which is a common motivation for engaging in vote buying. Additionally, they perceive vote buying as a pleasant experience, as it provides them with a sense of being helped, which underscores their helplessness in dealing with the practice of money politics. Research has shown that vote buying can be an effective means of influencing voter behaviour, particularly in areas with limited access to political information (Kramon, 2016). It can also promote efficiency in certain contexts, such as the market for corporate control and some local political elections (Neeman & Orosel, 2006). Furthermore, vote buying can increase voter turnout and influence vote choice, especially in highly competitive election settings (Muhtadi, 2019).

The phenomenon of money politics in Indonesia is deeply rooted in the vertical relationship between political candidates and voters. Research by (Muhtadi, 2020) highlights the need for patron-client relationships in the political process, which is also reflected in the informant's expectations of being helped by political actors. This sense of helplessness towards political actors or candidates is a common phenomenon, as the community expects them to take prosocial actions, such as providing financial assistance.

The Role of Political Actors

In this context, political actors are expected to be "helpers" who provide financial support to voters. This expectation is further reinforced by the socio-demographic situation of the community, where most individuals are uneducated and poor. As a result, money politics becomes a practical means for political candidates to demonstrate their commitment to the community and gain their support. Research by (Way, 2017) has identified several factors that contribute to the prevalence of money politics in Kendari City. These include poverty, public misunderstanding of politics, and cultural factors. The study found that money politics is widespread in every sub-district in the city, highlighting the pervasive nature of this phenomenon.

Undoubtedly, structural, cultural, and economical issues can influence the voting market, as in the widespread cultural custom of giving money. Links between clients and patrons may foster a social environment that encourages vote buying. The incentives to buy votes can also be influenced by socioeconomic factors including income, urbanization, and degree of development. Many academics and decision-makers establish the connection between the prevalence of vote buying and the degree of economic progress. They contend that poverty is what drives the demand for and susceptibility to vote buying and other forms of clientelism (Hicken, 2008). All else being equal, when wages rise, the cost of vote buying will increase while the advantages decrease, making other tactics more enticing (Eggert &

Sørensen, 2008; Gersbach & Mühe, 2011). In particular, the marginal advantage to a voter of a given amount of funding from a candidate declines as incomes grow. Candidates must raise the amount of money they give out in order to retain a certain level of support through vote buying. Given this, candidates may find it more enticing to reduce vote buying and switch to different personal vote techniques that result in a greater return (Charles & Stephens Jr.s, 2013; Guvercin, 2018; Matsubayashi & Sakaiya, 2018).

This study not only examines the pattern of relationships between political candidates and voters but also introduces novel factors that directly contribute to the perpetuation of money politics in Indonesia. One such factor is the process of modelling or imitating the behaviour of others, as proposed by Bandura (Abdullah, 2019). According to Bandura, observing others is a powerful means of learning without direct involvement. Humans learn by observing the behaviour of others, a process known as vicarious learning. This process involves focusing attention, constructing images, remembering, analyzing, and making decisions that ultimately affect learning.

The Role of Vicarious Learning

Vicarious learning plays a significant role in the perpetuation of money politics in Indonesia. By observing the behaviour of political candidates and other influential individuals, people learn to associate certain actions with positive outcomes. This can lead to the adoption of similar behaviours, such as accepting money in exchange for votes. The influence of vicarious learning is particularly pronounced in societies where education and awareness about political processes are limited. Vicarious learning, particularly in societies with limited political education, plays a significant role in shaping political awareness and participation among people (Ruitenberg, 2010; Yoldaş, 2015).

The impact of vicarious learning on money politics is multifaceted. Firstly, it perpetuates the practice of money politics by creating a culture where individuals learn to associate financial gain with political involvement. Secondly, it reinforces the notion that political candidates are expected to provide financial support to voters, further solidifying the patron-client relationship. Finally, it contributes to the normalization of money politics, making it a widely accepted practice in Indonesian politics. In the context of money politics behaviour, the informants learn by looking at the many money politics practices that have been carried out by the community even before the open election, which then influences the informant to imitate them. The practice of giving has existed since the New Order period, with different goals but having the same operandi. Closed elections also provide a mobility strategy using the money given to party sympathizers to be more loyal and vote for that party in the election. The shift, or difference, with today's outline is that money in closed elections is used to encourage voters to vote for parties, and in open elections, money is used to encourage voters to personally vote for political candidates.

The Sustainability of Money Politics

The last factor that supports the sustainability of money politics in Indonesia is the informants' belief that receiving money from political candidates will not result in negative consequences. This belief is rooted in their experience, where they have not encountered obstacles or sanctions from law enforcement. Although the Indonesian Criminal Code regulates the practice of giving money as a criminal offense (Irawan et al., 2014), the lack of serious law enforcement efforts has created a culture of impunity. Research has shown that public confidence in policing is influenced by perceptions of the values and morals of the police force, as well as their treatment of the public (Jackson & Sunshine, 2007). This confidence is further bolstered by a belief in the effectiveness of law enforcement, which is negatively correlated with delinquency and positively correlated with respect for the law and police (Jensen, 1969).

This belief has indirectly led to the repetition of behaviour, where both political actors and voters need each other. Political actors require positions or power, while voters need practical benefits from political actors. The informants' lack of worries about dealing with the money political situation is further reinforced by the private nature of the giving process. The direct, systematic, and private distribution of money by the success team visiting voters from house to house creates an opportunity for bigger transactions due to the privacy element of the giving process.

The privacy element of the giving process has a significant impact on the sustainability of money politics. It allows political actors to operate with relative impunity, as the private nature of the transactions makes it difficult for law enforcement to detect and prosecute such activities. This, in turn, perpetuates the practice of money politics, as voters are more likely to engage in such activities if they feel that there are no consequences for doing so.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the meaning of giving money in the election process in Indonesia is that giving money is considered a representation of prosocial actions. The informant's perception is that giving is considered an alms, affection, and gift that must be accepted and not a violation of the law or a negative thing. Second, giving is something that is considered not to violate the values and norms of the individual and society. Because the modelling process that occurs because of this practice is done by many people and has been done for years, Then the pattern of relationships between political candidates and voters who are in a vertical relationship creates a strong relationship of needs. Third, individuals have the resources and opportunities to do money politics. Where resources support the sustainability of the practice of money politics due to weak law enforcement and practices carried out in the private sphere.

In additions, this study shows how money politics has become the new normal in elections. So, unless the electoral system is evaluated or, at the very least, modified on the

supply side, legislative candidates will continue to rely on money politics as the ultimate weapon to win personal votes. As a result, elections fail to become an instrument for producing public officials with integrity. Elections have become a battleground for financial power. Sovereignty over money will be the keyword for electoral victory. Instead of elections being a means of realizing good governance and being free from corruption, they are actually the initial source of damage to our political integrity. In addition, further researchers can conduct further studies related to the psychological dynamics of individuals who run money politics in comparative or experimental studies so that intrinsic or internal factors can be generalized to a wider population.

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