

## University student voters' resistance to money politics

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**Abstract:** The practice of money politics damages the essence of fairness in democracy. It can encourage abnormalities in democracy if its practice is seen as acceptable by young voters. The perceptions and reactions of young voters about money politics can influence the implementation of democracy and fair state politics. This study aimed to examine the practice of money politics among young student voters in Surabaya and their resistance to it. This study also attempted to respond to a gap in the literature regarding resistance to money politics among young voters. The research method consisted of two stages; first, exploring the responses of young voters about money politics through focus group discussions, and second, specifically using the phenomenological method with various empirical experiences and individual awareness regarding various actions and responses to the practice of money politics. This study found that young student voters carried out acts of resistance to money politics but not with real resistance. Instead, they showed silent resistance. The resistance was shown through taking the act of not voting in the election as a form of distrust toward the candidates, and other actions such as taking counter-adaptive actions by accepting the money given but not choosing candidates who carried out money politics. The rationality of novice voters in rejecting money politics was driven by good political values but their lack of ability to put up a fight encouraged silent resistance.

**Keywords:** Money Politics, Young Voters, Resistance

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### Introduction

Money politics is a common phenomenon occurring during every election in Indonesia. Its existence seems to have become a tradition in our democratic governance. There is the term democracy for sale where democracy is usually implemented in transactional ways (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). This of course is far from the substance of democracy, where it is expected to produce leaders who fight for people's aspirations. The practice of money politics also makes elections in Indonesia costly. Consequently, candidates with no funding will unlikely be selected no matter the quality. This then encourages candidates to look for other funding sources from capital holders.

The transition from indirect regional election to direct one has led to widespread money politics. Money politics has become an important element in winning candidates, both at the executive and legislative levels. One of the considerations for the transition of the Pilkada mechanism by the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) to direct Pilkada is to cut money politics, logically candidates do not have the ability to buy the votes of the people with a large number. However, the facts show that even in direct regional elections, money politics takes place, although at an increasingly expensive cost because it involves voters in one electoral area. During the election of regional heads by the Regional House of Representatives, money politics also surfaced, but in direct regional elections, it has become more widespread (Fitriyah, 2012). Another factor that causes the practice of money politicking to thrive is the poor economic level of the community.

Research from the Election and Democracy Syndicate (SPD) found that society is permissive toward money politics. This is related to the public's perception that money politics is a fortune

that should not be refused (Salabi, 2020). This permissive attitude was also found in research conducted by LIPI in 2019. According to LIPI, people think that money politics and gifts are parts of elections (Purnamasari, 2019). However, the permissive attitude toward money politics is apparently not in line with the community's commitment to selecting candidates practicing it. For example, the SPD survey found that 60% of people in Indonesia accept the forms of money politics and of the 60% who accepted, only 49% considered voting for the candidates distributing the money. Whereas a survey from LIPI shows that 40% of people who accepted money politics did not consider voting for the candidates practicing it. This shows that society is more pragmatic in viewing money politics.

There are several ways of carrying out money politics: (1) Direct money politics involving the distribution of cash by a certain candidate's campaign team to potential constituents, (2) donations from prospective candidates to political parties that have supported them, or (3) "obligatory contribution" required by a political party to party cadres or prospective candidates who wish to run for governor, regent, or mayor. As for money politics, it can indirectly take the form of distributing gifts or door prizes, distributing groceries to constituents, distributing cement in certain constituencies, and so on. Candidates cannot even exactly calculate how much they have spent on donations, gifts, and banners, as well as official fees for membership registration, paying witnesses, and other administrative needs (Karim, 2020).

In the 2018 East Java Regional Election, there were various reports regarding the implementation of money politics during the campaign period and on election day. Among these reports were from Bangkalan Regency (2 reports), Bojonegoro (3 reports), and Magetan Regency (1 report) (Karim, 2020). Unfortunately, all of these reports stopped at the Sentra Gakkumdu due to a lack of material and formal evidence. This indicates that money politics practices will still be one of the most effective strategies for candidates. Besides being very effective in attracting voters' interest, there is also no firm action for perpetrators practicing money politics.

A great hope in preventing the practice of money politics in elections lies within the generation of university students. University students should ideally have a different perspective on money politics. They might not be tempted by Rp. 25,000 – Rp. 50,000 given. They also did not have as many dependents compared to the previous generation. They are also not classified as poor because of their status since most of them are students, working students, or students looking for work. As parts of generation Z who understand technology and are generally more literate, they will be able to access various sources of information, including about their future leaders. This research aimed to investigate how student voters view money politics as well as their resistance to responding to money politics. This resistance should be present among university students as their generation is considered quite idealistic.

Movements against money politics among students have not been studied much. The patterns of their movements, the effects of these movements, and the responses from fellow students in seeing the movement against money politics. One of the movements against money politics is the Gerakan Pemuda Peduli Demokrasi (GPPD) which carried out a simultaneous campaign against hoaxes and money politics in 19 East Java Regional Election in 2020 instigated by students from Airlangga University, Surabaya (Azmi, 2020). Moreover, Kita Arek Surabaya Community (Karsa) made a declaration against money politics in the Mayor Election of Surabaya in 2020 (Kurniawan, 2020), even though the movement carried out was aimed at supporting one of the candidate pairs.

The practice of money politics raises two different reactions in society. First, there is permissiveness or acceptance of money politics and second, there is rejection or resistance arising from students. This research focused on the second reaction which was the resistance to money politics among university students. It explored how far their pattern of resistance was, what kind of pattern was done, and how far their understanding was of the movement being carried out. This research also investigated how the student's internal upheaval was when responding to money politics. Apart from putting up resistance, the existence of those who were adaptive to the money politics movement was also investigated.

## Methods

This study employed a qualitative method using a phenomenological approach used to research, examine, and also analyze the empirical conditions of the object being studied. Phenomenology seeks to explore the meaning and concept of one's life within the framework of intersubjectivity (Strauss, 2013). This approach comes from individual awareness of phenomena experienced directly. In this case, students were experiencing the phenomenon of money politics in the 2020 regional election and their attitude toward the phenomenon was studied. This approach required this research to investigate more deeply the occurring phenomena and also the behavior of the actors involved to form empirical research in a real context even though there were limitations between the context and biased phenomena in the research object studied.

Efforts to capture the phenomenon of money politics among students are very important to understand the resulting relation patterns between the running candidates with student voters. The study questioned whether a patron-client pattern that influenced student voters to submit to the practice of money politics was formed, or if the formed pattern was a resistance to the differences in money politics. Consequently, there were rejections and other actions to express rejection, such as in the forms of abstentions or anti-money political campaigns.

This research had 115 respondents consisting of students in Surabaya who were given open-ended questions through Google Forms regarding money politics. From the 115 respondents, 11 people were then selected for the FGD to further study the issue through in-depth interviews.

## Results and Discussion

### Political Patronage and Money Politics

The term money politics is an interesting and broad discussion in the study of political science and government. It is described in various political phenomena such as in the forms of distributing money during campaigns, bribing the House of Representatives (DPR) to influence the policy-making process, and buying and selling serial numbers in political parties. These variations make the definition of money politics a little blurry. Everyone can interpret the term according to their own definition. This study specifically used the term by Aspinall (Aspinall, 2014), which described money politics as the concepts of patronage and clientelism.

According to Shefter's view, patronage is a profit-sharing among politicians to distribute something individually to voters, workers, or campaigners, to get political support from them. It is clear that patronage includes whatever is distributed by politicians (whether money, goods, or services) to get votes. This applies both individually and in groups. Matters abstract in nature such as political promises or political contracts and programs to be carried out are not included in this distribution category. Meanwhile, the term clientelism is a pattern of relations formed on an electoral basis. Referring to Hicken's explanation (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015) clientelism is divided into three definitions. First, the contingency or reciprocal provision of goods or services from one party (patron or client) is a direct response to the provision of benefits from another party. Second, hierarchical; there is an emphasis on the unequal power relations between the patron and clients. Third, the repetition aspect; clientelistic exchanges take place continuously. The hierarchical and ongoing relationship pattern certainly illustrates the need to make reciprocal efforts for the sake of electoral political support. The term reciprocity does not apply to candidates who give something to people they have never met or will not meet again (for example, distributing something to people outside their electoral area) so that no reciprocal efforts will be made and there is no pressure from the client after getting something from the candidate.

Money and patronal politics as well as clientelism are phenomena we are familiar with in post-reform Indonesian politics. This is due to the belief that patronal and money politics can affect voter preferences so that it benefits candidates who implement this strategy electorally (Okthariza, 2019). In Muhtadi's view, there are two major things discussed in money politics. First, money politics operates among the elites, starting from the President, the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia to the Regent/Mayor where they advance in elections through political parties and spend a lot of money to get ahead. Second, money politics operates at the

lower level where there is the practice of buying and selling votes in elections. This is also related to the dimension of money politics where the money spent can produce effective vote conversions and have a significant effect on the candidate's victory (Muhtadi, 2019).

The study conducted by Aspinall and Sukmajati mentions the use of money or goods in money politics. Aspinall stated that the practice of money politics still exists in the general elections in several Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015). Patronage and clientelism are considered the roots of the spread of money politics in developing countries since they are seen as socio-cultural products in which certain groups and those with privileges provide money or benefits in return for the loyalty of their followers. Patronage illustrates the existence of a personified relationship based on conditional loyalty and mutually beneficial transactions. If patronage refers to transactional practices material in nature, clientelism refers to the pattern of relations between candidates and political elites, voters, or supporters. In addition, clientelism relies more on social ties and religion (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015).

In study conducted by Schafer and Canare (Canare et al., 2018; Schaffer & Schedler, 2007), money politics is easy and very effective for targeting people with low incomes, even though the candidates do not specifically target low-income people to vote for them. However, the effectiveness of vote conversion among low-income people is considered to be more effective.

Wilkinson (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007) argued that public goods are desired by everyone in society with no one excluded from benefiting them. According to this definition, people's votes cannot be traded through clientelistic exchanges. Such an argument shows that exchange in money politics practices is not in the form of public goods in an economic sense, as defined by non-rival consumption and non-excludability. Even in consolidated democracies, 'public' honesty is politicized, 'targeted', and unequally distributed. In this case, the 'purity' of political honesty credentials as a public good needs to be carefully maintained' (Loader & Walker, 2007).

### **Critical Characteristics and Student Voters' Resistance**

Student voters are a very interesting topic in an electoral context. This is because of a large number of student voters reaching 35-40% of the total voters based on LIPI data for 2019 or a total of around 85 million out of 185 million voters. Furthermore, the impact of student participation is surely an attraction for anyone with an interest in elections. LIPI also stated that the characteristics of millennial generation tend to be rational and more aware of their participation (Abdi, 2018). In research conducted by Basuki, student voters are categorized into 3 groups; rational voters which are voters casting their votes with rational considerations and in-depth analysis, emotionally critical voters with idealistic and uncompromising characteristics, and novice voters who are new voters with the right to vote after reaching the voting age (Rahmat & Esther, 2016).

The word critical is closely related to reactions to things that are not in accordance with idealism. Critical students can be interpreted as students who fight against the current conditions. In the context of this study, the character of students in fighting money politics is interpreted as political resistance. This research focused on the definition of political resistance by Lilja (2022) and Foucault (1990) which is considered very suitable to describe the case of resistance to money politics.

In general, resistance is a form of reaction in relation to power. The close relationship between power and resistance then implies that resistance does not only challenge or provoke power but sometimes ends up supporting power (Lilja, 2022). In general, people who resist or dare to be different from others are labeled as people who deviate because they violate the existing rules or norms. They will be defined as people who are eccentric (abnormal). This means that forms of resistance are not always as expected. In fact, according to Lilja (2022), this resistance turns out to consolidate the power relation at stake. In more detail, Foucault (1990) explains that the relationship of power and resistance is a long thread that is connected to one another, attracts and propagates one another, but finds their support base elsewhere and forms a comprehensive system. Where there is strength, there is resistance. The existence of power depends on how much these resistance points play their role. The role here is defined as an enemy, target, support, or key in power relations (Foucault, 1990).

In the case of resistance to money politics, did the students realize the meaning of their resistance?, did they also think thoroughly in carrying out the resistance?, and what were the implications of the resistance they carried out? In van Klinken (2007) view of social movements, a social movement must exhibit at least three of the five axes to be considered a social movement. Those five axes are: (1) collective or joint action; (2) change-oriented goals or claims; (3) some collective action that is extra- or non-institutional; (4) some degree of organization; and (5) some temporal continuity (van Klinken, 2007).

Based on Law No. 10 of 2008 concerning General Elections, Voters are citizens of the Republic of Indonesia who have reached 17 (seventeen) years of age or more, or are/have not married. Article 19 states that voters who have the right to vote are Indonesian citizens registered by the regional election organizers on the voter list and on election day are already 17 years old or married. Meanwhile, the definition of youth in Law No. 40 of 2009 concerning Youth states that the age of youth is between 16-30 years. In this case, youth are not only first-time voters but also voters who have used their right to vote until the age of 30.

The strengthening of "critical citizens" often found in students and highly educated citizens (Norris, 1999) who support democratic values but are very critical of democratic government systems, has contributed to the growth of cynicism toward conventional politics in recent times. This is related to the increasing dissatisfaction with the performance and motives of governments, political parties, and politicians in general (Spanring, 2008). Furthermore, a generally declining trajectory in party membership (Norris, 1999), party cohesion, and political trust continue to weaken in democratic countries (Dalton, 2004).

In this perspective, people with higher education will have more distrust toward politics, as "critical citizens" are more likely to observe the performance of political actors and more sensitive to the dysfunctional outcomes associated with the wider political system. This leads to a direct relationship between political distrust and participation in non-electoral politics. Alienation from conventional politics and a lack of trust in traditional political institutions have been identified as potential contributing factors in the rise and proliferation of youth protests across Europe at a time of austerity and austerity of wealth (Sloam, 2013). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that students who do not believe in conventional politics and politicians in general, will be more inclined to express their concerns and grievances through non-electoral forms of political participation. Indeed, Kaase (1999) found that lower political confidence is associated with a higher probability of engaging in direct action within a European context.

### **Student Voters' Sensitivity to Money Politics**

The practice of money politics is a phenomenon often understood from an individual perspective based on personal references and preferences of social values. These references and preferences encourage individuals to respond to the phenomenon.

Resistance is a situation showing the position of an attitude to behave defensively, trying to fight, oppose or attempt opposition. Determining the position or repositioning is influenced by two aspects, namely money politics as an external phenomenon for student voters and the student voters' thought-shaping process as an internal factor. In addition to the external and internal factors, it is necessary to have a situation that harmonizes the two. Political knowledge is usually measured by asking questions to the subject about factual knowledge of money politics. In this case, student voters identify alternative choices about which political reality is most in line with their own beliefs and opinions. To capture this important form of political resistance, we can examine the situation that encourages the sensitivity of student voters about politics.

It is known that the context of money politics put forward by student voters varies from elections for village heads, regents/mayors, to legislative and presidential institutions. However, this did not contradict the focus of the research. Some information can reinforce that money politics is actually livelier at the local/village level than in political contestation at the national level.

The gradual shift away from open-oligarchic politics is a significant challenge to democracy in Indonesia. The conflict of interest between the demands of public office and their personal interests seems inescapable for politicians running large business empires and possessing the needed

capital. On the other hand, political parties and candidates are encouraged to come forward and defend public office personally and their behavior and decisions are more subject to public scrutiny and accountability. Student voters responded to this situation in various ways. The mindset of student voters which tended to be reactive and non-confirmative resulted in a less tactical and productive response style. This can be seen from the general response of student voters regarding money politics presented in the Table 1.

**Table 1.** Student Voters' General Views on Money Politics

No.	Form of Money Politics	Response	
		Total	%
1.	Bribery in the form of giving money to someone for a certain interest	63	54,78
2.	Giving money for transactional purposes	25	21,74
3.	The practice of money politics approaching election day is a "negative" means to attract public sympathy to vote for a particular candidate.	27	23,48
	Total	115	100

Table 1 shows that the knowledge orientation of student voters toward money politics led to the perception that money politics is an act of bribery. However, perceptions 1 and 2 of money politics do not refer to its definition in the election law. The assumptions built within the general framework can be explained in a more specific framework below. Fundamental descriptions of student voters in response to events they have experienced.

In the initial framework, student voters felt that money politics was an uncomfortable situation because they viewed democracy as free from fraudulent practices and money politics. Situations that occurred in respondents' lives were interpreted normatively and logically, by framing their opinions and views in a satirical situation that presented it as a "funny" reality of what they saw, as expressed by Nabila as follows:

"It's funny how people choose their leaders based on the money given to them. Most people don't know, especially in rural communities or people with low education, that with money political officials will not hesitate to commit corruption to replace all the costs they have spent on campaigns. Indeed, it should be necessary to educate the public about money politics. Most of them do not know the consequences of money politics."

This shows that there was a concern about the implications of money politics. Unfortunately, student voters rarely and never carried out intensive discussions related to the issue because they regarded it as something factually unreachable. This apathetic and permissive nature made students aware of the impact of money politics on the quality of democracy but tended to be more passive in responding to its practice around them.

The inaccessibility of student voters in digging more intensely about money politics was based on factual views that included their perceptions and reasonings. Most of them described logical thinking about money politics as a reality difficult to resist. This is revealed in the following narrative.

"In my opinion, the condition of the practice of money politics in Indonesia still happens a lot and it has become a culture that is considered normal or natural to occur, especially in rural areas where the residents are predominantly from the financial lower class so that the presence of money politics is a momentum that is well welcomed by society."

This view was expressed by almost all respondents which was in line with the general opinion held by a wide audience. Even families experienced encourage permissive, if not adaptive behaviors. The practice of money politics had been a familiar occurrence since childhood. This encouraged falsification in their thought process as a result of the paradoxical situation they had experienced.

### Family Broker Network

Student voters went through a phase of confusion when they had the right to vote for the first time. On one hand, they were very enthusiastic about welcoming the election, both the regional election and the village head election. On the other hand, they had to accept the fact that the

regional and village head election were held dishonestly by the existence of money politics practices. Most of them saw the practice firsthand. They directly saw and heard money or goods being distributed in favor of certain candidates. Some students directly saw it done by their families. There were those whose parents acted as a part of a campaign team or siblings who served as brokers to search for masses to be brought to the polling place.

The broker network is indeed one of the key factors in determining the success of money politics (vote buying) because they are key in obtaining votes in the field. The broker network is tiered from the sub-district level, village level, to the polling place level. Based on information obtained in the field, one broker at the polling place level is tasked with finding 10-20 voters. The job of these brokers is to ensure that the targeted people use their right to vote to elect the candidate who orders them. Brokers at the polling place level are recruited by brokers at the village or hamlet level, and the village and hamlet level brokers are recruited by brokers at the sub-district level. That's how the network works.

Loyalty and integrity of the brokers will be the key to the success of a candidate because besides mapping prospective voters, they also distribute money to prospective voters. The amount of money received by students averaged around Rp. 50,000 – Rp. 100,000, although there were those who claimed to have received more than those amounts. Not only in the form of cash, several candidates also distributed goods such as t-shirts, groceries, and sarongs. In certain cases, the amount of money as a form of money politics can be very unreasonable. For example, in a district in East Java, for a village head election event, a village head can share an amount large enough to gain votes. Usually, this happens because the village has quite a large natural resource potential. In addition, there is prestige that comes along with serving as a village head.

Brokers at the polling place level will be more willing to invite people they already know, such as children, husband/wife, relatives, or friends. Several respondents admitted that their families were parts of a candidate's campaign team whose job was to distribute money (brokers). And the students were invited by their families to vote for the candidate they were supporting. It would be very difficult to refuse money politics if the invitation came from your own parents or close relatives. If the invitation was from someone outside the nuclear family, the student would be more likely to refuse it.

One method of verifying the voters of the candidates is to record the prospective voters from the permanent voter list that has been determined. After that, they invite the prospective voters by asking for their ID and household membership document ID as well as their phone numbers to then be recorded as one of the voters of a particular candidate.

### **Student Voters' Silent Resistance to Money Politics**

The sensitivity of student voters in responding to the phenomenon of money politics encouraged their attitudes toward resisting money politics that are personal and partial in accordance with their beliefs at that time. Distrust of the mechanism of the political system encourages abstentions (not using the right to vote/invalid votes).

There was a situation illustrating a perception of money politics told by one of the respondents with experience regarding money politics and was asked for his ID to be recorded without any clarity regarding the purpose of the data collection. The respondent only realized when the team that collected the data gave money with little demand to vote for a particular candidate. This experience eroded student voters' appreciation of politics and democratic mechanisms. This prompted respondents to interpret other facts as repetitive.

In the end, several student voters chose to reject the act of money politics by refusing to vote in the election. Of course, there are many factors to look at in detail about this abstention, but seeing the trend in the number of undecided voters and high abstention rates among young people, of course, it is very reasonable if you look more deeply at what young voters were experiencing, especially student voters.

A different way was chosen to deal with candidates practicing money politics, where students received the money but did not vote for the candidate. This is of course very pragmatic and paradoxical, but this was done because there were other "beliefs" about politics that held as the

truth. When the political reality encountered was a paradoxical reality, student voters took this action as a rational one.

The reflections made by student voters in manifesting their knowledge and beliefs in political actions were in line with the views used in Gunn (2014) and Winters (2011) regarding political oligarchy for it is defined as a society that displays a systematic mix of political and economic power within the same individual or a small elite group of such individuals in a way that is visible, acceptable or at least tolerated, and therefore considered roughly legal. Oligarchy can and does influence not only politics but also the judiciary, military, and civil society.

There is a fundamental problem in the political culture in Indonesia, namely the practice of money politics which exists due to a strong patron-client relationship between the elite (political parties, executive and legislative candidates) and voters. This pattern of relations runs hierarchically and asymmetrically, thereby reducing constituency values in our democratic process.

As revealed by Lipset (1959), democracy is very likely to develop in a society with an even level of education and economy. The main root of the problem of the patron-client relationship which then creates the effect of money politics is the existence of disparities in the education sector as well as the economy in our society. This makes political literacy in society still very lacking. Students with better educational backgrounds tend to be more rational in looking at money politics issues. They ideally will not be tempted to vote for a candidate with Rp. 25.000 in cash, for example. They are also literate in technology so they will check and track the candidates for executive and legislative members. The younger generation is a strategic group that has ideals and political literacy that previous generations did not have. They can influence the political process which has been transactional so far. They also can be ignorant and apathetic toward the current political conditions and choose to abstain from voting in every election or they can make movements to reject money politics and eliminate the patron-client culture that has been rooted in our political system. They also have the choice to become adaptive to the phenomenon of money politics that occurs, and they are not resistant and able to adapt to the existence of money politics.

### Conclusion

Student voters are still unsure in examining the situation that they define as money politics. On the one hand, money politics is understood as a denial of the norms of justice, but if it is equated with the social situation, it would be a common practice found every day. This encourages the growth of sensitivity toward money politics that is not in line with the actions taken by student voters. Factually, the concerns felt by student voters about the practice of money politics were not followed up by confirmation of collective positive actions. The response shown was still in personal-individual interpretation without affirming the views and actions of other colleagues. This has implications for the student voters' resistance mechanism against the practice of money politics. The resistance shown by student voters was found in the forms of; (1) not voting for any candidates during the election, (2) accepting money as a form of money politics but refusing to follow the agreement. Student voters showed resistance by taking counter yet adaptive actions. It could be associated that student voters had not shown realized the potential of money politics in encouraging corruption.

### Recommendation

Based on the research results, the practice of money politics in Indonesia requires a holistic and sustainable solution. For this reason, this research provides the following policy recommendations. **First**, strengthen the role of political parties as the main filter for selecting prospective leaders with integrity, as well as encourage political parties to increase the transparency and accountability of campaign funds and party financial management. **Second**, organize free and fair elections by strengthening the integrity of the electoral management body and the electoral supervisory body. **Third**, make campuses independent institutions capable of providing policy and technological innovations to minimize the practice of money politics and election fraud. **Fourth**, encourage the active participation of the community by continuing to provide education about democratic values, participation, and anti-corruption values.



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