

Money Politics and Its Complexity: Evidence form Four Regencies in Indonesia

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Abstract : Vote buying in Indonesia reveals a persistent paradox between moral rejection and pragmatic engagement, reflecting the deeply complex interplay between democratic ideals and patronal realities. This study examines the effects of party identification, education, income, and generational cohort on voters' attitudes and experiences toward vote buying across four regencies—Banjar, Humbang Hasundutan, Kolaka, and Lamongan. Employing a quantitative explanatory design and logistic regression based on post-2024 election survey data, the study analyzes how these factors shape both moral perceptions and behavioral participation in electoral transactions. The findings demonstrate a consistent pattern of moral-practical ambivalence: while most respondents reject vote buying as improper, but many still participate in it. Party identification weakens moral resistance and reinforces transactional networks, whereas education and generational cohort strengthen ethical awareness, though unevenly across regions. Income has no significant effect, suggesting that the practice cuts across class boundaries. Overall, vote buying in Indonesia operates as an adaptive and socially embedded mechanism within a patronal democracy, where values, needs, and loyalties are continuously negotiated within the electoral arena. These findings underscore the multidimensional complexity of political exchange, revealing that Indonesia's democratic participation is sustained through a delicate balance between morality, pragmatism, and social reciprocity.

Keywords : vote buying; moral ambivalence; party identification; local election; money politic

Abstrak : Praktik jual beli suara di Indonesia menunjukkan paradoks yang terus-menerus antara penolakan moral dan keterlibatan pragmatis, yang mencerminkan interaksi yang sangat kompleks antara cita-cita demokrasi dan realitas patronase. Studi ini meneliti pengaruh identifikasi partai, pendidikan, pendapatan, dan kelompok usia terhadap sikap dan pengalaman pemilih terhadap praktik jual beli suara di empat kabupaten, yakni Banjar, Humbang Hasundutan, Kolaka, dan Lamongan. Dengan menggunakan desain penjelasan kuantitatif dan regresi logistik berdasarkan data survei pasca-pemilu 2024, studi ini menganalisis bagaimana faktor-faktor ini membentuk persepsi moral dan partisipasi perilaku dalam transaksi pemilu. Temuan menunjukkan pola ambivalensi moral-praktis yang konsisten: meskipun sebagian besar responden menolak praktik jual beli suara sebagai tindakan yang tidak pantas, tapi masih banyak yang berpartisipasi di dalamnya. Identifikasi partai melemahkan resistensi moral dan memperkuat jaringan transaksional, sedangkan pendidikan dan kelompok generasi memperkuat kesadaran etis, meskipun tidak merata di berbagai wilayah. Pendapatan tidak memiliki pengaruh yang signifikan, menunjukkan bahwa praktik ini melintasi batas kelas. Secara keseluruhan, praktik pembelian suara di Indonesia beroperasi sebagai mekanisme adaptif dan tertanam secara sosial dalam demokrasi

patronase, di mana nilai-nilai, kebutuhan, dan loyalitas terus dinegosiasikan dalam arena pemilihan. Temuan ini menggarisbawahi kompleksitas multidimensional dari pertukaran politik, mengungkapkan bahwa partisipasi demokratis Indonesia dipertahankan melalui keseimbangan yang rumit antara moralitas, pragmatisme, dan timbal balik sosial.

Kata Kunci : pembelian suara; ambivalensi moral; identifikasi partai; pemilihan lokal; politik uang

INTRODUCTION

General elections are the main foundation of modern democracy, which ideally should be conducted in a direct, general, free, confidential, honest, and fair (in Law 7 of 2017 on General Elections). However, in practice in many developing countries, including Indonesia, money politics remains a fundamental problem (Aspinall, 2015; Hadiz, 2012; Muhtadi, 2019b; Wagner, 2019). In fact, in Indonesia, money politics is considered part of the “new normal” in post-New Order electoral democracy (Muhtadi, 2019a). This study seeks to explore the variations of money politics in Indonesia's electoral democracy after the 2024 elections at the local level, using four regencies in Indonesia as the research locus.

Researchers generally discuss vote buying and clientelism (Aspinall et al., 2017; Mares & Young, 2016; Vicente & Wantchekon, 2009). This phenomenon is reinforced by deep-rooted patron-client patterns in many regions mobilized by competing candidates (Aspinall et al., 2017; Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019), as well as the role of political brokers who act as intermediaries between candidates and constituents (Stokes et al., 2013). The strengthening of money politics is an unfortunate sign for the democratization process in Indonesia after the reform (Regif & Pribadi, 2024).

In Indonesia, the phenomenon of declining party identification (party-id) continues to occur. The decline in party-id is due to changes in the design of legislative elections (Fossati, 2020). Research conducted by Mujani et al., (2019) shows that since 1999, party-id has remained very high—around 86 percent—due to the euphoria of newfound freedom and democracy. However, since then there has been a downward trend: in 2014, party-id ranged from only 9 to 14 percent. The latest data from research conducted by Politika Research & Consulting (PRC) also shows a similar trend, namely that from 2020 to 2024, party-id will only range from 10.3 percent to 15.2 percent.

The practice of money politics or vote buying is still widely used to influence voting behavior (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012). This is similar to the classical voting behavior theory, which places party-id as a relatively stable psychological bond between voters and a particular party (Campbell et al., 1960). Voters with strong party-id are believed to have higher loyalty, so in many contexts they are assumed to be more immune to the lure of money politics (Muhtadi, 2013). This finding is in line with the swing voter tradition (Stokes, 2005), which states that political parties usually prefer to target swing voters rather than the loyal supporters of a particular political party.

Other research results show different and more complex dynamics. Apriani & Irhamna (2020) found that in Bali Province—an area with one of the highest levels of party-id in Indonesia—voters with strong party-id still had a high tendency to accept money politics. This finding is similar to findings in parliamentary elections in Turkey, which show that the targets of vote buying are the core supporters of certain parties, as well as those who are socio-economically vulnerable (Çarkoğlu & Aytaç, 2015).

The latest developments were presented by Tawakkal (2025), who explained that the weakening of party-id on the surface was actually followed by the emergence of party-id intermediaries, namely the role of brokers or middlemen who connect parties or candidates with voters. In this context, according to Hicken et al., (2022), brokers work as informal networks that

act as intermediaries for the distribution of money politics, so that individuals with large social networks are more likely to be targets of money politics (Cruz, 2019). This study does not look at brokers or informal networks in money politics, but rather emphasizes the variations in money politics in various regions to obtain context about money politics practices in diverse regions (see Gonzalez-Ocantos *et al.*, 2014; Jensen & Justesen, 2014; Justesen & Manzetti, 2023).

In addition to psychological attachment through party-id, demographic characteristics such as age group and socioeconomic characteristics such as education and income are also important channels that influence voters' rationality towards money politics. Poor citizens tend to be the targets of money politics compared to the rich (Canare *et al.*, 2018; Jensen & Justesen, 2014). Research conducted by Amick (2018) in Indonesia shows that voters with weak economic conditions tend to be more vulnerable to becoming targets of money politics. In this context, money politics does not always take the form of cash, as Amick (2018) states that gifts in the form of goods tend to be more effective than cash. Meanwhile, research in Latin American countries shows that the effect of poverty on vote buying is more dominant among swing voters than partisan voters (Justesen & Manzetti, 2023).

There is ambivalence between the practice of accepting money politics and attitudes towards money politics, but education plays a role in reducing this ambivalence (Tawakkal *et al.*, 2017). This means that citizens with higher education tend to reject the practice of money politics and consider it inappropriate. Conversely, citizens with lower levels of education tend to accept the practice of money politics and consider it normal. This study aims to conduct further research on the role of educational level in relation to the practice of money politics.

Generational variables (e.g., Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X) also deserve a place in the conceptual framework of this study. Different generations grow up in different social, technological, and political contexts; for example, younger generations (Gen Z) who are accustomed to digital media and information technology have different ways of obtaining political news and voter orientation than older generations. Several studies in Indonesia show that the younger generation has different knowledge and attitudes toward money politics than previous generations (Mulyaningsih & Hertanto, 2025). Therefore, this study places age generation as an independent variable to reveal whether it influences attitudes and experiences of money politics.

Based on the description above, this study can enrich the discourse on voting behavior in Indonesia, using party-id, income, education, and age generation as independent variables. Furthermore, this study places attitudes toward money politics and experiences of receiving money politics as dependent variables. The novelty of this study lies in its comparison of four regencies in Indonesia. Do money politics practices, both experiences of receiving money politics and attitudes toward money politics, differ or are they similar among these regencies? This fundamental question guides this study.

Thus, this study aims to examine the influence of party-id, education, income, and age generation on two dimensions of money politics: (1) attitudes toward money politics and (2) experiences of receiving money politics. In addition, this study compares variations in money politics practices in four different regencies to capture the complexity of voter behavior at the local level.

DATA AND METHODS

This study uses a quantitative research method with a public opinion survey approach. The researchers would like to thank Politika Research & Consulting (PRC) for granting permission to use this unpublished data as the basis for this study. The survey was conducted in four different regencies, including Banjar Regency in South Kalimantan Province (Banjar), Humbang Hasundutan

Regency in North Sumatra Province (Humbang Hasundutan), Kolaka Regency in Southeast Sulawesi Province (Kolaka), and Lamongan Regency in East Java Province (Lamongan).

This research design uses an explanatory approach with a cross-sectional study type, as it aims to explain the causal relationship between the variables tested (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach is commonly used in studies of voter behavior in developing countries because it allows for the simultaneous analysis of relationships between variables at a single point in time (for example, see: Muhtadi, 2019b). The PRC survey was conducted in May–June 2025, after the 2024 elections. Specifically, it was conducted in Humbang Hasundutan Regency from May 24 to June 1, 2024, Kolaka Regency from June 4 to 10, 2024, Lamongan Regency from June 13 to 17, 2024, and Banjar Regency from June 11 to 17, 2024.

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire. The interviews were conducted by trained enumerators, most of whom were students, after undergoing intensive training on interview techniques and research ethics procedures. Before use, the questionnaire was tested to ensure clarity and reliability, as well as to avoid potential bias due to differences in the socio-cultural backgrounds of respondents (Lavrakas, 2008). Furthermore, the researchers used a sampling technique called multi-stage random sampling (Babbie, 2020). This technique was chosen because it is suitable for research with a large and heterogeneous population and allows for proportional geographical and demographic representation in each regency.

Table 1. Research Locus

Regency	Province	Majority Ethnic Group	Winning Party	
			2019	2024
Banjar	Kalimantan Selatan	Banjar	Gerindra	Golkar
Humbang Hasundutan	Sumatera Utara	Batak Toba	PDIP	Golkar
Kolaka	Sulawesi Tenggara	Tolaki	Gerindra	PDIP
Lamongan	Jawa Timur	Jawa	PKB	PKB

Source: Compiled by the author from various resources

This cross-regency design not only allows for testing the influence of inter-variables, but also opens up opportunities to identify contextual variations and regional differences in money politics in Indonesia. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide a comprehensive empirical picture of the dynamics of money politics at the local level after the 2024 elections. More detailed differences between the four research locations can be seen in Table 1.

This study examines four independent variables, namely:

1. Age generation, categorized ordinally into (1) Generation Z, (2) Millennials (Generation Y), (3) Generation X, and (4) Baby Boomers and Pre-Boomers.
2. Education level, categorized as (1) Low, (2) Medium, and (3) High.
3. Income level, categorized as (1) Low, (2) Medium, and (3) High.
4. Party-id, measured binarily: (0) No party-id and (1) Party-id.

Meanwhile, this study has two dependent variables, namely:

1. Normative attitudes toward money politics, measured through perceptions of the fairness of money politics practices, with categories (0) Fair and (1) Unfair.

2. Experience of receiving money politics, measured based on respondents' personal experiences, with categories (0) Have received and (1) Have never received.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Before discussing an in-depth analysis of the findings of this study, namely the influence of age group, education level, income level, and party affiliation on normative attitudes and experiences of accepting money politics, descriptive statistical data from the study based on the variables of interest in this study will first be presented. Next, the main findings of the comparison between regencies that are the main focus of this study will be discussed.

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the study in each regency. These descriptive statistics provide an initial overview of the variations in demographic characteristics and political attitudes of respondents in each study area. The final results of the survey data collection from four regencies, namely Banjar (n = 500), Humbang Hasundutan (n = 414), Kolaka (n = 420), and Lamongan (n = 420). The results of the descriptive analysis show significant variations among the four regions, which help explain the differences in how people interpret and respond to transactional political practices.

The generational composition shows quite striking variations among the four regencies. Lamongan has the highest average value (Mean = 2.85), indicating that the respondent population in this region is relatively older, dominated by Generation X and Baby Boomers & Pre-Boomers. Conversely, Banjar has the lowest average value (Mean = 2.42), indicating the dominance of younger age groups such as Generation Z and Y. Humbang Hasundutan (Mean = 2.62) and Kolaka (Mean = 2.56) are in the middle.

Tabel 2. Descriptive Statistics (Pooled Data)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Banjar					
Generational Cohort	500	1	4	2.42	0.930
Education	500	1	3	1.81	0.556
Income	500	1	3	1.52	0.592
Party-id	500	0	1	0.25	0.435
Normative attitude	418	0	1	0.40	0.491
Experience of receiving	500	0	1	0.64	0.482
Humbang Hasundutan					
Generational Cohort	414	1	4	2.62	0.920
Education	414	1	3	1.92	0.539
Income	414	1	3	1.41	0.574
Party-id	414	0	1	0.25	0.431
Normative attitude	370	0	1	0.54	0.499

Experience receiving	of	414	0	1	0.57	0.496
Kolaka						
Generational Cohort		420	1	4	2.56	0.868
Education		420	1	3	1.88	0.589
Income		420	1	3	1.70	0.619
Party-id		420	0	1	0.45	0.498
Normative attitude		372	0	1	0.56	0.497
Experience receiving	of	420	0	1	0.68	0.468
Lamongan						
Generational Cohort		420	1	4	2.85	0.855
Education		420	1	3	1.80	0.627
Income		420	1	3	1.64	0.634
Party-id		420	0	1	0.31	0.463
Normative attitude		403	0	1	0.26	0.438
Experience receiving	of	420	0	1	0.45	0.498

Source: Politika Research & Consulting (PRC)
(Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)

The average education level of respondents was relatively homogeneous, ranging from 1.80 to 1.92. Humbang Hasundutan had the highest average education level (Mean = 1.92), while Lamongan had the lowest (Mean = 1.80). Meanwhile, Banjar (Mean = 1.81) and Kolaka (Mean = 1.88) were in the middle between Humbang Hasundutan and Lamongan. With a scale of 1 = low to 3 = high, these findings indicate that most respondents tended to be at the lower secondary education level.

Household income levels show slight variations among the four regencies, with averages ranging from 1.41 to 1.70. In general, most respondents belong to the lower-middle economic class. Kolaka has the highest average income (Mean = 1.70), followed by Lamongan (Mean = 1.64), Banjar (Mean = 1.52), and Humbang Hasundutan (Mean = 1.41).

Party-id closeness shows low levels across all regions, with averages ranging from 0.25 to 0.45. The highest average value was found in Kolaka (Mean = 0.45), while Banjar and Humbang Hasundutan had the lowest values (Mean = 0.25). Lamongan has a medium level of party-id among the three other regencies, with a mean of 0.31. This pattern shows weak partisan identification among Indonesian voters, reflecting a decline in public loyalty or closeness to political parties.

Normative attitudes toward money politics show significant variation between regions. The highest values were found in Kolaka (Mean = 0.56) and Humbang Hasundutan (Mean = 0.54), indicating a relatively higher level of rejection of money politics. Meanwhile, Banjar (Mean = 0.40) and especially Lamongan (Mean = 0.26) show an attitude of normalizing money politics. In other words, in Lamongan and Banjar, the proportion of people who consider money politics to be

“normal” is greater than in other regions. Conversely, the people of Kolaka and Humbang Hasundutan tend to have higher normative awareness.

Despite this normative awareness, direct experience of receiving money politics remains high in most regions. The regency with the highest experience of receiving money politics was found in Lamongan (Mean = 0.45). Meanwhile, the next three regions in descending order were Humbang Hasundutan (Mean = 0.54), Kolaka (Mean = 0.68), and Banjar (Mean = 0.64). These data indicate that money politics is still an integral part of the electoral mobilization process in Indonesia, as respondents from most research locations reported having experienced money politics. Interestingly, a fairly high level of experience of receiving money can occur alongside a fairly high normative attitude that rejects this practice, as seen in Humbang Hasundutan. This phenomenon shows that moral rejection does not automatically eliminate the practice of involvement in money politics. Therefore, the dimensions of values and practice coexist in the reality of Indonesian electoral politics.

The Dynamics of Money Politics: Contextual Variations across Regencies

Cross-regency analysis shows that the dynamics of money politics in Indonesia are highly contextual. Differences in the direction and significance of the influence of key variables—such as party-id, education, generation, and income—not only reflect statistical variation, but also indicate the existence of a distinctive political exchange logic in each region (see Table 3). Money politics thus does not operate homogeneously across all regions, but rather adapts to the prevailing social structures, political patronage, and community norms.

Banjar showed the strongest relationship between party proximity and political money behavior. Significant negative coefficients in both normative attitudes ($B = -1.087$) and experiences of receiving ($B = -1.773$) indicate that individuals who feel close to political parties tend to be more permissive of money politics and more frequently engage in its practices. These findings confirm that party closeness in Banjar does not function as a moral barrier, but rather as a channel of patronage that facilitates material exchanges between candidates and voters.

This phenomenon confirms that closeness to political parties in Indonesia is often pragmatic rather than ideological. Voters do not necessarily see the acceptance of money as a form of corruption, but as part of social relations that are considered legitimate in the context of assistance or sharing of wealth. Money politics in Banjar represents a form of ambivalence, where democratic values and political patronage interact in the same social space.

Other variables that have an influence in Banjar are education on attitudes towards money politics ($B = 0.353$) and income on experiences of receiving money politics ($B = 0.328$). Both variables have low significance. However, it can be interpreted that education can be a normative barrier to increase awareness of money politics, even though it does not affect experiences of receiving money politics. Furthermore, a higher income level can be an obstacle to having experience receiving money politics.

Unlike Banjar, the pattern in Humbang Hasundutan shows a fairly strong significance of social factors such as age group and education. The younger generation ($B = 0.261$) and the less educated group ($B = 0.432$) show a greater tendency to have experience of receiving gifts than the older generation and the highly educated group. Those from the older generation and with higher education also have relatively high normative awareness and do not condone money politics. This can be seen in the regression test results, which show a fairly high significance between age group and attitudes toward money politics ($B = 0.235$) and a low significance between education and attitudes toward money politics ($B = 0.322$). A positive coefficient with low significance that was also confirmed was the influence of party-id on the experience of receiving money. So, almost the

same as in Banjar, closeness to political parties actually becomes a means for someone to be more experienced in engaging in money politics.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Test of Money Politics

	Normative attitude		Experience of receiving	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
Banjar				
Generational Cohort	0.018	1.018	-0.040	0.960
Education	0.353***	1.423	-0.057	0.944
Income	0.237	1.267	0.328***	1.388
Party_id	-1.087*	0.337	-1.773*	0.170
Humbang Hasundutan				
Generational Cohort	0.235**	1.265	0.261**	1.298
Education	0.322*	1.379	0.432**	1.540
Income	0.234	1.263	0.034	1.035
Party_id	-0.312	0.732	-0.399***	0.671
Kolaka				
Generational Cohort	0.117	1.124	0.290**	1.337
Education	0.484*	1.623	-0.299***	0.741
Income	-0.076	0.927	-0.063	0.939
Party_id	-0.208	0.812	0.013	1.013
Lamongan				
Generational Cohort	0.158	1.171	0.415*	1.515
Education	0.463**	1.588	0.447**	1.564
Income	0.146	1.157	0.094	1.098
Party_id	-0.558**	0.572	-0.624*	0.536

Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$
(Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)

In the context of Humbang Hasundutan, relationships between citizens are largely governed by norms of communal solidarity, where the practice of gift-giving is often understood not as bribery, but as a form of moral reciprocity within social networks. Therefore, the rejection of money politics in Humbang Hasundutan is more a reflection of new ethical values among the older generations, such as Gen X, Baby Boomers, and Pre-Boomers, as well as among the highly educated. Meanwhile, at the community level, the practice of reciprocity remains legitimized as an expression of social solidarity. Money politics, in this context, is more akin to a moral exchange than a purely economic transaction.

A unique and different context can be seen in Kolaka. The regression results show that education has a positive effect on attitudes toward rejecting money politics ($B = 0.484$). However, education has a negative effect with low significance on experiences of receiving money politics ($B = -0.299$), meaning that highly educated people are more likely to have experienced receiving money politics. Meanwhile, younger generations (Gen Z and Millennials) are more likely to have experienced receiving money politics ($B = 0.290$) compared to older generations. In Kolaka's economic structure, which is influenced by the mining sector, the relationship between candidates and voters is often framed in terms of benefits and compensation. Even highly educated voters may view money as a "fair reward" for their political participation. Therefore, the resistance between

attitudes towards money politics and the experience of receiving money politics continues to coexist with electoral pragmatism.

Lamongan showed dynamics that were almost similar to those in Banjar, but with a more complex combination of factors. Party-id had a negative effect on normative attitudes ($B = -0.558$) and experiences of receiving ($B = -0.624$), indicating that partisanship in Lamongan was also part of the electoral patronage network. Age generation shows strong significance towards the experience of accepting money politics ($B = 0.415$), meaning that the older generation is relatively less experienced in accepting money politics than the younger generation. Meanwhile, higher education levels have a fairly strong positive significance in acting as a counterbalance, strengthening resistance to money politics ($B = 0.463$) while reducing involvement in the experience of receiving money politics ($B = 447$). The more competitive electoral context in Lamongan makes the relationship between morality and pragmatism more open. Voters view money politics not as a form of moral corruption, but as part of a winning strategy that is “acceptable” as long as it does not interfere with their main political choices.

Between Moral Rejection and Practical Engagement: Voters Dual Attitudes

The results of logistic regression analysis show an ambivalent pattern between moral attitudes toward money politics and actual experiences of receiving political money. Across all regencies, the majority of respondents stated that money politics is an “unfair” practice, but some of them also admitted to having received money or goods from candidates. This pattern indicates that normative rejection does not always lead to behavioral rejection, reflecting a form of moral ambivalence rooted in the social context and local patronage structures.

The variable of closeness to political parties (party-id) emerged as the most consistent and significant determinant. In Banjar and Lamongan regencies, negative coefficients on attitudes and experiences ($B = -1.087$ and -1.773 in Banjar; $B = -0.558$ and -0.624 in Lamongan) indicate that individuals who are close to a party tend to be more permissive of money politics and more frequently involved in it. Meanwhile, in Humbang Hasundutan, party-id had a low significant effect on the experience of receiving money politics. Conversely, in Kolaka, the effect of partisanship was insignificant, indicating that patron-client relationships in the region are more rooted in community structures than in formal party affiliations. Findings in Banjar, Lamongan, and Humbang Hasundutan generally reinforce the argument that party loyalty in Indonesia often functions as a channel for patronage rather than ideological commitment (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Muhtadi, 2019b; Stokes *et al.*, 2013); those who are close to political parties tend to normalize and experience political money. Thus, party identity does not serve as a moral barrier but rather facilitates the social legitimacy of political money practices.

The education factor shows interesting dynamics, as there are unique differences in experiences of receiving money politics. Normative attitudes toward money politics indicate that education has an influence on increasing normative awareness, with strong and fairly strong significance found in Kolaka and Lamongan. Meanwhile, low significance was found in Banjar and Humbang Hasundutan. On the one hand, experiences of receiving money politics with fairly strong significance were found in Lamongan and low significance in Kolaka. This finding reinforces the literature stating that education strengthens ethical awareness and democratic standards, so that those with low education tend to have greater normative and practical awareness and are more resistant to money politics (Nichter, 2008; Stokes, 2005; Tawakkal *et al.*, 2017).

The effect of education on the experience of accepting money politics is not always significant, as in Kolaka, which shows that although highly educated individuals tend to consider money politics inappropriate, they are ambivalent because they still experience accepting money

politics. This shows that the practice of accepting money politics has spread widely, both among those with low and high levels of education. The effect of education on a particular political issue can be drawn from the research context of Ugur-Cinar *et al.*, (2020) and Agerberg (2019), which shows that the influence of education levels is highly dependent on specific contexts, such as a more meritocratic or corrupt system.

The influence of generational variables (voter age) on attitudes toward money politics is only significant in Humbang Hasundutan. The results in Humbang Hasundutan show that the younger generation is actually more permissive toward transactional politics. However, this normative orientation does not necessarily make them completely “free from transactions.” On average, the younger generation in Humbang Hasundutan, Kolaka, and Lamongan tend to have experience of receiving money politics. In Lamongan, the significance is strong and positive, while in Humbang Hasundutan and Lamongan the significance is lower.

The pragmatic logic of young voters towards accepting money politics can be interpreted as part of a rational strategy in the context of local electoral competition, as described in a study by Sari *et al.*, (2023), which found that experienced young voters accept money politics but do not vote for candidates who offer it. However, this study does not explicitly discuss this, but it is highly likely that experienced voters accept but do not necessarily vote for candidates who offer money politics. In a recent study on the younger generation, particularly Gen Z, by Muhtadi *et al.*, (2025), this generation is referred to as “complacent democrats” because they tend to be complacent with democracy compared to other generations amid a drastic decline in the quality of democracy. Thus, the younger generation is not merely a new agent of morality, but an actor who is re-navigating old practices in the modern patronage system by verbally rejecting it, yet still adapting to a political reality that is not yet fully programmatic and amid declining democratic quality.

Meanwhile, income hardly appeared as a significant determinant in any of the regression models. Only in Banjar did the income variable have low significance, namely its effect on the experience of receiving money politics. This shows that people with low incomes tend to have more experience receiving money politics than those with high incomes, albeit with low significance. In general, both attitudes and experiences of money politics, the income coefficient in the four regencies tended to be small and insignificant. These results confirm that money politics transcends economic class boundaries—it is not merely a practice of the poor, but part of a broader social logic. These results also differ from previous studies that found that those with low incomes tend to be the targets of money politics (Jensen & Justesen, 2014; Justesen & Manzetti, 2023). In the context of Asian countries, research by Canare *et al.*, (2018) in the Philippines and Baniya *et al.*, (2024) in Nepal shows that other factors, such as education and access to information, are better predictors of acceptance of money politics than income.

A comparison of the four regencies shows that money politics operates through various exchange logics, and is likely to depend on local social, economic, and cultural configurations. In Banjar and Lamongan, political patronage is intertwined with partisanship and reinforces institutionalized exchange patterns. Meanwhile, in Kolaka and Humbang Hasundutan, money politics is more characterized by moral exchange and social solidarity within the local socio-demographic framework—often understood in terms of ‘assistance’ and ‘reciprocity’.

Thus, money politics in Indonesia cannot be understood merely as a deviation from democracy, but rather as a social mechanism that negotiates morality and practical needs. Cross-regional variations show that this practice has a dual logic: on the one hand, it strengthens patronage networks, while on the other, it adapts to the changing moral values of the community. In this context, Indonesian democracy presents a complex picture—where norms, social networks, and political strategies coexist in a complementary system of exchange.

CONCLUSION

Empirical findings from four regencies show that money politics in Indonesia operates in a space of moral ambivalence and pragmatic rationality. Most respondents described money politics as an “unfair” practice, but the proportion who admitted to having received electoral assistance remained significant. This pattern confirms that normative rejection does not automatically translate into transaction-free behavior; morality and practice coexist in the same political arena.

Regression analysis shows that the determining factors do not move uniformly between the two levels, namely moral attitudes and factual experiences. In general, variables such as education and generation play a consistent role in strengthening moral resistance and clean behavior in some contexts (such as in Humbang Hasundutan, Kolaka and Lamongan), but lose their power when faced with strong patronage structures (Banjar). Meanwhile, party-id generally weakens resistance, indicating that proximity to political parties remains the main channel for the normalization of money politics. Income, on the other hand, does not play a significant role in all regencies—indicating that this practice transcends economic boundaries and is more influenced by social values and patronage relationships.

This complexity implies that money politics in Indonesia cannot be reduced to a matter of “individual morality” alone, but rather a reflection of social negotiations between norms, needs, and loyalties. In this context, attitudes and experiences are not two separate poles, but two dimensions that interact with each other in the process of adapting to a deeply rooted patronage system. In other words, voters can reject money politics on moral grounds while remaining pragmatically involved—not because of inconsistency, but because of an effort to balance values and social reality.

Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of developing a new conceptual framework that can explain the moral-practical ambivalence of voters in the context of patronage democracy. Findings across s show that money politics is not a residue of political backwardness, but rather part of an adaptive strategy in a society that is negotiating the values of democracy and patronage. Thus, this study not only strengthens the literature on voter behavior in Indonesia, but also broadens the discourse on how democracy operates in the tension between morality and pragmatic behavior.

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