



## MONEY POLITICS AND VOTER BEHAVIOR: FACTORS BEHIND INCUMBENT DEFEAT IN SUBANG REGENCY'S 2024 REGIONAL ELECTION

**Ujang Komarudin**

*Universitas Al Azhar Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia, Email: [ujangkomarudin.uai@gmail.com](mailto:ujangkomarudin.uai@gmail.com)*

**Waluyo Handoko**

*Universitas Jenderal Soedirman, Purwokerto, Indonesia, Email: [whandoko18@yahoo.com](mailto:whandoko18@yahoo.com)*

**Farzana Hussain**

*University of Northumbria, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom, Email: [hasan1215@yahoo.com](mailto:hasan1215@yahoo.com)*

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### ABSTRACT

The defeat of incumbents in Indonesia's 2024 concurrent regional elections reflects deeper issues in local electoral dynamics. In Subang Regency, the incumbent pair—Ruhimat and Aceng Kudus—lost despite holding office for five years and benefiting from institutional and political capital. This study aims to examine the factors behind this electoral defeat, using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected through closed-ended questionnaires from 400 voters across Subang sub-districts, while qualitative insights were drawn from in-depth interviews with five key informants. The findings reveal that while several variables influenced the outcome—including public dissatisfaction, weak campaign messaging, and fragmented political alliances—the most significant factor was political money. A total of 69.75% of respondents admitted that financial incentives had a decisive influence on their voting decisions. These findings underscore how clientelism and vote-buying practices continue to undermine the performance-based evaluation of candidates. The study concludes that political money remains a powerful determinant in regional elections, with significant implications for democratic accountability and electoral reform in Indonesia.

## 1. Introduction

General elections are a central pillar of democracy, serving as mechanisms through which public officials gain legitimacy. Essential features of a democratic system include free, fair, and periodic elections.<sup>1</sup> In Indonesia, direct Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) are constitutionally mandated under Law No. 7 of 2017 and Law No. 10 of 2016, reflecting the post-reform commitment to decentralization

<sup>1</sup> Robert Alan Dahl and A. Rahman Zainuddin., *Perihal demokrasi: Menjelajahi teori dan praktek demokrasi secara singkat*, Jakarta, Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2001, page.121.

and democratic governance.<sup>2</sup> However, the quality of these elections is frequently undermined by persistent practices of money politics.

Money politics, broadly understood as the exchange of material rewards for votes or political loyalty, represents a major impediment to Indonesia's democratic maturity. Its normalization across electoral cycles erodes public trust and transforms elections into transactional rather than deliberative contests. Faiz<sup>3</sup> classifies money politics under the broader framework of electoral corruption, which includes vote buying, candidate buying, and illicit campaign financing. Although the Indonesian legal framework criminalizes money politics—stipulating severe penalties under both Law No. 10 of 2016 and Law No. 7 of 2017—the practice remains rampant.<sup>4</sup> Enforcement is often weak due to societal tolerance, economic vulnerability, and a blurred understanding between acceptable campaign assistance and bribery. Public perception frequently frames money as compensation for voter time or lost income, weakening the deterrent effect of the law (Bawaslu Regulation No. 13 of 2024).

From an Islamic perspective, money politics is condemned as a form of bribery. Quranic verses, such as Al-Baqarah 188 and Al-Maidah 42, prohibit unjustly consuming others' property and accepting bribes, respectively.<sup>5</sup> A hadith from Prophet Muhammad further curses both bribe-givers and recipients (narrated by Abu Dawud). These teachings frame money politics as ethically and morally destructive, aligning with modern legal prohibitions.

The Pilkada system, which should ideally enhance democratic responsiveness, instead often reinforces elite domination. Incumbent candidates tend to enjoy a structural advantage in local elections due to greater access to campaign resources, media exposure, and political patronage.<sup>6</sup> Supported by business elites with vested interests, incumbents are expected to perform well electorally. However, empirical anomalies challenge this assumption.

In the 2020 simultaneous regional elections, 11 incumbent candidates lost their re-election bids—a striking deviation from the typical incumbency advantage. This electoral defeat of incumbents raises important questions about the effectiveness of money politics as an electoral strategy. Despite mobilizing substantial financial resources, these incumbents failed to secure voter support, suggesting a potential shift in voter rationality, political awareness, or dissatisfaction with local governance performance.

The persistence of money politics in Indonesian elections has been widely studied, with research highlighting its normalization across levels of governance—from village head elections to regional and national contests. Scholars such as Aspinall

<sup>2</sup> Siti Zuhro., *Demokrasi Dan Kepemimpinan Transformatif*, *Himmah: Jurnal Kajian Islam Kontemporer*, Vol.5, no.2, 2021, page.371.

<sup>3</sup> Elza Faiz., *Urgensi Calon Independen Dalam Pemilihan Presiden dan Pemilihan Kepala Daerah*, Yogyakarta, Pusat Studi Hukum Konstitusi FH UII Yogyakarta, 2019, page.32.

<sup>4</sup> Yasser Arafat, Alfi Sahrin, and Arnasari Merdekawati Hadi., *Pilkada antara pertarungan gagasan dan perebutan kekuasaan*, *Al-Ittihad: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Hukum Islam*, Vol.8, no.2, 2022, page.12.

<sup>5</sup> M. Quraish Shihab., *Tafsir al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an*, Tangerang, Lentera Hati, 2017, page.43.

<sup>6</sup> Luthfi J. Kurniawan., *Peta korupsi di daerah*, Jakarta, MCW and Yappika, 2006, page.54.

and Berenschot<sup>7</sup> and Reuter<sup>8</sup> have detailed how transactional politics and elite clientelism have become embedded in Indonesia's democratic processes. Numerous works have examined political dowries,<sup>9</sup> rural patronage,<sup>10</sup> digital corruption,<sup>11</sup> gender disadvantages,<sup>12</sup> and ethnic-religious mobilization.<sup>13</sup> However, these studies primarily emphasize how money politics enables electoral success, rarely problematizing instances where it fails despite heavy financial deployment. Although some research recognizes structural resistance to vote-buying—such as rising political awareness, performance dissatisfaction, or normative disapproval—these remain underexplored in the context of electoral losses by incumbents. Furthermore, while many studies explore money politics from legal or sociological perspectives, few adopt an integrative framework that combines empirical voter behavior analysis. Thus, there is a gap in literature addressing the declining effectiveness of money politics in light of voter agency and legal enforcement.

Moreover, limited research has focused specifically on cases where incumbents lose despite deploying clientelist strategies. This gap points to a need for more nuanced analysis of how voters respond to money politics, particularly in contexts of rising political literacy or disillusionment with the status quo. The aim of this study is an empirical investigation to examine the factors contributing to the defeat of the incumbent candidate pair, Ruhimat and Aceng Kudus, in the 2024 Subang Regency Regional Head Election. Specifically, it explores the erosion of political capital through ineffective performance dissemination, campaign inefficacy, and poor electoral branding. The study also investigates the influence of money politics, focusing on the role of clientelist practices in shaping voter behavior.

## 2. Method

This study employs a mixed methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the factors contributing to the defeat of incumbents in the 2024 Subang Regional Head Election (Pilkada). The research adopts a sequential explanatory design, where quantitative data collection and

<sup>7</sup> Edward Aspinall and Ward Berenschot., *Democracy for sale: Elections, clientelism, and the state in Indonesia*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2019, page.132.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Reuter., Political parties and the power of money in Indonesia and beyond, *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and-National Studies of Southeast Asia*, Vol.3, no.2, 2015, page.288.

<sup>9</sup> Erdianto Effendi and Tito Handoko., Political Dowry in the Indonesian Election Nomination Process, *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, Vol.52, no.3, 2025, page.3965. See too, Tiara Mustika and Rodiyah Rodiyah., Political Dowry in the Maelstrom of Political Practices in Indonesia: Legal and Political Aspects, *Journal of Law and Legal Reform*, Vol.4, no.1, 2023, page.52.

<sup>10</sup> George Towar Ikbil Tawakkal, Wisnu Suhardono, Andrew D. Garner, and Thomas Seitz., Consistency and vote buying: income, education, and attitudes about vote buying in Indonesia, *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol.17, no.3, 2017, page.325. See too, Haryanto., Adaptation and Continuities in Clientelism in a Fishing Community in Takalar, South Sulawesi, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.39, no.3, 2017, page.527.

<sup>11</sup> Siti Fatimah, Kushandajani Kushandajani, Fitriyah Fitriyah, and Muhammad Adnan., *The Intersection of Technology, Money Politics, and Democracy in Indonesia / La intersección entre tecnología, política monetaria y democracia en Indonesia*, *Sociología y tecnociencia: Revista digital de sociología del sistema tecnocientífico*, Vol.15, no.1, 2025, page.218.

<sup>12</sup> Ella S. Prihatini., Women's Views and Experiences of Accessing National Parliament: Evidence from Indonesia, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol.74, no.2, 2019, page.87.

<sup>13</sup> Arizka Warganegara and Paul Waley., Do ethnic politics matter? Reassessing the role of ethnicity in local elections in Indonesia, *South East Asia Research*, Vol.32, no.3, 2024, page.260.

analysis precede qualitative methods to provide a structured exploration of the research problem. Subang Regency was selected as the research location due to the significant incumbent defeat in the 2024 simultaneous regional elections, offering a pertinent case for examining electoral dynamics.

Data were collected through multiple methods: closed-ended (multiple-choice) questionnaires, in-depth interviews, documentation studies, and literature reviews. The sample included 400 respondents across all Subang sub-districts, ensuring broad representation. Additionally, qualitative data were gathered from in-depth interviews with five individuals, supplemented by insights from five key informants, including Subang political party elites, candidate campaign team members, and local political observers. This research utilized a 5-point Likert scale, namely: 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree, and 5 for strongly agree.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify and describe the distribution of factors influencing incumbent defeat, such as media use for political education. Qualitative data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model,<sup>14</sup> which involves three key stages: data reduction (organizing and simplifying data), data display (presenting data in an accessible format), and conclusion drawing/verification (interpreting findings). To enhance rigor, the analysis incorporated data triangulation (cross-verifying data from multiple sources) and member checks (validating findings with participants). This approach ensures a robust examination of the complex factors behind the incumbent's defeat in the 2024 Subang Pilkada.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1. Erosion of Political Capital through Ineffective Performance Dissemination**

This study investigates the unexpected defeat of the incumbent candidate pair, Ruhimat and Aceng Kudus, in the 2024 Subang Regency Regional Head Election (Pilkada). Despite their incumbency advantages, including institutional access, political networks, and governance achievements, the pair failed to secure re-election. Utilizing a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, this section presents findings from quantitative surveys (N=400) and qualitative interviews (N=5) to elucidate three primary factors contributing to their defeat: ineffective dissemination of political capital, campaign inefficacy, and failure in electoral branding. These factors are analyzed through theoretical lenses, including Bourdieu's political capital,<sup>15</sup> Green and Gerber's campaign efficacy,<sup>16</sup> and Alhidayah's political marketing frameworks.<sup>17</sup>

The demographic profile of the 400 respondents provides context for interpreting

<sup>14</sup> Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman., *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*, Thousand Oaks, sage, 1994, page.21.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Bourdieu., *Political interventions: Social science and political action*, London, Verso Books, 2008, page.41.

<sup>16</sup> Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber., Voter mobilization, experimentation, and translational social science, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.14, no.3, 2016, page.743.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmad Yozi Alhidayah., Strategi Komunikasi Politik Rohidin Mersyah sebagai Calon Petahana Pilkada 2020 Provinsi Bengkulu, *Jurnal Komunikasi dan Budaya*, Vol.1, no.1, 2020, page.21.

voter perceptions (Table 1). Females comprised 61.5% of the sample, while males accounted for 38.5%. The age distribution was dominated by early adults (25–35 years, 38.5%), followed by those aged 35–50 (36.5%) and 17–25 (26.0%). This uneven gender and age distribution reflects the electoral composition of Subang Regency, with a notable female voter majority.

**Table 1: Respondent Demographics**

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)	Frequency (N)
Gender	Male	38.5	154
	Female	61.5	246
Total			400
Age Group	17–25	26.0	104
	25–35	38.5	154
	35–50	35.5	142
Total			400

Source: Processed by researchers (2024)

Bourdieu's<sup>18</sup> concept of political capital posits that incumbents leverage institutional and symbolic resources to maintain electoral dominance. Ruhimat, as the incumbent Regent (2018–2023), possessed significant political capital, including governance achievements such as achieving an Unqualified Opinion (*Wajar Tanpa Pengecualian*/WTP) from the Indonesian Audit Board (BPK) for five consecutive years, implementing a “Zero Rupiah” meritocratic policy, and reducing stunting rates, earning provincial recognition in 2021. Additionally, his anti-corruption record distinguished him from three predecessors implicated in graft. However, the failure to effectively disseminate these achievements to voters undermined this capital.

Quantitative data from a five-point Likert scale survey (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) reveal widespread voter dissatisfaction and lack of awareness (Table 2). An average of 61.6% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with statements affirming satisfaction with Ruhimat's performance, awareness of his vision-mission, and exposure to campaign information about his achievements. Notably, 65.5% strongly disagreed with being satisfied with his 2018–2023 performance, and 63.7% reported receiving insufficient information about his programs during the campaign.

Qualitative insights corroborate these findings. Political observer Ade Hasanudin noted that the incumbent's campaign team failed to effectively communicate achievements, leaving voters disconnected from the district government's efforts.<sup>19</sup> This aligns with Bourdieu's assertion that political capital requires active

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Bourdieu., *Political interventions: Social science and political action*, London, Verso Books, 2008, page.41.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Ade Hasanudin in Jakarta, June 30, 2024

mobilization to translate into electoral success. The incumbent's inability to convert governance achievements into voter trust reflects a critical lapse in strategic communication, eroding their electoral advantage.

**Table 2: Voter Perceptions of Incumbent Performance Dissemination**

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Disagree Percentage (1+2)
1	Satisfied with Ruhimat's performance as Regent (2018–2023)	262	83	46	3	6	86.3%
2	Felt the results of Ruhimat's work as Regent (2018–2023)	250	96	43	10	1	86.5%
3	Understood the vision-mission of Ruhimat-Aceng Kudus in 2024 Pilkada	227	101	54	11	7	82.0%
4	Received information about Ruhimat's achievements during 2024 campaign	255	88	39	10	8	85.8%
5	Voted for Ruhimat in 2024 due to his achievements (2018–2023)	238	99	47	12	4	84.3%

Source: Processed by researchers (2024)

Furthermore, the results highlight key issues related to campaign inefficacy and organizational fragmentation. Campaign efficacy, defined as the ability to mobilize resources and coordinate strategies effectively,<sup>20</sup> is pivotal in electoral contests. Despite the incumbent's access to political networks and bureaucratic resources, their campaign suffered from organizational fragmentation and strategic missteps. Survey results indicate that 62.8% of respondents perceived the campaign team as ineffective, with 64.8% strongly disagreeing that they were satisfied with the team's performance (Table 3).

Qualitative data provide deeper insights. Campaign team member Abdul Muid highlighted inadequate funding and immature strategies, which hindered volunteer

<sup>20</sup> Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber., Voter mobilization, experimentation, and translational social science, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.14, no.3, 2016, page.744.

mobilization and message dissemination.<sup>21</sup> Election observer Shibghotulloh<sup>22</sup> noted that overconfidence in incumbency led to a lack of militancy among supporters, undermining grassroots efforts. This disorganization failed to capitalize on the incumbent's social capital, as described by Bourdieu,<sup>23</sup> resulting in a fragmented campaign unable to compete with the more cohesive strategies of opponents.

**Table 3: Voter Perceptions of Campaign Team Efficacy**

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Disagree Percentage (1+2)
1	Satisfied with the performance of Ruhimat-Aceng Kudus' campaign team	259	82	30	18	11	85.3
2	Coalition supporting Ruhimat-Aceng Kudus was compact and hardworking	247	95	38	12	8	85.5
3	Campaign team worked optimally and effectively	255	86	49	7	3	85.3
4	Campaign team was massive in socializing candidates	245	91	43	12	9	84.0
5	Campaign team was solid and militant in winning the candidate pair	250	109	36	4	1	89.8

Moreover, another contributing factor is the failure of electoral branding in shaping voter perceptions. Political marketing theory emphasizes the role of electoral branding in aligning candidate images with voter aspirations.<sup>24</sup> The incumbent pair's branding as experienced and clean leaders failed to resonate with Subang's electorate, significantly contributing to their electoral defeat. Survey data show that 60.5% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with positive perceptions of the pair's image, including their pro-people stance, integrity, and contributions to economic development (Table 4).

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Abdul Muid in Jakarta, June 28, 2024

<sup>22</sup> Dea Arsyad Mujtahid Shibghotulloh, Husin Al-Banjari, and Yusa Djuyandi., Peran Aktor Dalam Proses Pembentukan Dinasti Politik (Studi Kasus Di Kabupaten Purwakarta), *Paradigma POLISTAAT: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik*, Vol.3, no.1, 2020, page.45.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Bourdieu., *Political interventions: Social science and political action*, London, Verso Books, 2008, page.41.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Needham, and Gareth Smith., Introduction: political branding, *Journal of Political Marketing*, Vol.14, no.1, 2015, page.16.

**Table 4: Voter Perceptions of Incumbent Electoral Branding**

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Disagree Percentage (1+2)
1	Ruhimat-Aceng Kudus known as pro-people candidates	254	85	48	7	6	84.8
2	Known as candidates with integrity and free from corruption	226	96	56	13	9	80.5
3	Known as candidates loved by Subang people	234	99	51	12	4	83.3
4	Known as candidates who can improve Subang's economy	250	77	38	24	11	81.8
5	Known as candidates with leadership experience	245	87	43	17	8	83.0

Qualitative findings from Ade Hasanudin indicate that the incumbent's branding was misaligned with the local context, where voters favored the religiously resonant narrative promoted by the winning coalition of Reynaldi Putra Andita and Agus Masykur Rosyadi. The incumbent's reliance on open rallies, contrasted with opponents' door-to-door and dialogic approaches, limited voter engagement. This misalignment underscores the importance of context-sensitive branding in shaping voter perceptions.<sup>25</sup>

The high disagreement rates (82.7–86.0%) across all factors suggest a systemic failure in converting incumbency advantages into electoral support. The incumbent's political capital was not effectively communicated, their campaign lacked organizational cohesion, and their branding failed to resonate with voter priorities. These findings align with Aspinall and Berenschot's argument<sup>26</sup> that clientelist strategies often overshadow performance-based appeals in Indonesian elections, though this study highlights internal campaign failures as equally critical. The defeat of Ruhimat-Aceng Kudus underscores the fragility of incumbency advantages in the face of poor campaign execution and branding. Theoretically, this study extends Bourdieu's framework<sup>27</sup> by demonstrating that political capital requires active dissemination to influence voter behavior.

### **3.2. Influence of Money Politics on Incumbent Defeat in the 2024 Subang Pilkada**

The defeat of the incumbent candidate pair, Ruhimat and Aceng Kudus, in the 2024 Subang Regency Regional Head Election (Pilkada) underscores the pervasive influence of money politics in shaping electoral outcomes. Grounded in clientelism theory and political resource theory, the findings reveal that money politics, encompassing cash payments and material assistance, was a dominant

<sup>25</sup> M. Ichsan Bayunta Perangin-Angin and Riady Raffiudin., Pengaruh Informasi Kinerja Incumbent Terhadap Partisipasi Pemilih Milenial Dalam Pilkada Medan 2020, *Jurnal Ilmu Politik dan Pemerintahan*, Vol.9, no.2, 2023, page.43.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Aspinall and Ward Berenschot, *Democracy for sale: Elections, clientelism, and the state in Indonesia*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2019, page.132.

<sup>27</sup> Pierre Bourdieu., *Political interventions: Social science and political action*, London, Verso Books, 2008, page.41.



determinant of voter behavior, significantly undermining the incumbent's campaign efforts. Quantitative data, collected via closed-ended questionnaires, assessed the relative influence of nine factors on voting decisions, including money politics, sociological factors (age, region of origin, gender, education, religious background), and psychological factors (nominating party, work program, candidate loyalty). Descriptive statistics, presented in Table 1, indicate that money politics accounted for 69.25% of voter preferences, far surpassing sociological (21.4%) and psychological (9.6%) factors. The frequencies, calculated from the sample of 400 respondents, reflect the number of voters attributing their decisions to each factor, with 277 respondents citing money or other assistance as the primary influence.

The dominance of money politics, with 69.25% influence, highlights its role as the primary driver of voter behavior, overshadowing demographic and ideological considerations. Sociological factors, including age (6.8%), region of origin (6.3%), and religious background (4.0%), collectively contributed 21.4%, while psychological factors, such as candidate loyalty (4.3%) and work program (2.8%), accounted for 9.6%. This distribution suggests that clientelist practices, characterized by material exchanges, significantly outweighed performance-based or value-driven voting rationales.

Qualitative interviews provide granular insights into the mechanisms of money politics. Five informants, selected for their knowledge of campaign practices, reported direct experiences with clientelist tactics. Informant A (SR) disclosed receiving Rp. 20,000 to vote for candidate pair No. 2 (Reynaldi-Agus Masykur). Informants B (JE) and C (NJ) confirmed receiving cash payments with instructions to support specific candidates, while Informant D (CP) described basic food assistance from the No. 2 campaign team, accompanied by voting directives. Informant E (ZA) reported a cash distribution two days before the election, explicitly tied to supporting a candidate pair. These accounts align with Aspinall and Berenschot's framework of clientelism,<sup>28</sup> where material incentives secure electoral loyalty, often exploiting economic vulnerabilities.

**Table 5: Factors Influencing Voter Behavior in the 2024 Subang Pilkada**

No	Factor	Percentage (%)	Frequency (N)
1	Age	6.8	27
2	Region of Origin	6.3	25
3	Gender	2.8	11
4	Education	1.5	6
5	Religious Background	4.0	16
6	Nominating Party	2.5	10
7	Work Program	2.8	11
8	Candidate Loyalty	4.3	17
9	Money/Other Assistance	69.25	277
Total		100.0	400

The findings resonate with political resource theory, which posits that financial




<sup>28</sup> Edward Aspinall and Ward Berenschot., *Democracy for sale: Elections, clientelism, and the state in Indonesia*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2019, page.132.

resources amplify political influence.<sup>29</sup> Alexander<sup>30</sup> further argues that money serves as a tool to sway voters, particularly in contexts of economic precarity. In Subang, the prevalence of cash and goods distribution by the winning pair's campaign likely outpaced the incumbent's efforts, eroding their incumbency advantage. Despite Ruhimat's governance achievements, including an Unqualified Opinion from the Indonesian Audit Board and anti-corruption credentials, the transactional nature of voter engagement favored candidates with more aggressive clientelist strategies.

Legal responses to money politics allegations proved inadequate. The Subang Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) investigated public reports through its Gakkumdu Center, concluding on December 9, 2024, that the practices did not meet the criteria for election crimes under Article J3 in conjunction with Article 187A of Law No. 10 of 2016 (Bawaslu Subang, 2024). The incumbent pair escalated the issue by filing a dispute with the Constitutional Court on January 8, 2025 (Case No. 223/PHPU.WAKO-XXIII/2025), alleging money politics and administrative violations by the No. 2 pair. The Court dismissed the case, citing procedural deficiencies. This outcome reflects a broader challenge in Indonesian elections: the gap between empirical evidence of clientelism and the legal system's capacity to enforce accountability.<sup>31</sup>

Table 6 aggregates the data into three categories—money politics, sociological factors, and psychological factors—to visualize their relative influence on voter behavior. The table employs a block-based representation to approximate a bar chart, illustrating the disproportionate impact of money politics.

**Table 6: Relative Influence of Voter Behavior Factors (Figure Representation)**

Category	Percentage (%)	Frequency (N)	Visual Representation
Money Politics	69.25	277	 69.25%
Sociological Factors <sup>a)</sup>	21.4	85	 21.4%
Psychological Factors <sup>b)</sup>	9.6	38	 9.6%
<sup>a)</sup> Sociological factors include age, region of origin, gender, education, and religious background; <sup>b)</sup> Psychological factors include nominating party, work program, and candidate loyalty.			

Source: Processed by researchers (2024)

The visual representation in Table 2 underscores the overwhelming influence of money politics (69.25%) compared to sociological (21.4%) and psychological (9.6%) factors. This disparity highlights the structural entrenchment of clientelism

<sup>29</sup> Edward Aspinall., Elections and the Normalization of Politics in Indonesia, *South East Asia Research*, Vol.13, no.2, 2005, page.153.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander., *The meanings of social life: A cultural sociology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, page.21.

<sup>31</sup> Munadi Munadi., Etika politik generasi milenial menjelang Pemilu 2024, *Resolusi: Jurnal Sosial Politik*, Vol.6, no.2, 2023, page.122.

in Subang's electoral landscape, where economic incentives superseded the incumbent's performance-based appeals. The incumbent's failure to counter these practices, combined with their campaign's organizational and branding weaknesses, created a cumulative disadvantage that precipitated their defeat.

Theoretically, these findings extend clientelism theory by demonstrating how material exchanges dominate voter preferences in patronage-driven systems. The 69.25% influence of money politics aligns with Aspinall and Berenschot's observation<sup>32</sup> that clientelist networks prioritize transactional loyalty over ideological alignment. The secondary role of sociological and psychological factors suggests that while demographic and attitudinal variables shape voting behavior, they are subordinate to financial incentives in contexts of weak institutional oversight. Aspinall's emphasis on financial resources as a political tool is particularly relevant,<sup>33</sup> as the winning pair's ability to distribute cash and goods likely capitalized on Subang's socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Practically, the findings highlight the challenges of combating money politics in Indonesian elections. The legal system's inability to prosecute clientelist practices, despite clear evidence from voter reports, perpetuates a cycle of electoral manipulation. This gap underscores the need for enhanced enforcement mechanisms, such as real-time monitoring and stricter penalties, to deter vote-buying. Additionally, voter education initiatives could foster greater awareness of the ethical and legal implications of accepting material incentives, potentially reducing their electoral impact.

### 3.3. Dominance of Clientelist Networks in Voter Mobilization

The 2024 Subang Pilkada study reveals that the defeat of incumbent candidates Ruhimat and Aceng Kudus stemmed from three primary factors: ineffective dissemination of political capital (61.6% voter disagreement), campaign inefficacy (62.8% disagreement), and failed electoral branding (60.5% disagreement) (Tables 2–4). These findings, derived from a mixed-methods approach involving 400 survey respondents and five qualitative interviews, align with established theoretical frameworks—namely political capital,<sup>34</sup> campaign efficacy,<sup>35</sup> and political marketing.<sup>36</sup>

Despite Ruhimat's administrative accomplishments, including receiving an Unqualified Opinion (WTP) from the Indonesian Audit Board and maintaining a corruption-free governance image, these achievements failed to gain traction among the electorate. The inability to effectively communicate such accomplishments significantly weakened the incumbents' public appeal. Furthermore, campaign disorganization—exacerbated by insufficient funding,

<sup>32</sup> Edward Aspinall and Ward Berenschot., *Democracy for sale: Elections, clientelism, and the state in Indonesia*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2019, page.132.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Aspinall., Elections and the Normalization of Politics in Indonesia, *South East Asia Research*, Vol.13, no.2, 2005, page.153.

<sup>34</sup> Pierre Bourdieu., *Political interventions: Social science and political action*, London, Verso Books, 2008, page.41.

<sup>35</sup> Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber., Voter mobilization, experimentation, and translational social science, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.14, no.3, 2016, page.745.

<sup>36</sup> Catherine Needham and Gareth Smith., Introduction: political branding, *Journal of Political Marketing*, Vol.14, no.2, 2015, page.15.

strategic complacency, and overconfidence<sup>37</sup> further diminished their competitiveness. The branding strategy, which emphasized experience and bureaucratic merit, appeared out of sync with local voter sentiments, which were more attuned to identity-based and religious narratives.

The campaign methods adopted by the incumbent pair predominantly relied on conventional open campaign formats. In contrast, the successful Reynaldi–Agus Masykur campaign employed a hybrid approach that combined open rallies with dialogic forums and door-to-door engagement strategies. This multifaceted outreach enabled closer voter interaction and enhanced message personalization. Notably, the Islamic religious branding employed by the winning coalition significantly influenced voter preferences. This branding extended beyond personal piety; it was embedded in the coalition’s vision and mission statements, the symbolic naming of their supporting alliance—the Reynaldi–Agus Masykur Coalition—and a religiously evocative campaign tagline. These elements provided a cohesive and resonant narrative that the incumbent pair failed to match.

According to political marketing theory, electoral branding must align with voter aspirations through strategic positioning and voter-centered messaging.<sup>38</sup> Although the incumbent candidates possessed substantial political and social capital, they were unable to effectively translate these assets into a compelling political brand. This failure contributed to the erosion of their political image and ultimately led to their electoral loss. The study’s emphasis on the ineffective dissemination of political capital further echoes Bourdieu’s assertion<sup>39</sup> that symbolic resources must be actively mobilized to yield political returns. The 61.6% of voters who remained unaware of Ruhimat’s policy accomplishments parallels Berenschot and Mulder’s observation<sup>40</sup> that clientelist practices often overshadow governance performance in state-dependent electoral environments. In the context of Subang, the inability to convert institutional legitimacy into electoral gain reflects broader trends identified by Hendrawan, Berenschot, and Aspinall,<sup>41</sup> who note that pre-electoral coalitions in Indonesia frequently prioritize patronage over programmatic appeals.

Qualitative insights further underscore the disconnect between the district administration and the electorate. This detachment reflects Simandjuntak’s conception of a “patronage democracy,”<sup>42</sup> where political engagement is shaped more by transactional relationships than by democratic deliberation. Within such a context, the success of the Reynaldi–Agus Masykur coalition demonstrates the continued relevance of clientelist and identity-based appeals in subnational

<sup>37</sup> Dea Arsyad Mujtahid Shibghotulloh, Husin Al-Banjari, and Yusa Djuyandi., Peran Aktor Dalam Proses Pembentukan Dinasti Politik (Studi Kasus Di Kabupaten Purwakarta), *Paradigma POLISTAAT: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu*, Vol.3, no.1, 2020, page.43.

<sup>38</sup> Catherine Needham and Gareth Smith., Introduction: political branding, *Journal of Political Marketing*, Vol.14, no.2, 2015, page.14.

<sup>39</sup> Pierre Bourdieu., *Political interventions: Social science and political action*, London, Verso Books, 2008, page.41.

<sup>40</sup> Ward Berenschot and Peter Mulder., Explaining regional variation in local governance: Clientelism and state-dependency in Indonesia, *World Development*, Vol.122, no.3, 2019, page.243.

<sup>41</sup> Adrianus Hendrawan, Ward Berenschot, and Edward Aspinall., Parties as pay-off seekers: Pre-electoral coalitions in a patronage democracy, *Electoral*, Vol.69, no.3, 2021, page.102238.

<sup>42</sup> Deasy Simandjuntak., Gifts and promises: Patronage democracy in a decentralised Indonesia, *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol.11, no.1, 2012, page.123.

Indonesian politics, highlighting the structural fragility of incumbency in a patronage-driven system.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, the findings suggest campaign inefficacy, with 62.8% of respondents perceiving the incumbent's team as ineffective. This aligns with Green and Gerber's framework,<sup>44</sup> emphasizing resource mobilization and strategic coordination. Abdul's report of funding shortages<sup>45</sup> and Shibghotulloh's note of overconfidence<sup>46</sup> reflect Aspinall and Hicken's depiction of Indonesia's transactional clientelism,<sup>47</sup> where ephemeral "success teams" lack organizational durability. This fragmentation contrasts with Kılıçdaroğlu's analysis of the Prosperous Justice Party's adaptive clientelist strategies,<sup>48</sup> suggesting that Subang's incumbent campaign failed to match opponents' cohesive grassroots efforts. The reliance on open rallies, as opposed to door-to-door engagement, further echoes Fossati et al.'s finding that clientelist networks sustain electoral mobilization, often outpacing less dynamic campaigns.<sup>49</sup>

The failure of electoral branding, with 60.5% voter rejection of the incumbent's image, supports Needham et al.'s political marketing theory,<sup>50</sup> stressing context-sensitive voter alignment. The incumbent's "experienced and clean" branding clashed with the winning pair's religiously resonant narrative, mirroring Fionna and Tomsa observation that patronage-driven factionalism shapes voter perceptions over ideological coherence.<sup>51</sup> This misalignment contrasts with Yuda's study of clientelist-influenced social policy,<sup>52</sup> where familial ethics bolster elite appeal, suggesting Subang's incumbent lacked a culturally resonant narrative. Wadipalapa and Tyson's analysis of dynastic clientelism<sup>53</sup> further contextualizes Subang's competitive landscape, where entrenched networks likely amplified the winning pair's clientelist advantage.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Aspinall and Ward Berenschot., *Democracy for sale: Elections, clientelism, and the state in Indonesia*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2019, page.132.

<sup>44</sup> Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber., Voter mobilization, experimentation, and translational social science, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.14, no.3, 2016, page.744.

<sup>45</sup> Muhyi Abdul., *Pengumuman Rekapitulasi Hasil Perhitungan Perolehan Suara di Tingkat Kabupaten Subang Pemilihan Tahun 2024*, 2024 [Online].

<sup>46</sup> Dea Arsyad Mujtahid Shibghotulloh, Husin Al-Banjari, and Yusa Djuyandi., Peran Aktor Dalam Proses Pembentukan Dinasti Politik (Studi Kasus Di Kabupaten Purwakarta), *Paradigma POLISTAAT: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik*, Vol.3, no.1, 2020, page.28.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Aspinall and Allen Hicken., Guns for hire and enduring machines: clientelism beyond parties in Indonesia and the Philippines, *Democratization*, Vol.27, no.1, 2020, page.154.

<sup>48</sup> Kerem Kılıçdaroğlu., Embracing Clientelism: The Case of the Prosperous Justice Party in Indonesia, *International Area Studies Review*, Vol.27, no.3, 2024, page.244.

<sup>49</sup> Diego Fossati, Edward Aspinall, Burhanuddin Muhtadi, and Eve Warburton., Ideological representation in clientelistic democracies: The Indonesian case, *Electoral Studies*, Vol.63, no.3, 2020, page.102111.

<sup>50</sup> Catherine Needham and Gareth Smith., Introduction: political branding, *Journal of Political Marketing*, Vol.14, no.12, 2015, page.12.

<sup>51</sup> Ulla Fionna and Dirk Tomsa., Changing patterns of factionalism in Indonesia: From principle to patronage, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol.39, no.1, 2020, page.55.

<sup>52</sup> Tauchid Komara Yuda., The complementary roles between clientelism and familism in social policy development, *Social Policy & Administration*, Vol.55, no.7, 2021, page.1390.

<sup>53</sup> Rendy Wadipalapa and Adam Tyson., Cross-Party Presidential Dynasticism in Indonesia: Evidence from the 2024 Presidential Elections, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.98, no.1, 2024, page.100. <https://doi.org/10.5509/2025981-art4>.

Comparatively, the Subang findings extend Aspinall and Berenschot's clientelism framework<sup>54</sup> by highlighting how internal campaign failures exacerbate the dominance of patronage-based appeals. While Berenschot notes clientelism's undermining of civil service reform,<sup>55</sup> Subang's case illustrates its electoral impact, where voter preferences (82.7–86.0% disagreement) favored transactional strategies over governance records. Unlike Fossati et al.'s evidence of ideological persistence,<sup>56</sup> Subang's electorate prioritized material incentives, aligning with Simandjuntak's voter-client duality.<sup>57</sup> The study underscores the need for strategic communication and adaptive branding to counter clientelism, reinforcing Hendrawan et al.'s call for programmatic coalition-building to enhance electoral competitiveness in patronage democracies.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, the results also showed that money politics in 2024 Subang Pilkada is pervasive, with a 69.25% influence on voter behavior, was the primary driver of the incumbent pair's defeat, overshadowing sociological (21.4%) and psychological (9.6%) factors (Table 5). Qualitative interviews corroborate this, with informants reporting cash payments and material assistance tied to voting directives, aligning with Aspinall and Berenschot's clientelism framework,<sup>59</sup> where material exchanges secure electoral loyalty. This finding resonates with political resource theory, as Aspinall<sup>60</sup> and Alexander<sup>61</sup> argue that financial incentives amplify influence in economically precarious contexts. The incumbent's governance achievements were insufficient against the winning pair's aggressive clientelist strategies, highlighting the entrenched nature of transactional politics in Subang.

Prior research confirms the systemic prevalence of money politics in Indonesian elections. Tawakkal and Garner<sup>62</sup> found that even in unopposed elections, candidates engage in vote-buying to ensure turnout, reflecting cultural expectations of material incentives. Similarly, Haryanto<sup>63</sup> illustrates how patron-

<sup>54</sup> Edward Aspinall and Ward Berenschot., *Democracy for sale: Elections, clientelism, and the state in Indonesia*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2019, page.132.

<sup>55</sup> Ward Berenschot., The political economy of clientelism: A comparative study of Indonesia's patronage democracy, *Comparative political studies*, Vol.51, no.12, 2018, page.1590.

<sup>56</sup> Diego Fossati, Edward Aspinall, Burhanuddin Muhtadi, and Eve Warburton., Ideological representation in clientelistic democracies: The Indonesian case, *Electoral Studies*, Vol.63, no.3, 2020, page.102111.

<sup>57</sup> Deasy Simandjuntak., Gifts and promises: Patronage democracy in a decentralised Indonesia, *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol.11, no.1, 2012, page.121.

<sup>58</sup> Adrianus Hendrawan, Ward Berenschot, and Edward Aspinall., Parties as pay-off seekers: Pre-electoral coalitions in a patronage democracy, *Electoral Studies*, Vol.69, no.3, 2021, page.102238.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Aspinall and Ward Berenschot., *Democracy for sale: Elections, clientelism, and the state in Indonesia*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2019, page.132.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Aspinall., Elections and the Normalization of Politics in Indonesia, *South East Asia Research*, Vol.13, no.2, 2005, page.150.

<sup>61</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The meanings of social life: A cultural sociology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, page.21.

<sup>62</sup> George Towar Ikbil Tawakkal and Andrew D. Garner., Unopposed but not Uncontested: Brokers and "Vote Buying" in the 2017 Pati District Election, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.14, no.4, 2017, page.507.

<sup>63</sup> Haryanto., Adaptation and Continuities in Clientelism in a Fishing Community in Takalar, South Sulawesi, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.39, no.3, 2017, page.530.

client relations in South Sulawesi's fishing communities facilitate political brokerage, mirroring Subang's cash and goods distributions. Prihatini<sup>64</sup> highlights barriers for female candidates due to financial demands, suggesting that money politics reinforces elite dominance, a dynamic evident in Subang's electoral landscape. Gonschorek<sup>65</sup> further links fiscal favoritism to clientelism, noting discretionary grants to governors' districts, akin to Subang's material inducements.

However, some studies reveal countercurrents. Mahsun et al.<sup>66</sup> show that female candidates in Central Java leveraged social capital to mitigate clientelist disadvantages, a strategy absent in Subang's incumbent campaign. Warganegara and Waley<sup>67</sup> note that ethnicity and religion intersect with money politics, as seen in Lampung, but Subang's findings emphasize financial incentives over identity politics. Effendi and Handoko<sup>68</sup> and Mustika and Rodiyah<sup>69</sup> discuss political dowry as a precursor to money politics, suggesting upstream financial barriers that Subang's candidates likely navigated. Fatimah et al.<sup>70</sup> and Perbawa et al.<sup>71</sup> highlight technology's role in facilitating money politics, a factor not explored in Subang but potentially relevant. Rahmat et al.<sup>72</sup> advocate for legal reforms to curb money politics in village elections, echoing Subang's enforcement challenges, where Bawaslu and the Constitutional Court failed to prosecute violations.

The Subang findings extend Aspinall and Rohman's<sup>73</sup> and Simandjuntak's<sup>74</sup> concept of "patronage democracy," where voters balance material benefits with

<sup>64</sup> Ella S. Prihatini, Women's Views and Experiences of Accessing National Parliament: Evidence from Indonesia, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol.74, no.2, 2019, page.85.

<sup>65</sup> Gerrit J. Gonschorek, Subnational Favoritism in Development Grant Allocations: Empirical Evidence from Decentralized Indonesia, *World Development*, Vol.139, no.3, 2021, page.105299.

<sup>66</sup> Muhammad Mahsun, Misbah Zulfa Elizabeth, and Solkhah Mufrikhah., Female candidates, Islamic women's organisations, and clientelism in the 2019 Indonesian elections, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol.40, no.1, 2021, page.90.

<sup>67</sup> Arizka Warganegara and Paul Waley., Do ethnic politics matter? Reassessing the role of ethnicity in local elections in Indonesia, *South East Asia Research*, Vol.32, no.3, 2024, page.260.

<sup>68</sup> Erdianto Effendi and Tito Handoko., Political Dowry in the Indonesian Election Nomination Process, *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, Vol.52, no.3, 2025, page.3964.

<sup>69</sup> Tiara Mustika and Rodiyah Rodiyah., Political Dowry in the Maelstrom of Political Practices in Indonesia: Legal and Political Aspects, *Journal of Law and Legal Reform*, Vol.4, no.1, 2023, page.49.

<sup>70</sup> Siti Fatimah, Kushandajani Kushandajani, Fitriyah Fitriyah, and Muhammad Adnan., *The Intersection of Technology, Money Politics, and Democracy in Indonesia / La intersección entre tecnología, política monetaria y democracia en Indonesia*, *Sociología y tecnociencia: Revista digital de sociología del sistema tecnocientífico*, Vol.15, no.1, 2025, page.220.

<sup>71</sup> Ketut Sukewati Lanang Putra Perbawa, Willy Naresta Hanum, and Almaz Karimovich Atabekov., Industrialization of Election Infringement in Simultaneous Elections: Lessons from Sweden, *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System*, Vol.4, no.2, 2024, page.501.

<sup>72</sup> Diding Rahmat, Sudarto Sudarto, Sarip Sarip, Sujono Sujono, and Muhammad Faiz Aziz., The Urgency of Administrative Law in Light of Ius Constituendum Regarding the Role of Village Heads, *Volkgeist: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum Dan Konstitusi*, Vol.14, no.2, 2024, page.63.

<sup>73</sup> Edward Aspinall and Noor Rohman., Village Head Elections in Java: Money Politics and Brokerage in the Remaking of Indonesia's Rural Elite, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol.48, no.1, 2017, page.51.

<sup>74</sup> Deasy Simandjuntak., Gifts and promises: Patronage democracy in a decentralised Indonesia, *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol.11, no.1, 2012, page.121.

political judgment. Unlike Ufen<sup>75</sup> and Hadiz<sup>76</sup> who emphasize elite control post-decentralization, Subang's data suggest voter agency in responding to clientelist incentives, albeit constrained by economic realities. This study underscores the need for preventive legal measures and voter education, aligning with Daud et al.<sup>77</sup> to disrupt Indonesia's clientelist electoral cycle.

#### 4. Conclusion

The 2024 Subang regional election underscores the persistent and pervasive influence of money politics in Indonesia's local democratic processes. Despite holding the structural advantages typical of incumbency—such as governance experience, political access, and institutional support—candidates Ruhimat and Aceng Kudus were decisively defeated. The study's mixed-methods findings reveal that the most critical factor behind this electoral loss was not performance deficits or political scandals, but the overwhelming role of political money, which swayed nearly 70% of voter behavior. This transactional dynamic illustrates how vote-buying remains deeply embedded in the political culture, overpowering rational, programmatic, or performance-based considerations among the electorate.

Qualitative insights further confirm that clientelist practices—ranging from direct cash payments to material aid—shaped voter preferences, often blurring the lines between legal campaign assistance and electoral bribery. Weak enforcement of anti-money politics regulations, societal tolerance, and economic vulnerability all contribute to the normalization of these practices. The Subang case thus reflects a broader national pattern where democratic procedures coexist with informal power structures, limiting the space for ethical, issues-based campaigns. Moreover, the incumbent's inability to effectively communicate achievements, coupled with fragmented political alliances and poor electoral branding, made them vulnerable to more agile, populist challengers who employed symbolic appeals and religious identity to gain traction. The victorious Reynaldi–Agus Masykur pair strategically combined grassroots engagement with transactional politics, showing how adaptable campaign tactics can overcome even entrenched incumbency.

These findings have important meaning for future local elections in Indonesia. The strong presence of money politics damages the fairness of elections, showing the need to better enforce election laws like Law Number 10 of 2016. Also, the failure to make use of the incumbent's strengths shows how important clear communication and well-planned campaigns are. Political parties and candidates should focus on honest campaigns that highlight achievements and should build strong, organized teams to fight against the influence of money politics. Without addressing these systemic weaknesses, democratic consolidation in Indonesia will remain fragile. Encouraging moral political behavior—supported by Islamic ethical values and effective legal mechanisms—is essential to fostering more accountable

<sup>75</sup> Andreas Ufen., From aliran to dealignment: political parties in post-Suharto Indonesia, *South East Asia Research*, Vol.16, no.1, 2008, page.37.

<sup>76</sup> Vedi R. Hadiz., Indonesian Local Party Politics: A Site of Resistance to Neoliberal Reform, *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol.36, no.4, 2004, page.633.

<sup>77</sup> Brian Septiadi Daud, Bayu Ardian Aminullah, and Nyoman Serikat Putra Jaya., Law enforcement and overcoming violations of money politic in general election: Indonesia's case, *Jurnal Hukum Novelty*, Vol.11, no.2, 2020, page.124.



and programmatic electoral competition in future local elections. The study suggests several actions: training campaign teams to improve voter outreach, building political branding that fits local culture and values, and creating public education programs to reduce voters' dependence on material rewards. These steps can make future local elections more competitive and protect democracy.

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