



2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections (Pilkada) and Political Education Through Media: Why Does Money Politics Remain Prevalent in Indonesia?

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Abstract. Political education centers upon escalating democracy quality in Indonesia, including regional elections (*pilkada*). The provision of citizens' political rights and responsibilities can foster rational and accountable voters. In the digital era, political education has transformed with the advent of social media and online platforms, accelerating information dissemination. However, the latest challenges, such as misinformation and opinion polarization, necessitate adequate digital literacy among the public to filter information effectively. These issues go side by side with money politics, which remains a serious threat to election integrity. This practice is rooted in economic inequality, patron-client culture, and weak law enforcement, perpetuating a cycle of community dependency on material incentives from candidates. Effective political education alone is insufficient to eliminate vote-buying; it needs structural reforms, improved welfare, and strict law enforcement support. This article argues that political education should focus on raising public awareness about the detrimental effects of money politics, empowering local communities, and strengthening a democratic, value-based political culture. Collaboration between the government, civil society, and the private sector is essential to create a clean and sustainable political ecosystem. This holistic approach is expected to promote a more integrity-driven democracy in Indonesia.

Keywords: Political Education, Digital Era, Money Politics, Political Education Prospect

1 Introduction

The 2024 simultaneous regional elections (*pilkada*) are pivotal in Indonesia's democratic journey. As a political mechanism aimed at selecting local leaders, *pilkada* plays a strategic role in shaping the direction of regional development. However, election success is not solely measured by its outcomes but also by the quality of the underlying processes, including the roles of media and political education in fostering voter awareness [1]. In this context, media serves as one of the primary actors in providing information, shaping public opinion, and educating citizens on the importance of voting based on candidates' visions and missions rather than material incentives.

Both print and digital media possess significant power to influence public perceptions [2]. With advancements in information technology, social media has become one of the main channels for disseminating political information. On the downside, however, media misuse frequently occurs to spread biased or false information, ultimately undermining democratic integrity. Media engagement in political education should encourage voters to make more rational decisions. Unfortunately, many regions are not yet fully complemented by efforts to promote political education that fosters critical public awareness.

This article highlights the importance of synergy between media, government, and civil society in improving the quality of political education. Media should act as an agent of change capable of educating voters, while the government and relevant institutions must ensure strict enforcement against vote-buying practices. The 2024 simultaneous regional elections, thus, are examined as a momentum to strengthen democracy with integrity in Indonesia.

2 Findings and Discussion

Political Education for Pilkada

Political education is a primary pillar in realizing a healthy and high-quality democracy. In the context of regional elections (pilkada) in Indonesia, political education aims to provide citizens with an understanding of the importance of exercising their voting rights rationally and responsibly. This effort includes raising awareness about the role of voters in selecting local leaders capable of driving positive change. However, political education in Indonesia often faces various challenges, ranging from low political literacy to the dominance of transactional practices in democratic processes.

Among many issues in political education in Indonesia, the disparity in information access emerges as a crucial one [3]. Urban communities have easier access to political information through various media platforms, while rural communities rely solely on limited traditional sources. As a result, these groups have a gap in political understanding. An inclusive political education strategy is needed to address this issue—one that can reach all segments of society without exception. Mass media and social media are the keys to this matter. These platforms supply information for many voters, particularly younger generations. However, the rapid flow of information on social media also poses risks, such as spreading fake news and political propaganda. Therefore, political education must be accompanied by efforts to improve digital literacy among the public so that they can filter valid information and remain unaffected by hoaxes or manipulative narratives.

At the grassroots level, the participation of local communities can be a key factor in the success of political education. Civil society groups, such as youth organizations, women's groups, and religious institutions, can act as change agents by educating communities on the importance of clean and democratic elections [4]. The involvement of these communities is essential as they better understand local social and cultural

dynamics, enabling them to deliver political education messages in more relevant and effective ways.

Effective political education should also include knowledge about the electoral system and the pilkada process. Many citizens do not fully understand how Indonesia's electoral system works, including the stages involved in pilkada. Certain parties often exploit this lack of knowledge to engage in manipulative practices such as mobilizing voters through vote-buying or social pressure. With better understanding, citizens can become more critical of such practices.

Political education for pilkada is not merely about providing information to voters but also about building collective awareness of the importance of clean and integrity-driven democracy. With deeper understanding, citizens can become active participants in safeguarding the quality of democratic processes while encouraging the emergence of competent and visionary leaders. Without adequate political education, challenges such as vote-buying, misinformation, and low voter turnout will continue to threaten the sustainability of democracy in Indonesia.

Political Education in the Digital Era

Political education in the digital era has undergone significant transformations driven by information and communication technology advancements. In this era, access to political information has become more convenient and instantaneous through various digital platforms, such as social media, news portals, and internet-based applications. While these developments provide opportunities for the public to gain broader political insights, they also pose challenges, particularly regarding the validity and reliability of the disseminated information.

Social media has emerged as one of the primary mediums for modern political education [5]. Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube are frequently utilized by individuals, civil society organizations, and government institutions to convey political messages. The rapid dissemination of information on these platforms enables people to follow political developments in real-time. However, this phenomenon also creates fertile ground for spreading hoaxes and disinformation, which can significantly influence public political perceptions.

The ability of citizens to critically assess information in the digital age is heavily dependent on their level of digital literacy. Low levels of digital literacy can render individuals more vulnerable to political propaganda and fake news. Consequently, political education in this era must prioritize enhancing digital literacy to enable individuals to discern credible information from misinformation. Digital literacy is a cornerstone for fostering critical thinking and independent political awareness.

In addition to digital literacy, active public participation in online political discussions has become a defining characteristic of this era. Forums, social media groups, and comment sections allow individuals to express their opinions [6]. However, this phenomenon is not without its drawbacks; it often leads to polarization, where groups

reinforce their views without engaging in constructive dialogue. Political education should emphasize the importance of tolerance and constructive engagement in online discussions to mitigate the risk of social conflict.

The digital era has also revolutionized political campaign strategies. Digital campaigns conducted through social media platforms and online advertisements have become increasingly prevalent among candidates and political parties. These methods allow campaigns to reach a wider audience at a lower cost than traditional approaches. However, using personal data for political purposes—such as micro-targeting—has sparked significant controversies surrounding privacy concerns. Political education should, therefore, include an understanding of citizens' digital rights, particularly regarding personal data protection.

Money Politics Kita Money Politics in Indonesia

Despite continuous advancements in the scope and quality of political education in Indonesia, money politics remains a persistent and formidable challenge to eradicate [7]. One of the primary reasons for this is the deeply entrenched structural inequality within Indonesia's political and social systems. The exorbitant costs of political campaigns often compel candidates to resort to money politics as a pragmatic strategy to secure voter support, particularly in regions with poor political literacy.

Despite efforts to enhance political education, it has yet to transform long-standing political cultures fully. In many areas, money politics is perceived as a customary or even "traditional" practice deeply embedded in electoral processes. Voters who accept monetary or material incentives from candidates often do not regard these transactions as unlawful but as part of a reciprocal relationship or an expression of gratitude. This mindset highlights the limitations of political education in displacing entrenched norms with values that promote transparency and democratic integrity.

Poverty and economic inequality further sustain the prevalence of money politics. In economically disadvantaged communities, offers of money or goods from candidates are often viewed as opportunities to fulfill immediate financial needs. Under such circumstances, political education struggles to counteract the pressing realities of economic hardship. As long as these socioeconomic disparities persist, impoverished communities remain highly susceptible to money politics.

Furthermore, weak law enforcement against perpetrators of money politics perpetuates the practice. Although legal frameworks are in place, prosecuting money politics remains a significant challenge due to insufficient evidence and low public awareness of reporting violations' importance [8]. Candidates who engage in money politics often operate covertly, disguising their actions through social assistance programs or seemingly legitimate community activities, making detection and prosecution particularly difficult.

The progress of political education has also not been accompanied by substantive reforms within Indonesia's political and electoral systems. The high costs and

competitive nature of Indonesian politics exert immense pressure on candidates to seek expedient methods for securing voter support. In this context, the principles of integrity and democracy emphasized in political education frequently conflict with the economic interests and pragmatic considerations that dominate real-world politics.

What Can We Do?

Political education must prioritize enhancing public political literacy to combat money politics effectively. Citizens require a comprehensive understanding of the detrimental effects of money politics, including its erosion of democratic integrity and its hindrance to regional development. This awareness can be cultivated through various channels, such as seminars, public discussions, and engaging digital campaigns tailored to diverse societal groups.

One of the most impactful strategies is focusing political education efforts on young people. As the demographic most receptive to change and innovation, youth are crucial in fostering a clean and transparent democratic culture. Schools and universities provide strategic platforms for integrating lessons on selecting competent leaders without succumbing to money politics [9]. Initiatives such as simulated election debates and leadership training programs can deepen their understanding of democratic values grounded in integrity.

Digital tools also serve as powerful instruments in the fight against money politics. Online platforms and mobile applications can be leveraged to provide transparent information about candidates, their policy agendas, and their visions for governance [10]. By making such data readily accessible, voters are empowered to make informed decisions based on substantive criteria rather than material incentives offered by candidates.

Respected community leaders' involvement is equally crucial in disseminating political education. These figures can serve as role models, promoting integrity values within their communities and encouraging citizens to reject money politics. Adopting localized approaches ensures that political education resonates more effectively with specific cultural contexts, increasing its impact.

Moreover, political education should not be confined to election periods. Instead, it must become an integral community development component, embedding democratic values into everyday life. Through sustained and collaborative efforts, political education can evolve into a powerful tool for curbing money politics and fostering a democracy rooted in integrity in Indonesia.

3 Conclusion

Political education for regional elections (pilkada) plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of democracy in Indonesia. By equipping citizens with a comprehensive understanding of their rights and responsibilities as voters, political education fosters more informed and rational decision-making during elections. However, significant challenges persist, including unequal access to information, an underdeveloped political culture, and low public participation in political processes. To be truly effective, political education must be designed to be both inclusive and tailored to the specific needs of local communities.

In the digital era, political education has undergone significant transformation. Technology has facilitated broader and faster access to information, particularly through social media and other digital platforms. However, these advancements also present new challenges, such as the proliferation of misinformation and the deepening of political polarization, both of which can heighten social tensions. To maximize the benefits of digital tools, political education must be complemented by efforts to enhance digital literacy, enabling citizens to critically assess information and guard against technology-driven political manipulation.

Despite progress in political education, money politics remains a persistent threat to democracy in Indonesia. This practice is deeply rooted in structural issues such as poverty, economic inequality, and a deeply ingrained patron-client culture. Moreover, weak law enforcement against perpetrators of money politics, coupled with the high costs of running for office, further exacerbates the problem. These challenges underscore the reality that political education alone is insufficient; systemic reforms and improvements in socioeconomic conditions are necessary to break the cycle of money politics.

Political education must prioritize strengthening political literacy and raising public awareness of its detrimental effects to effectively combat money politics. Special attention should be given to youth, women, and local communities through targeted programs designed to foster long-term change. Additionally, collaboration among the government, civil society, and the private sector is essential to establishing a political ecosystem rooted in integrity. This requires strict law enforcement, economic empowerment initiatives, and the promotion of a political culture grounded in democratic values.

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