

## Public Perceptions of Political Phenomena Without Vote Buying: Study on The 2020 Local Election

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**Abstract:** *Vote buying is a phenomenon that is often found in the arena of political contestation. However, there is a unique phenomenon in the 2020 Regional Head Election for Wonosobo Regency, which consists of one pair of candidates against an empty box. In the election (Pilkada), there was no indication of its use of money politics or vote buying, either by the candidate pair or the empty box support team. This study aims to analyze the perceptions of the people of Wonosobo Regency, who are familiar with the phenomenon of vote buying but have yet to find it in the 2020 Pilkada. The research method used in this study is a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The results of this study indicate that three main components become symptoms and can indicate public perceptions of their absence of vote buying in the Pilkada of Wonosobo Regency in 2020. First, the cognitive component includes public knowledge and its implications for the view that there is no vote buying. Second, the affective component indicates a positive emotional aspect of vote buying. Third, the cognitive component that influences positive action after the above expectations of vote buying are not fulfilled.*

**Keywords:** *Local election; Money politics; Public perception; Vote buying*

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a democratic country that places sovereignty in the hands of the people. In the 1945 Constitution, article 1, paragraph 2 states that "sovereignty is in the hands of the people and implemented according to the Constitution." A democratic system based on laws and regulations and people's sovereignty is the basis of national and state life (Nasution, 2017). This system has an embodiment in the form of direct holding of General Elections (Pemilu) or Regional Head Elections (Pilkada), which are carried out based on Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning the second amendment to Law Number 1 of 2015 concerning the stipulation of government regulations instead of Law Number 1 of 2014 concerning the election of governors, regents and mayors becomes law.

One of the regions in Indonesia that are holding Pilkada is Wonosobo Regency. In 2020, Wonosobo Regency held elections for the Regent and Deputy Regent, with the candidates for regent and deputy regent candidates Afif Nur Hidayat – Muhammad Albar against empty boxes. This empty box phenomenon is the first phenomenon in direct local elections in Wonosobo Regency since it was first held in 2005. In the end, the 2020 Pilkada in Wonosobo

Regency was won by the regent and deputy regent candidate pair Afif Nur Hidayat - Muhammad Albar with a gain of 269,789 votes of 423,394 valid votes.

The 2020 Wonosobo Pilkada has a high abstention rate. Based on data released by the Wonosobo General Election Commission (KPU), the number of Permanent Voter Lists (DPT) in the Wonosobo Regency touched 682.696 people. Meanwhile, the total number of people exercising their voting rights was only 453.092. That is, the abstention rate in this local election was 33.64%, with a participation rate of 66.36%. This figure decreased compared to the previous Pilkada in 2015, where community voting participation was 69,52%.

Based on observations made by researchers during the election period, no indications were found that vote buying or money politics were implemented. Apart from these field observations, researchers also monitored election supervisors and interviewed the Chairperson of the Wonosobo District Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu) on (21/12/2020). As a result, once the Pilkada is completed, there is no indication-vote buying carried out, either by the candidate pair or the empty box campaign team.

This information was reinforced by an interview with one of the candidate pairs' Success Team on (25/12/2020). In the interview, it was stated that there was a commitment from the candidate pairs to change the political culture in Wonosobo Regency, which was previously full of will-money politics, to become a cleaner regional election contestation arena, unlike the Pilkada that was held earlier, namely the 2015 Pilkada, which according to the Chairperson of the Wonosobo Regency Bawaslu, there were practices of buying or money politics (Nasrullah, 2015).

This phenomenon makes researchers interested in conducting analysis related to the phenomenon of money politics as well as the implications for public perception, which was then built in Wonosobo Regency. Transactional political culture through money politics or vote buying in Wonosobo Regency has taken root, which causes the community to normalize its existence in money politics at the elections. This phenomenon is inseparable from the pragmatism of society in viewing political constellations (Sugiyanto, 2020). Problems arise when local politicians do not spontaneously re-implement things that have taken root, namely in the 2020 Pilkada.

The study of public perception cannot be separated from the review of the literature put forward by Rakhmat (2015), which states that perception is an interpretation that arises from conclusions built from the existence of a series of relations of events or objects in society. In addition, the emergence of perception cannot be separated from the presence of three stages,

including the stages of selection, organization, and interpretation (Suryani, 2008). The creation of perception begins when there is an object that can then act as a stimulus to the receptor. The sensory nerves then forward the encouragement received by the receptor to the brain. This process is then referred to as a physiological process. In the brain that has received the stimulus, a method is created that is aware of what is seen, heard, and touched. Thus, the perception will be created that stems from the psychological center (Sunaryo, 2004).

Public perception can be explicitly identified through three components, namely the cognitive component, the affective component, and the conative component (Walgito, 1994). The cognitive component is a component that correlates to aspects of knowledge, perspectives, beliefs, or other matters related to the way a person perceives an attitude object. Furthermore, the affective component can produce pleasure or displeasure towards an attitude object. In this case, pleasure can be interpreted as a positive thing, while displeasure can be a negative thing. Then, the conative component can be understood as a component related to a person's relative action on the attitude object. This concept arises after receiving receptors in the brain and then forming perceptions, which correlate to specific actions to indicate the intensity of one's actions or behavior towards the attitude object.

A public perception examined in this study refers to vote buying, which means buying and selling votes between citizens or vote owners who sell votes and political candidates who buy votes (Schaffer, 2002). More specifically, vote buying can be defined as a form of distribution of payments in the form of cash / certain goods, which are carried out systematically from candidates to voters in the hope that gifts from candidates can be converted into votes by voters (Aspinall, 2015). As a form of economic transaction in politics, activity vote buying can be associated with money politics who grew up in a high culture of patronage and transactional politics (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015).

Money politics activities can be categorized as bribery with a political purpose, influencing people's choices (Kumolo, 2015). In practice, the party that will do money politics already has several strategies, including the dawn attack strategy. This strategy is commonly carried out by distributing money to people to bribe or buy votes. In addition, a mass mobilization strategy allows a group of people, usually coordinated by a political party, to be given a certain amount of money or goods to attend a particular event, such as a campaign (Irawan, 2015).

Some factors make money politics still exist. One of them is the poverty factor. Based on research conducted by the Department of Politics and Government at Gadjah Mada University, 40% of people with incomes below IDR 2,000,000.00 receive money politics, and

only 20% earn IDR 5,000,000.00 and above receive money politics. In addition, there is also an educational factor. Based on the same research, 46.15% of respondents graduated from elementary school money politics, and 20.02% of undergraduate graduates received money politics. The next factor is the cultural factor, in which society considers money politics as sustenance that cannot be rejected (Hasunacha, 2016).

There is an implementation effort in vote buying or money politics, which has the potential to occur in the arena of political contestation and has an orientation towards the influence given to voters so they can vote for the desired candidate. Voting is one of the primary outcomes of political participation in society. Conceptually, political participation includes all citizen activities that aim to influence a political decision (Anggara, 2013). Thus, the political participation process contains things crucial in running a government.

This political participation is divided into two subjects: participation to elect rulers and participation to implement government policies (Anggara, 2013). In every Regional Head Election (Pilkada) event and other political contestations, community participation is always a critical factor that indicates the success of organizing this democratic party (Handayani, 2019). More specifically, political participation can be identified from community participation in voting activities (voting), campaign activities, and forming and joining interest groups.

Thus, this research will become the new scientific research, with the novelty of the research located on the purpose of the research being carried out to analyze public perceptions of the zero practice vote buying in the Regional Head Elections in Wonosobo Regency in 2020. Furthermore, the public perception that has been formed will be associated with the behavior engendered by the community as voters at the Pilkada event in Wonosobo Regency in 2020, where there are candidate pairs against empty boxes.

## **METHOD**

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. According to Bogdan and Taylor (in Moleong, 2005), a qualitative descriptive method is a research method that emphasizes the existence of descriptive and narrative data in the form of words or writings from the subjects studied. In addition, Creswell (1997) states that the qualitative research method, which is a research process to investigate social phenomena, can create a complex picture of the phenomenon under study through words and detailed reports from the views of respondents, as well as carrying out studies in natural situations and conditions.

The suitability of the qualitative research method for this research topic is given that there is a research object in the form of community behavior for symptoms of vote buying or money politics, where qualitative research methods can be used to observe the behavior of research subjects to be analyzed and reconstructed based on the theoretical basis of the phenomenon in question (Moleong, 2007). With research focusing on symptoms of community behavior arising from issues of vote buying in the 2020 Wonosobo Pilkada, this research will be carried out in Wonosobo Regency using the informant selection technique using purposive sampling.

Technique purposive sampling is used to select informants with specific considerations (Sugiyono, 2016). According to Margono (2004), by using this technique, researchers target informants who conform to specific criteria that have been applied. Although there are certain appropriate criteria between informants and factual conditions in the field, sampling is used to deepen information on existing phenomena through purposive selection. It cannot be generalized (Sugiyono, 2016). The informants selected for this study included: Chair of the Wonosobo Regency Election Supervisory Board (Bawaslu), the Wonosobo Regency KPU Commissioner, members of the Candidate Pair Success Team in the 2020 Wonosobo Pilkada, and 34 community leaders spread across all sub-districts in Wonosobo Regency.

In data triangulation, this study uses source and theoretical triangulation techniques. The source triangulation technique was chosen considering the need for research to carry out the repeated excavation of the data sources used, both primary data such as interviews with informants and secondary data such as written documents, archives, official records, personal records, and others. In addition, theory triangulation is used to identify factual phenomena with relevant theories to avoid individual researcher bias as a research instrument. Furthermore, the data found is then analyzed using the techniques of collection, reduction, presentation, and concluding the data proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

One indicator that serves as a benchmark for the quality of democracy is the implementation of clean elections. However, there is a vulnerability to implementing vote-buying or money politics, which can disrupt the natural democratic process and make politics more costly (Dwipayana, 2009). Deeper than that, Dhakidae (2011) states that vote buying can produce a link to forming a political cartel. In practice, vote buying is not only through the mechanism of giving cash from vote buyers who incidentally are people who are participating

in political contests to the people who are voters, but can also be carried out through the mechanism of providing direct assistance (political groceries) and providing public facilities.

Only one pair of candidates exists in the regional head election (Pilkada) for Wonosobo Regency in 2020. Based on the findings from the research, there is some commitment from candidate pairs to eliminate the practice of vote buying in order to release political actors and the public who are used to the vote-buying mechanism. However, side on the other hand, the mechanism of breaking free from the habit of voting, which has implications for the absence of money politics in this constellation, has created a separate phenomenon in society, all of which can be identified through specific behaviors during the election period.

### **Public Cognitive Components in Vote Buying**

Based on information obtained from the Chairman of the Election Supervisory Board (Bawaslu) of Wonosobo Regency, there is a political climate that tends to be familiar with the use of money politics or vote buying during general elections or regional head elections in Wonosobo Regency. Conceptual review shows that there are plural symptoms of money politics that everyone has known since the reformation (Kumorotomo, 2009). This phenomenon is linear with the level of public knowledge in Wonosobo Regency regarding the practice of money politics. Walgito's thesis on cognitive-based perception (1994) brings people's understanding towards their point of view of vote buying as a normal thing in political constellations.

Based on the results of the interviews that have been conducted, it can be identified that a high level of public understanding regarding vote buying is based on the justification of the community as voters who have received vote buying directly in the previous regional head election. When examined, the vote-buying mechanism can be carried out through various mechanisms adapted to the local community's needs.

**Table 1.** Form of Vote Buying

No.	Criteria	Form of Giving
1.	Giving money	Money in cash to prospective voters
2.	Political groceries	Staple groceries / foodstuffs Celebration tent Stage equipment Equipment of sport Art supplies Professional support needs, and others.
3.	Public facilities	Road construction Bridge construction Other public facilities.

*Source: obtained from primary data, 2023.*

The existence of forms of giving in vote buying that politicians usually give has been adapted to the needs of the community. This reality can make people recognize, organize, and understand the nature of vote buying as a procedural matter in political contestation. This vote buying is a procedural matter to the concept introduced by Epstein & Rogers (in Sternberg, 2008) regarding the influence of stimulus environment in forming public perceptions. By creating a public view of their knowledge, then a belief is formed in the community that politicians who provide direct assistance will be able to make a real contribution when they are later elected as regional heads.

Aspects of public confidence are well established based on trust, which is then established between voters and politicians as part of a political contract. The political contract is one actualization of the conceptual framework of social exchange (Blau, 1964). This conceptual framework emphasizes the existence of trust to carry out social exchange relations carried out by one individual with another individual based on rewards. Furthermore, the social contract in the political realm includes sacrifices made by politicians in meeting post-election needs so that it becomes a reward in the perspective of voters to follow the will of politicians and creates benefits for both parties. These advantages include, among other things, politicians who get votes from the public and the public as voters who get help from politicians. This belief makes the practice of vote buying so entrenched in the people of Wonosobo Regency in regional head elections, even general elections.

### **Positive Affective Component of Vote Buying**

The practice of vote buying, which was often carried out in the regional head elections for Wonosobo Regency (before the 2020 Pilkada), has consistently shaped the positive perspective of society on vote buying. These symptoms are by the existence of functional factors forming perceptions which, according to Rakhmat (2009), are correlative with individual needs, experience, age, past, personality, gender, educational background, demographics, and others that are subjective. However, all community leaders who became informants in this study agreed that the most significant aspect influencing public perception of vote buying is the aspect of needs and personality.

The existence of these two aspects can override other aspects, such as education, age, past, gender, educational background, demographics, and others. Thus, people with positive affective perceptions are caused by a match between needs and personality, which justifies the act of vote buying with something politicians offer. However, there has been a paradigm shift in the gradient from young to old voters (Interview, KPU Commissioner, 2022). This shift based on age is caused by a shift in personality which integrally affects public perception. Young voters tend to have a neutral-negative view of vote buying, while older voters will have a neutral-positive tendency. This perception is apart from a regulatory framework for regional head elections in Wonosobo, but rather to the transactional political aspects and social contracts that have become entrenched.

More specifically, this symptom can be identified from the tendency of young voters who do not openly expect vote buying or money politics from politicians but have feelings that tend to be neutral in accepting these gifts. This affective aspect which tends to be neutral has been sufficient in organizing thoughts to agree on the existence of a social contract in the political sphere for regional head elections.

In addition, in the categorization of old voters, they have a cultural tendency that is neutral towards the hope of giving vote buying or money politics but has feelings that tend to be positive when receiving these gifts. In other words, this positive affective aspect makes voters feel happy when they get something from giving money to politics, even if they do not expect it openly. This categorization will make it easier to agree between politicians and voters to establish social contracts in regional head elections.

Furthermore, this study shows a differentiation between individual needs and the needs of community groups in an environment. Community groups that make up an organized society can be understood as a social unit that has held intensive and regular social interactions, thus making individuals in the social unit have a system of division of tasks, structures, and certain



norms unique to that group. Sheriff & Sheriff, 1956). However, the tendency is on the issue of vote buying; the community as a whole individual dominates positive affective behavior compared to organized society.

This finding correlates with the tendency of young and old voters who have neutral-negative to neutral perceptions when faced with the issue of expectations of receiving money politics or vote buying by politicians, but gradually tend to go in a positive direction when they have succeeded in getting things done. So, interest individuals dominate people's perceptions of vote buying or money politics in Wonosobo Regency compared to the expectations for organizations or groups to accept money politics.

### **Public Conative Component for the Absence of Vote Buying**

This study shows a positive affective perception of the community towards the issue of vote buying, which incidentally arises due to knowledge, perspectives, and beliefs in the cognitive component. After the existence of positive affective perceptions that are built up towards money politics or vote buying, the following exciting symptom is related to the conative component of society if it does not get money politics which has these positive affective perceptions.

Based on information obtained from the Chairperson of the Wonosobo Bawaslu in 2022, during the regional head elections in Wonosobo Regency in 2020, there were no indications of money politics or vote buying by candidate pairs or the success team with empty boxes to the public. Thus, people do not get a stimulus that impacts their positive affective perspective. Furthermore, the conative component, which is a component in the form of a person's relative actions towards an object of attitude that arises as a reaction to organized perceptions (Walgito, 1994), indicates a decrease in aspects of political participation in the 2020 regional head elections.

As Almond (in Mas'od, 2011) stated, there are two forms of political participation: conventional and non-conventional. Conventional participation involves voting, political discussion, campaign activities, forming and joining interest groups, and individual communication with political or administrative officials. In non-conventional political participation, there are aspects of petitioning, demonstrating, confrontation, strikes, and acts of political violence. If it is correlated to the regional head elections in Wonosobo Regency, several activities are commonly carried out based on conventional participation.

**Table 2.** Conventional Political Participation Activities

No.	Aspect	Activities
1.	Voting	Vote at the pools.
2.	Political discussion	Following political education from political parties Participate in political discussions by NGOs Follow the socialization of the election organizers/supervisors.
3.	Campaign Activities	Persuade someone to vote. Posting information about candidate pairs/empty boxes on social media Get involved in campaign events.
4.	Form and join interest groups	Form a successful team of candidate pairs / empty boxes. Join the candidate pair success team / empty box. Form a volunteer team of candidate pairs / empty boxes. Volunteer candidate pair / empty box.
5.	Communication	Communicate individually with political/administrative officials.

*Source: obtained from primary data, 2023.*

There are activities carried out during the regional head elections own. The main output is that voters can exercise their right to vote for certain parties based on applicable regulations. However, in the 2020 Pilkada, there were indications of a reduction in the political participation rate, especially in the voting aspect, with 423,394 valid votes, or 66.53%. This figure indicates a significant decline in political participation in regional head elections in Wonosobo Regency.

**Table 3.** Form of Vote Buying in Pilkada

Pilkada	Number of Valid Votes	Percentage
2005	444.899	79,38%
2010	412.376	65,98%
2015	461.640	69,52%
2020	423,394	62,01%

*Source: General Election Commission of Wonosobo Regency, processed by researchers.*

Based on the data above, the number of valid votes from the people of Wonosobo Regency in the 2020 regional head elections experienced a percentage of voters with valid

votes of 62.01%, which incidentally became the percentage of the total valid votes lowest since direct regional head elections were held in Wonosobo Regency, namely in 2005. Thus, it can be indicated that the conative component of the people of Wonosobo Regency has an impact that tends to produce negative actions, namely by increasing the number of abstentions or the low number of valid votes in head election contestations in the Wonosobo Regency area in 2020 where there are indications that there is no vote buying or money politics from candidate pairs or the success team, the box is empty.

## **CONCLUSION**

The existence of vote buying or money politics gave birth to various perceptions from the people in Wonosobo Regency. On the cognitive component, the people of Wonosobo Regency are indicated to be able to understand and know the existence of vote buying at the event contest regional head elections. This understanding then forms a belief in mutual trust in the mechanism of a social contract in a political context with rewards. Furthermore, the existence of this trust then influences the positive affective component, which causes some people to feel happy about the practice of vote buying.

In the 2020 regional head election for Wonosobo Regency, there was no practice of vote buying or money politics from candidate pairs or the empty box success team to the public. As a result, one of the positive affective components obtained from practice vote buying cannot be felt by the public, which in fact, then affects the conative component to be negative. Thus, there is a decrease in political participation in the 2020 Pilkada.

Based on these findings, the influence of vote buying or money politics has been deeply rooted and entrenched in the people of the Wonosobo Regency. Not implementing vote buying has excellent potential to reduce political participation rates. However, the existence of this culture must continue to be suppressed so that the arena of political constellations is in place. Regency Wonosobo can be clean and free from acts of bribery.

Thus, it should be considered for each political party that carries the candidate for a regional head in the next Pilkada to draw up a deed of understanding regarding Pilkada that is free from money politics or vote buying. In addition, supervision from the Wonosobo Regency Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu) needs to be optimized again by opening up more comprehensive participatory supervision to the public. This step is accompanied by socialization and political education for the community by election organizers regarding the

norms and regulations that apply to the Pilkada process, especially those related to vote buying or money politics.

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