

## MONEY POLITICS AS CULTURE: KEPYUR AND RATIONAL CHOICE AMONG RURAL VOTERS IN KENDAL REGENCY ELECTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*Kepyur* is a local term used by the people of Kendal Regency to refer to the practice of money politics in elections. *Kepyur* practices have become a cultural norm in Kendal, occurring in village head elections, parliamentary elections, and regional head elections. This study aims to explain the factors behind the prevalence of *kepyur* practices and analyze their relationship with voters' rational choices. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method using a case study approach, focusing on the 2020 regional election in Kalibareng Village. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing based on rational choice theory. The results indicate that money politics in the form of *kepyur* is not considered reprehensible by the community. For campaign teams, distributing *kepyur* to voters is viewed as a rational strategy to secure electoral victory for their candidates. Similarly, for community members, *kepyur* is perceived as a rational consequence, as voting for a candidate entails losing time that could otherwise be spent working. Unlike conventional money politics, which is generally associated with coercive vote buying, political bribery, or explicit electoral exchange, *kepyur* is socially legitimized and embedded in everyday economic practices. It is not understood as an illegal transaction but rather as informal compensation for lost livelihoods on election day. *Kepyur* has shifted political rational choice toward economic rationality, as voting rights can be exchanged for financial benefits that substitute for lost income on election day.

**Keywords:** *kepyur*; money politics; political culture; rational choice; regional head election

## POLITIK UANG SEBAGAI PRAKTIK BUDAYA: KEPYUR DAN PILIHAN RASIONAL PEMILIH PEDESAAN PADA PILKADA KABUPATEN KENDAL

### ABSTRAK

*Kepyur* merupakan istilah lokal yang digunakan oleh masyarakat Kabupaten Kendal untuk merujuk pada praktik politik uang dalam pemilihan politik. Praktik *kepyur* telah membudaya di Kendal, baik pada pemilihan kepala desa, pemilihan anggota parlemen, maupun pemilihan kepala daerah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan latar belakang maraknya praktik *kepyur* serta menganalisis keterkaitannya dengan pilihan rasional masyarakat pemilih. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan studi kasus yang berfokus pada Pilkada Tahun 2020 di Desa Kalibareng. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan berdasarkan teori pilihan rasional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa politik uang dalam bentuk *kepyur* tidak dianggap sebagai perbuatan tercela oleh masyarakat. Bagi tim sukses, pemberian *kepyur* kepada pemilih merupakan strategi rasional untuk memenangkan kandidat yang mereka dukung. Demikian pula bagi masyarakat, *kepyur* dipandang sebagai konsekuensi yang rasional karena aktivitas memilih menyebabkan mereka kehilangan waktu untuk bekerja. Berbeda dengan politik uang konvensional yang umumnya dikaitkan dengan pembelian suara secara paksa, penyuapan politik, atau pertukaran elektoral secara eksplisit, *kepyur* dilegitimasi secara sosial dan tertanam dalam praktik ekonomi sehari-hari. *Kepyur* tidak dipahami sebagai transaksi ilegal, melainkan sebagai kompensasi informal atas hilangnya mata pencaharian pada hari pemilihan. Praktik *kepyur* telah menggeser pilihan rasional politik menuju rasionalitas ekonomi, di mana hak suara dapat dipertukarkan dengan keuntungan finansial sebagai pengganti pendapatan yang hilang pada hari pencoblosan.

**Kata kunci:** budaya politik; *kepyur*; pilihan rasional; pilkada; politik uang

### INTRODUCTION

Following the 1998 Indonesian political reforms, Indonesia's governance and democratic sys-

tems underwent significant changes (Sorik, 2019). The floodgates of democracy began to flow freely, and the people's voice played a significant role in electoral democracy, influencing both executive

leadership and legislative members. Elections during the reform era became more dynamic than those during the New Order, as legislative candidates competed freely for voters' votes. Presidential and regional head elections, previously conducted by representatives of parliament, were transformed into direct elections by the people with a one-man-one-vote system.

At the local level, Indonesia implemented direct regional head elections or *pemilihan kepala daerah* (pilkada) following the enactment of Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government (Nuryanti, 2015). The 2020 simultaneous regional elections were the fourth held in Indonesia. The first simultaneous regional elections were held in 2015, with participation from 263 regions, comprising nine provinces, 34 cities, and 220 regencies (Akbar, 2016). The second simultaneous regional elections were held in 2017, covering 101 regions (Ananingsih, 2016). Voting for the 2020 simultaneous regional elections took place on December 9, 2020, in 270 regions, encompassing nine gubernatorial elections, 224 regent and deputy regent elections, and 37 mayor and deputy mayor elections (Hafizy et al., 2021).

In the 2020 regional elections in Kendal Regency, three candidate pairs ran. These three pairs were Dico Ganinduto – Windu Suko Basuki (DIBAS), Ali Nurudin – Yekti Handayani (NURANI), and Tino Indra Wardono – Mukhammad Mustamsikin (TIM). DIBAS won the 2020 Kendal Regent and Deputy Regent election with 279,632 votes, or 49.20%. NURANI was in second place with 214,299 votes, or 37.70%, followed by TIM with 74,371 votes, or 13.09% (KPU Kab Kendal, 2021).

One of the issues being discussed by the people of Kendal Regency ahead of the political elections is the issue of *kepyur*. *Kepyur* is a local term known to the Kendal community that refers to the practice of distributing money by candidates before election day. In the Javanese term, *kepyur* literally means sprinkling something on an object, person, or place. *Kepyur* is the distribution of money or goods given by the candidate's campaign team to the community to gain support during the vote. Furthermore, this study aims to determine the background of the widespread practice of *kepyur* in the 2020 Pilkada in Kalibareng Village, Patean District, Kendal Regency, and to analyze the practice of *kepyur* as a rational choice for the people of Kalibareng Village.

The issue of money politics in direct elections is often discussed and is an inescapable reality. Money politics is an attempt to influence voters by offering money or services, thereby influencing

their preference (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015). Numerous research results indicate that the phenomenon of money politics is prevalent in various regions, ranging from village head elections to national elections. Muhtadi (2013) explains the rampant money politics in Indonesia as being driven by socio-economic factors, including education levels and income levels, as well as the tolerant attitude of society towards the practice of money politics and patron-client networks that serve as a link between the elite and the masses. Meanwhile, other research results identify three factors that contribute to money politics in elections in Indonesia: electoral system factors, organizational institution factors, and societal factors (Nabila et al., 2020). Money politics often persist despite various legal regulations aimed at prohibiting them, but in practice, law enforcement against the occurrence of money politics in Indonesia remains very weak (Fitriyah, 2013).

Numerous empirical studies have been conducted in Indonesia to capture the phenomenon of money politics. Research on the 2018 Wajo Regency Pilkada revealed that money politics had a significant influence on political participation, particularly among first-time voters (Hawing et al., 2020). Similarly, in Blora Regency, money politics played a significant role in the 2014 legislative elections, involving village elites, religious leaders, and civil servants (Lukmajati, 2016). In Pati Regency, money politics operated through the candidate's campaign team network, which consisted primarily of relatives and friends of the candidate (Fitriyah, 2015). The campaign team's network structure was pyramid-shaped, with the lowest level being the neighborhood unit (RT), which was the most influential due to its direct contact with voters. Research in North Buton found that factors influencing public perception of money politics could include internal factors related to the utility of money politics in meeting community needs, as well as external factors related to the influence of the social environment (Suprianto, 2017). The rise of money politics has even targeted various young generation communities, as seen in the case of Tabanan, Bali. So, even though first-time voters have a good understanding of money politics, they still accept it when a candidate provides financial assistance to their community (Adhinata, 2019).

The practice of money politics can manifest in various ways. The most common form of money politics is the distribution of aid through social assistance provided by election participants in the form of materials, goods, and necessities (Maemunah & Masita, 2016). In the case of the 2017 Aceh

Regional Election, politicians did not engage in the practice of money politics in a vulgar manner, but rather more subtly and cunningly, so that recipients did not recognize it as such (Januar, 2018). It is not uncommon for money politics to also involve funders, typically businesspeople, who help candidates meet the enormous financial and logistical needs that they cannot afford (Hidayatullah et al., 2022). Of course, this assistance is not free, as businesspeople view it as an investment that candidates must repay if the candidate they support wins, ultimately giving rise to the practice of political oligarchy.

Not only in Indonesia, the phenomenon of money politics in candidate elections occurs in various other countries. For example, in the 2011 parliamentary elections in Turkey, communities with socio-economic vulnerability and low levels of education were found to be correlated with being targets of vote buying, indicating that the clientelist politics that occurred was a concept of resource exchange between actors (Çarkoğlu & Aytaç, 2015). In the Philippines, vote buying through the provision of material goods or food was more widely accepted by voters compared to monetary rewards, as indicators of wealth and needs were significantly correlated with the type of goods used in vote buying (Canare et al., 2018). Research in Nigeria has shown that vote buying in gubernatorial elections is often carried out using a "carrot throwing" strategy, resulting in elections that resemble an auction market, where politicians who spend more money are more likely to win (Nwankwo, 2018). In Australia, the distribution of money politics, in addition to clientelist politics, also occurred in a partisan "pork barrel" pattern, where politicians from the ruling party utilized government resources they controlled for their electoral interests (Denemark, 2023). Frye's research uncovered an interesting fact in Russia that likens vote buying to "carrot-punching," where politicians collaborate with company bosses or employers to act as intermediaries for their employees' votes. While the bosses receive carrots from candidates, they do not give them to employees; instead, they use them as a means of punishing those who refuse to comply with their instructions. Thus, vote-buying is not given to voters but is used to intimidate them. Bosses threaten employees with dismissal or benefit cuts if they do not vote as instructed (Frye et al., 2019).

Existing studies consistently characterize money politics as a detrimental practice that distorts democratic processes and erodes institutional legitimacy. Money politics is a form of degrading the dignity of society, a trap for the people, neglect

of the development of political cadres, and a pathway to corruption, thereby hampering societal transformation. (Nabila et al., 2020). Various efforts have been made to minimize the practice of money politics. In reality, this practice is difficult to eradicate because it is deeply ingrained and has become an unhealthy aspect of the political culture. In Bima Regency, the election organizers' efforts to minimize money politics by raising public awareness about the prohibition of money politics were ineffective, as candidates continued to engage in money politics secretly (Maemunah & Masita, 2016). Various moral appeals have also been made, such as by the Aceh Ulama Consultative Assembly (MPR), which condemned the practice of money politics, deeming it inconsistent with Islamic law, specifically cheating and bribery, and thus labeling money politics a form of crime prohibited by Islam (Januar, 2018). Law enforcement measures by the authorities have also been carried out, such as those conducted by the election supervisory committee in Bireuen, which uncovered the money politics of candidate Rini Yanti Bin Hamzah, who was subsequently sentenced by the Bireuen District Court (Yolanda & Hasan, 2017). However, this phenomenon is only the tip of the iceberg, as law enforcement has apparently been unable to provide a deterrent effect for many other perpetrators, as it is rooted in culture and social structures, not just weak laws (Kurniawan & Hermawan, 2019).

Based on this background, this study focuses on explaining the factors underlying the rise of *kepyur* as a form of money politics in Kendal Regency and analyzing its relationship to the rational choices of voters, using the case of Kalibareng Village. *Kepyur* represents a locally embedded form of money politics that has undergone social normalization, as evidenced by the localization of the term, which indicates its internalization within the community's political culture. This case illustrates how practices that are normatively considered deviant can become socially legitimized at the local level.

## METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach, focusing on the perspectives, points of view, and lived experiences of the individuals who were the study's subjects (Silverman, 2004). A case study method was employed to delve deeper into specific phenomena within a unique context, limited by time and place (Creswell, 2015). A single instrumental case study was conducted, focusing on the case of Kalibareng Village, Patean District, Patean

Regency. This site was chosen as the research location because of the competition between regional election candidates in this village was quite intense and extensive compared to other neighboring villages. The research was conducted in several stages, beginning with observations in November 2020 and followed by interviews with informants between January and May 2021.

The research data used were derived from direct observation, interviews with informants, and secondary documents. Participant observation was conducted by one of the researchers, a resident of Kalibareng Village, which enabled closer involvement in the 2020 simultaneous regional election process from the campaign period through voting and vote counting. Structured interviews were conducted to supplement the observational data, using an interview guide to facilitate the research topic (Sugiyono, 2010). Interviews were conducted with selected informants who were deemed to have a specific understanding of the research problem, a method known as purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2015). Seventeen informants, comprising eight men and nine women, were selected and divided into categories, including younger and older generations, residents who received and did not receive financial support, candidate campaign teams, village supervisory committees, and village officials. The distinction between residents who received and those who did not receive kepyur was determined based on their self-reported accounts obtained through in-depth interviews. Documentation techniques were used to collect data, including village election documents and relevant visual data.

The research data obtained was then analyzed using qualitative data analysis procedures as described by Creswell, which begin with preparing and organizing the data, including text, interview transcripts, observation notes, and visual data. The next stage was reading and annotating or memoing sections of the data deemed important, which then served as material for description and classification. The data were then coded, and themes or categories were determined, followed by interpretation, which was ultimately presented and visualized in the research report (Creswell, 2015).

To minimize potential bias arising from the researcher's position as part of the Kalibareng Village community, the researcher reflectively separated her roles as a villager and as a researcher throughout the research process. The researcher avoided conducting interviews with informants who had family ties or direct political interests, and refrained from involvement in practical political activities during the research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *A Brief Overview of Kalibareng Village*

Kalibareng is a village in Patean District, Kendal Regency, Central Java. Located in the southern part of Kendal Regency, approximately 35 km from the regency center, this 512-hectare village has a plateau contour with an altitude of 400 meters above sea level. Administratively, Kalibareng Village is divided into four hamlets: Kalibareng, Randusari, Ngepos, and Kemloko. The majority of Kalibareng's residents make a living in the agricultural sector. Agricultural products produced by Kalibareng Village include rice, secondary crops, vegetables, fruits, spices, and various plantation products. Additionally, Kalibareng Village is also recognized as a significant corn-producing area. The population of Kalibareng Village consists of 1,995 individuals, comprising 1,001 males and 994 females. The majority of Kalibareng people have an elementary school education, with 35.7% having completed it, 22% not attending school, 17% not finishing elementary school, 16.6% having completed junior high school, 8.2% having completed high school, and 0.75% having pursued higher education (Kalibareng, 2021). In terms of religion, almost 100% of the residents of Kalibareng Village are Muslim. Village data indicate that there are no individuals who adhere to other religions, such as Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Confucianism.

### *Kendal Regional Election in Kalibareng Village*



**Figure 1. Candidate Pair for Regent and Deputy Regent of Kendal in 2020**

Source: Instagram KPU Kabupaten Kendal 5 Okt 2020 (@kpu\_kab\_kendal)

Kendal Regency was among the regions participating in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections.

The hustle and bustle of the election to elect the Kendal Regency leader also took place in Kalibareng Village. In Kalibareng, there are 1,484 eligible voters. Five polling stations (TPS) were located in each hamlet to conduct the voting. The number of voters at TPS 1 was 416, TPS 2 was 177, TPS 3 was 357, TPS 4 was 369, and TPS 5 was 167. Three pairs of regent candidates in Kendal Regency competed in the 2020 regional elections: Dico Ganinduto-Windu Suko Basuki, Ali Nurudin-Yekti Handayani, and Tino Indra Wardono-Mukhammad Mustamsikin.

The three candidates campaigned extensively in Kalibareng Village. Candidate 1's campaign was well-organized, with banners displayed along several village roads. His campaign team also distributed pamphlets, masks, and directly explained the candidate's programs to the community. Candidate 1's campaign team held a mass gathering, albeit limited due to the COVID-19 situation. At an event held at a campaign team member's home, the candidate met with the community in person. Villagers who attended the campaign were provided with food, cigarettes, and envelopes containing money upon their departure. The campaign team's strategy of bringing the candidate directly to meet and greet the grassroots community was an effort by the candidate to project the image of a down-to-earth leader who's willing to engage with the community and attentive to their concerns and aspirations.

Structurally, Candidate 1's winning strategy involved forming a volunteer team to assist the campaign team. Two volunteers came from each neighborhood unit (RT) in the village. The total number of volunteers on the campaign team was 18, comprising two campaign team members serving as village coordinators and 16 volunteers as neighborhood unit coordinators. The candidate entirely provided operational funds used during the campaign period. The campaign teams and volunteers do not spend their own money on the candidate's campaign. However, they contribute to its success by providing meeting places and sharing their energy and thoughts to support the candidate they are promoting.

For candidate number 2, the campaign team in Kalibareng Village consisted of 17 people, consisting of one village coordinator and 16 neighborhood association (RT) coordinators. Candidate 2's campaign strategy was well-planned and organized. Their campaign strategy included displaying pamphlets and billboards, holding cadre meetings, and conducting direct community outreach. Candidate banners were displayed at several strategic locations along the roads in Kalibareng Village. An-

other campaign strategy involved direct door-to-door outreach to the community, where the candidate was introduced by distributing stickers and leaflets. The gathering was conducted in three stages to avoid excessive crowds during the pandemic. At the first meeting, the regent candidate met directly with the community; at the second meeting, the vice regent candidate attended; and finally, the campaign team from the regency level attended. After the event, attendees received envelopes containing Rp 50,000 as a token of appreciation for their time in attendance. The candidate, political parties, and sponsors provided the campaign funds.

Candidate number 3, the last candidate, has campaigned the most intensively since the official announcement of the contesting candidates' names. Banners and billboards for candidate three were seen most frequently on the streets of Kalibareng Village and were raised first. However, based on field findings, the campaign was conducted in a less structured manner. Candidate 3 did not have a campaign team in Kalibareng Village, so the community had little access to in-depth information about the candidate's profile. The only people who had information about candidate 3 were sympathizers from the supporting party and the candidate's family. Sympathizers of candidate 3's supporting party played a less significant role in the campaign than the other candidates' campaign teams. They campaigned on a smaller scale and more personally among their family members.

### ***Voting Process and Election Results***

The 2020 Regional Election (Pilkada) voting took place on December 9, 2020. The Kalibareng community enthusiastically exercised their right to vote. Of the 1,486 eligible voters in Kalibareng Village, 1,113 (74.9%) cast their ballots, while 373 (25.1%) abstained. Voters who did not cast their ballots were primarily residents who had migrated from the city and were unable to return home, as well as older adults unable to attend the polling station in person.

There were five polling stations (TPS) for voting in Kalibareng Village. Due to the pandemic, each TPS provided water and soap for handwashing, hand sanitizer, disinfectant, and masks. Everyone attending the TPS was allowed to use these facilities. Polling station staff also wore masks and face shields. Voting hours were staggered to avoid crowding. Voting took place from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. After 1:00 p.m., the vote count continued until the afternoon. Many people came to watch the vote

count enthusiastically. During the counting process, they cheered when their candidate pair received additional votes. Based on the vote count results in Kalibareng Village, candidate number 1, Dico Ganinduto, won 47.76% of the vote, followed by candidate number 2, Ali Nurudin, with 40.06% of the vote, and candidate number 3, Tino Indra, received 12.18%.

**Table 1. Results of the 2020 Pilkada Vote Count in Kalibareng Village**

Candidates	Vote results	
	Amount	%
Candidate No. 1	502	47,76 %
Candidate No. 2	421	40,06 %
Candidate No. 3	128	12,18 %
Total Voters	1051	100 %

Source: Primary Data

### ***Kalibareng Villagers' Perceptions of Kepyur***

Money politics is always a hot topic in Indonesian society, especially in the lead-up to elections. Residents of Kendal, including those in Kalibareng Village, refer to this form of money politics as *kepyur*. The Kalibareng community already has a clear understanding of what money politics is. They can describe it as money given as bribes in elections. They state that money politics is inappropriate and a violation of the law. However, in reality, *kepyur* is not considered unusual by the Kalibareng community. Several informants stated that it would be boring if the *kepyur* were not involved in the political candidate selection process. The views expressed by community informants are as follows.

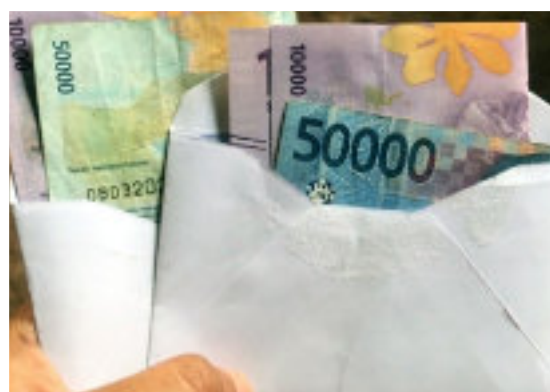
The people of Kendal, including those in Kalibareng Village, refer to money politics as *kepyur*. The people of Kalibareng Village already have a clear understanding of what money politics is. They can describe it as money given as bribes in general elections. They state that money politics is not a good practice and is a violation of the law. However, in reality, *kepyur* is not considered unusual by the people of Kalibareng. Several informants stated that it would be boring if the *kepyur* did not occur in the political candidate selection process. As one villager, Abd, says: "It is commonplace. As villagers, if we're given money, we accept it. However, it actually teaches bad things, but what

can I do? It is a political game, and it is hard to eradicate."

The candidates' campaign teams also view *kepyur* or money politics as a common practice in political elections, as it is widely practiced throughout Indonesia. They also believe that *kepyur* is not detrimental to anyone; in fact, people enjoy waiting for it. The campaign teams consider *kepyur* to be the most effective alternative campaign strategy to attract voters. "I think it is commonplace. Politics is inseparable from money. Moreover, what citizens expect is money, money, and more money," said Tn, from the campaign team for candidate number 1. Similarly, the campaign team for candidate number 2, Ms, said: "*Kepyur* is a term in Indonesia that is already commonplace. It is no longer taboo. If people are asked to vote but do not get pocket money, they will not go."

### ***Kepyur Practices by Candidates in Kalibareng Village***

In the 2020 regional elections in Kendal, the practice of *kepyur* was openly carried out by the campaign workers, particularly those of candidates number 1 and number 2. *Kepyur* took the form of distributing cash in white envelopes in the five days leading up to the election. The amounts distributed varied between Rp 30,000 and Rp 60,000. Nearly all eligible villagers were targeted for *kepyur*. Family and relatives of the campaign workers were the first group targeted, as they were considered trustworthy and were expected to follow the campaign worker's wishes. Next came neighbors and acquaintances living near the campaign worker's residences.



**Figure 2. Envelope containing kepyur in Kalibareng Village**

Source: Primary Data

Candidate campaign teams do not distribute *kepyur* haphazardly. They select potential voters

who are likely to be willing to support their candidate. Even if they are neighbors, if a potential voter is deemed difficult to persuade, they will not receive *kepyur*. People known to have affiliations with other candidates will also be excluded from *kepyur* distribution. The neighborhood association (RT) coordinator plays a crucial role in this selection process, as they possess the best understanding of the surrounding social context. The prospective voter data is then discussed with the village-level campaign team to determine and propose the required *kepyur* budget for the village.

*Kepyur* is distributed door-to-door to the public by campaign teams and volunteers. They hand out envelopes containing money and souvenirs prepared for the targeted voters, strategically, in the five days leading up to the election. Although considered common practice, in practice, *kepyur* is distributed clandestinely. *Kepyur* is distributed in the afternoon and evening when people have returned home from work.

During the distribution of the *kepyur*, the RT Coordinators, who were volunteers for the candidates, visited the homes of people on their lists as if they were visiting as guests. Afterward, the volunteers did not immediately hand over the cash envelopes to the hosts. Instead, they chatted with the homeowners as if they were guests. The conversation was casual, not always about politics. At the end of the conversation, before leaving, the volunteers handed over the prepared cash envelopes. When voters received the envelopes, the volunteers stated that they were a gift from the candidate, and even gave them the envelopes without explaining their purpose. Even without an explicit statement, the voters understood the volunteers' intentions.

Based on the research findings, the use of *kepyur* as a winning strategy in Kalibareng Village was employed by two of the three contesting candidates. Candidate number 3 did not provide *kepyur* because news spread widely on social media that the money allocated for *kepyur* had not been disbursed, as one of Candidate 3's main sponsors was caught in a corruption case during the campaign period. Regarding the amount of *kepyur* money distributed to voters, the campaign worker of candidate number 1 admitted to giving *kepyur* of Rp 60,000 for each person. The amount of money was also confirmed by the recipients of *kepyur*, as conveyed by several informants who received *kepyur*, namely Prm, Khr, Dhr, and Atn. One of the recipients of *kepyur*, Prm said: "I got Rp 60,000. This amount is adjusted to the daily wage of work here. Usually, the wage for hoeing in the rice fields is Rp 50,000. However, this was slightly more."

According to Tn, the village campaign team coordinator, the funds spent by candidate number 1 to conduct *kepyur* in Kalibareng Village totaled Rp 27,900,000 for 465 envelopes, each with a nominal value of Rp 60,000. The campaign team determined the number of 465 people from the results of the selection of prospective voters proposed by each RT coordinator. In the end, the number of votes obtained was comparable to the *kepyur* distributed, even exceeding the target. Candidate number 1 received 502 votes, so the practice of *kepyur* was considered successful in securing the candidate's win. The campaign worker and volunteers did not receive special wages for carrying out their duties. However, they were counted as voters and therefore also received *kepyur*, but with a slightly larger nominal value of Rp 100,000.

Candidate 2 also distributed money as *kepyur* to villagers who supported their candidate. The nominal value of the *kepyur* distributed was Rp 30,000 per envelope. The total funds received by the campaign team reached almost 30 million rupiah, which were used for campaign costs and distribution of *kepyur*. Candidate 2's campaign team distributed *kepyur* to more than 500 people. This number included voters whom volunteers had selected from each neighborhood unit (RT) in Kalibareng Village. However, during the vote count, the number of votes obtained did not match the predicted number. The total number of votes obtained by candidate pair number 02 was only 421 votes. This difference in votes from the prediction is a sign that the vote count failed to reach the target, as stated by the campaign worker number 2, Ms said: "It did not meet the target. At that time, I distributed around 500 envelopes, but when the votes were counted, it turned out that the target had not been reached, with only around 400 votes. Many did not keep their promises."

Meanwhile, candidate number 3, based on research findings, was not seen conducting *kepyur* to voters. This condition was because candidate number 3 did not have a successful team in Kalibareng village, so there was no operational team to carry out *kepyur*. Although he did not conduct *kepyur*, candidate number 3 was widely discussed by the community for giving instructions to village officials to direct villagers to vote for candidate number 3, or threatening to stop social assistance for residents who did not support him. A female village official provided information that the village head received instructions to condition village staff and their families to support candidate 3. Candidate 3 promised that if elected as regional head, they would increase the salaries of village officials.

### ***The Rationality of Kepyur in the Perspective of Village Communities***

In the concept of modern democracy, money politics is a form of democratic deviation that causes voters to make choices based on political programs rather than ideals and ideology. Aspinall and Berenschot (2019) even termed money politics the practice of selling democracy, or "democracy for sale". This selling of democracy leads to a decline in the quality of democracy and the failure of a healthy political contestation process that produces quality leaders.

However, this theoretical perspective does not align with the views of the local community in Kalibareng. For them, money politics, known as *kepyur*, is a common political practice and a rational choice. According to the people of Kalibareng Village, *kepyur* and money politics have different meanings. Money politics is considered a bribe, while *kepyur* is considered compensation for the time wasted attending the election. The rationale for *kepyur* was explained by a campaign team member, Ms, who said: "Here, people who work as laborers are paid more than Rp 50,000.00, so we also compensate them with the equivalent of a day's work here. As compensation for voting." A similar opinion was expressed by voters who received *kepyur*, as explained by Prm: "*Kepyur* is not a bribe, but money as a replacement for work time, because it is a day off from work. Most people here are farm laborers, and if they want to work after voting, they cannot because it is already late. If the candidates do not provide compensation, that is irresponsible."

The distribution of *kepyur* by campaign workers to voters is not based on a written agreement or contract, but rather on trust. Therefore, determining who will receive *kepyur* is not a random choice, but rather a rational decision based on the campaign team's considerations. To ensure the *kepyur*'s objectives are achieved, campaign workers determine potential recipients based on rational considerations, including close family members, neighbors, and social networks.

Rational choice theory explains that an individual's actions are influenced by their rationality. This concept is based on the idea that various actions have specific utility for the actor and is accompanied by a principle of action that believes the actor chooses the action that will maximize that utility (Coleman, 2017). In Coleman's view, rational action involves at least two actors, each with resources.

In the view of the people of Kalibareng Village, *kepyur* is a rational choice and has become a standard part of political elections. According to informants, they consider *kepyur* to be compensation for a day off work due to voting. Therefore, in the understanding of the people of Kalibareng Village, *kepyur* is not purely a form of money politics.

For campaign teams, distributing "*kepyur*" is a winning strategy used to gain voter support and win elections. Campaign teams consider *kepyur* a rational strategy because, in reality, people are often reluctant to vote unless they receive some form of compensation. As Tn, a campaign worker, said: "In reality, people are happy and expect *kepyur*. Those who do not get *kepyur* do not want to vote." Similarly, another candidate's campaign worker, Ms, said: "Most people say that if they do not get pocket money, they will not come to the election."

There are two main elements in Rational Choice Theory: actors and resources (Ritzer, 2018). The intersection between these actors and resources is what causes them to engage in mutually beneficial actions. *Kepyur* is a resource controlled by the candidate and has utility for both the candidate and voters. The candidate, through his campaign team, aims to maximize profits by gaining votes and support from the community to win the electoral contest.

On the other hand, the community, the voters, is the actor whose votes are needed by the candidates. The rational choice made by the villagers in accepting *kepyur* is because the candidates are perceived as possessing valuable resources. The rationality of the Kalibareng community in making political choices is evident in their calculated assessment of what they will gain by supporting the candidate they choose. Accepting *kepyur* is positioned as a rational choice as compensation for leaving their jobs to go to the polls, strengthening their view that *kepyur* is not an attempt to buy votes is the absence of a formal agreement between the campaign team and voters. There is no coercion from those giving *kepyur* to the people who receive it.

In the context of actor action, Coleman asserts that rational action always occurs within a specific social structure that shapes the preferences, opportunities, and constraints of the actor's actions (Coleman, 2017). Thus, rationality does not exist in a vacuum but is constructed by the social, economic, and institutional contexts in which actors operate. In the case of *kepyur*, monetary resources are understood not only as a means of transaction but also as a symbol of power relations and an adaptive strategy within a local political system with minimal trust in substantive electoral processes.

Candidates and their campaign teams act rationally by utilizing *kepyur* as a strategic instrument to minimize uncertainty in electoral outcomes and maximize their chances of victory. This rationality is reinforced by previous electoral experiences demonstrating the effectiveness of money politics as a mechanism for mobilizing voter support, leading to the repeated reproduction of such practices.

Conversely, the rationality of voters in Kalibareng Village is shaped by everyday experiences characterized by economic vulnerability and the limited direct benefits derived from changes in political leadership. Under these conditions, voting rights are not perceived as instruments for long-term policy change, but rather as resources with immediate exchange value. Consequently, voter rationality shifts from a political to an economic orientation, in which accepting *kepyur* is understood as compensation for time and income lost due to participation in the voting process.

This permissive attitude toward *kepyur* is socially constructed by framing it not as vote buying, but as compensation, a form of social attention, or a customary element of electoral contests. The absence of formal agreements, coercion, or social sanctions further reinforces the perception that *kepyur* does not violate local moral norms. Within the rational choice framework, the lack of social and legal risks renders *kepyur* a subjectively rational option for voters. Thus, *kepyur* cannot be understood solely as the result of individual calculations, but rather as the product of interaction between individual rationality and a social structure that tolerates transactional politics. This interaction creates a reinforcing cycle in which the rationalities of candidates and voters mutually reproduce *kepyur* as a normalized practice. Ultimately, *kepyur* represents not merely an individual rational choice, but a form of rational adaptation to a local political system that fails to provide meaningful non-material incentives for political participation.

## CONCLUSION

The practice of *kepyur* in Kalibareng Village has long been known by the community and is seen as a common phenomenon during political elections. Both the community and campaign teams understand that *kepyur* violates election laws and regulations, yet the practice persists because it is not culturally taboo. *kepyur* is not considered a bribe or vote-buying practice, but rather a form of compensation for the loss incurred by leaving work on election day. Campaign teams also use *kepyur* as a rational strategy to secure a candidate's victory.

Thus, in the practice of *kepyur*, the rational choices of the people of Kalibareng Village are not directed at seeking competent leaders, but rather as logical financial compensation to meet economic needs. *kepyur* has shifted the community's political rationality to an economic rationality, where their voting rights can be exchanged for financial gain through the practice of *kepyur*, which replaces their lost livelihood on election day.

The results of this study raise several recommendations for stakeholders to consider. First, there is a need to strengthen understanding and political literacy among rural communities to increase programmatic political awareness and reduce the practice of money politics. Second, there is a need to strengthen civil society at the village level so that it can act as a social control mechanism to prevent vote buying. These two factors will help transform local democracy in rural areas into a practice that can produce capable and responsible local leaders.

At the conceptual level, this study demonstrates that money politics cannot be fully understood merely as a legal violation or moral deviation from democratic norms. Through the concept of *kepyur*, this research shows that money politics is socially embedded and locally rationalized within everyday economic conditions and cultural interpretations of electoral participation. The findings extend rational choice theory by revealing that voters' rationality in electoral contexts is shaped not only by individual cost-benefit calculations, but also by collective norms, economic vulnerability, and the absence of meaningful non-material political incentives. By situating money politics within the interaction between individual rationality and permissive social structures, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of why transactional practices persist in local electoral democracies.

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