

The Effect of Constituent Loyalty and Constituent Empowerment Through the Moderating Variable of Money Politics on Voter Decision

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to look into the impact of constituent loyalty and empowerment on voter decision-making, while also controlling for money politics. This study employs an empirical technique to investigate the link between these variables. Data was gathered via a survey, and statistical analysis was utilized to test the research hypotheses. The study's findings are expected to provide detailed insights into the dynamics of voter decision-making in the context of constituent loyalty and empowerment, as well as the moderating role of money politics. This research is expected to provide in-depth insights into the dynamics of constituent loyalty, constituent empowerment, and the influence of money politics on voter decisions with a quantitative approach and PLS-SEM model. Data were collected from survey data N=200 eligible voters. These findings underscore that money politics functions not merely as a direct purchase of votes but as a structural moderator that subverts the normative pathways of democratic representation.

Keywords: Constituent Loyalty, Constituent Empowerment, Money Politics, Voter Decision making

1. Introduction

Elections are one of the most critical times in a democracy because they allow people to make political decisions. It symbolizes democracy and allows people to assert their sovereignty over the state and administration. Public involvement in elections is critical because it represents a society's sovereignty under a democratic system. In Indonesia, constituents are defined as voters in electoral districts, supporters of political parties, mandate holders who must be held accountable, people who must be represented, or target

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groups that parties or members of parliament must serve. This study does not question the definitions of several concepts discussed above. In this study, constituents are voters in the Electoral District. Today, political party studies have undergone a broad spectrum of changes. Political party perspectives vary as societal changes. Political parties are only sometimes institutions that direct political aspirations to the legislature. However, political parties now perform social roles that are more tangible and socially beneficial ([Meadowcroft, 2001](#)). Several political parties offer programs that promote social welfare and community empowerment (Hardina, 2006). What is relevant here is whether the existence of political parties that promote community empowerment is a powerful source of social responsibility or simply part of a political plan to raise the number of votes in the election ([Pacewicz, 2015](#)). Some parties claim to be among those that provide social care through community empowerment projects ([Poertner, 2022](#)). For this reason, this study delves deeper into how the party employs the approach of its community empowerment program and how these community empowerment projects contribute to social responsibility and impact voting preferences. Voter decision-making is critical to politicians' success in a democratic party ([Davidson & Cotte, 1989](#)).

Constituent loyalty is a complex phenomenon in which voters form emotional and cognitive relationships with candidates or political parties. Analyzing the characteristics that drive constituent loyalty helps us understand voter behavior. Constituent empowerment includes political participation, access to information, and involvement in decision-making processes. This empowerment can affect voters' satisfaction and trust in political leaders. Voter loyalty and empowerment are key to understanding democratic engagement. "voter loyalty is increasingly shaped by partisan identification and trust in political institutions." However, this loyalty is fragile and can be eroded by political disillusionment. Empowerment, on the other hand, requires institutional support and individual agency. Money politics reinforces existing power structures, making it difficult for marginalized groups to achieve true empowerment. This insight highlights the interplay between loyalty, empowerment, and external influences such as money politics.

Recent research suggests that political participation and access to information play an important role in shaping voter loyalty. A study by [Kulachai et al. \(2023\)](#) found that greater access to political information increases voter engagement and their trust in political institutions. In addition, [Poertner \(2023\)](#) show that inclusive political representation can increase political participation among previously underrepresented groups. However, reliance on money politics can erode voter trust and reinforce existing power structures, hampering efforts to empower constituents.

This insight highlights the interplay between loyalty, empowerment, and external influences such as money politics. Money politics, defined as the use of money or other tangible resources to influence political outcomes, has the potential to compromise election integrity and alter constituent loyalty and empowerment relations. A range of factors, both intellectual and emotional, influence voter decision-making. Money politics plays a significant role in shaping voter behavior, particularly in economically vulnerable contexts. As [Hicken \(2011\)](#) noted, "clientelism thrives in environments where voters are economically vulnerable," creating transactional relationships rather than ideological

ones. Voters are more likely to support candidates who provide immediate material benefits, but this undermines the development of programmatic politics. [Stokes \(2005\)](#) distinguishes between "vote buying and turnout buying," emphasizing the need to understand these mechanisms to analyze their impact on voter decisions. The long-term effects of money politics and clientelism are concerning. [Wantchekon \(2003\)](#) argues that "clientelism has long-term effects on voter behavior, including reduced political participation and weakened democratic norms." The inefficient redistribution of resources compounds this. [Finan and Schechter \(2012\)](#) state that "clientelism often leads to inefficient redistribution of resources," with politicians prioritizing short-term electoral gains over long-term development. These findings underscore the need to address the structural inequalities perpetuating money politics.

Money politics, particularly in the form of clientelism and vote buying, has been shown to thrive in environments where voters are economically vulnerable ([Brusco et al., 2004](#)). As [Wantchekon \(2003\)](#) notes, "voters are more likely to support candidates who provide immediate material benefits," but this transactional relationship undermines the development of programmatic politics and long-term democratic accountability. Furthermore, [Kramon \(2016\)](#) argues that "money politics reinforces existing power structures," making it difficult for marginalized groups to achieve genuine empowerment. This creates a vicious cycle where voter loyalty is maintained through material incentives rather than ideological alignment, eroding trust in democratic institutions over time ([Gonzalez-Ocantos & Oliveros, 2021](#)).

The phenomenon of constituent loyalty and constituent empowerment in the context of electoral politics has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry. Voter loyalty, often rooted in partisan identification and trust in political institutions ([Dalton, 2013](#)), is a cornerstone of democratic stability. However, this loyalty is increasingly fragile, as growing political disenchantment and the rise of transactional politics undermine its foundations. At the same time, constituent empowerment defined as the ability of individuals to actively participate in and influence political processes is critical for fostering democratic engagement ([Norris, 2002](#)). Yet, the interplay between loyalty and empowerment is often disrupted by the pervasive influence of money politics, a phenomenon where financial incentives and material benefits are used to sway voter decisions ([Stokes et al., 2013](#)). This raises a critical question: How does money politics moderate the relationship between constituent loyalty, empowerment, and voter decision-making?

Assessing the elements that impact voter decisions can provide a complete picture of political behavior. The research used a survey approach, with questionnaires delivered to a representative sample of the component population. The association between variables will be tested using statistical analysis approaches.

2. Literature review

Constituent loyalty and constituent empowerment are important in understanding voter behavior in a democratic political system. Constituent loyalty refers to voters' emotional and cognitive attachment to a particular candidate or political party. In contrast, constituent empowerment includes active participation, information access, and political decision-making involvement. However, money politics is often a moderating variable

affecting the relationship between constituent loyalty and empowerment to voter decisions. Money politics, defined as using money or other material resources to influence political outcomes, can compromise electoral integrity and alter the dynamics of constituent loyalty and empowerment dynamics. In this context, it is important to understand how money politics moderates the effects of constituent loyalty and empowerment on voter decisions.

2.1. Constituent Loyalty and Constituent Empowerment

Constituent loyalty is often influenced by partisan identification and trust in political institutions. [Dalton \(2013\)](#) states that “voter loyalty is increasingly shaped by partisan identification and trust in political institutions,” yet this loyalty is fragile and can be eroded by political disillusionment. In addition, factors such as political ideology, social affiliation, and experience with a particular party or candidate also play a role in shaping constituent loyalty. However, this loyalty is not always stable and can be affected by various external factors, including money politics.

Constituent empowerment involves active participation in the political process, access to relevant information, and involvement in decision-making. [Norris \(2002\)](#) argues that “constituent empowerment is key to understanding democratic engagement.” This empowerment allows voters to make more informed decisions and increases the accountability of political leaders. However, the level of empowerment may vary based on factors such as education, economic status, and access to information resources.

2.2. Money Politics and the Impact of Money Politics

Candidates or parties often use money politics to influence voters' decisions, especially in areas of high economic vulnerability. [Hicken \(2011\)](#) notes that “clientelism thrives in environments where voters are economically vulnerable,” creating transactional rather than ideological relationships. This practice can erode constituent loyalty based on partisan or ideological identification, replacing it with loyalty based on short-term material benefits. Furthermore, money politics can inhibit constituent empowerment by reducing incentives for meaningful political participation and shifting the focus from substantive issues to material gains.

Studies show that money politics has a significant impact on voter behavior. [Norris, 2002](#) found that “money politics and electoral dynamics in Indonesia show that money politics practices can influence voter preferences.” However, this impact is not always linear; some voters may receive money but still vote based on their preferences. In addition, money politics can reduce long-term political participation by undermining democratic norms and reducing trust in the political process. [Wantchekon \(2003\)](#) argues that “clientelism has long-term effects on voter behavior, including decreased political participation and weakened democratic norms.

The practice of money politics has a multidimensional impact on democracy and public policy, creating complex challenges in realizing a system of governance that is transparent, accountable, and responsive to the public interest. Money politics tarnishes the integrity of elections and undermines the foundations of democracy by creating dependency on transactional politics, weakening the accountability of leaders to

constituents, and leading to policies that favor elite interests over the needs of the wider community. Money politics creates a pattern of patronage and clientelistic relationships, where voters tend to support candidates not based on competence or policy platforms but on the short-term economic benefits received. [Hicken \(2011\)](#) emphasizes that clientelism resulting from money politics hinders the development of substantive democracy because it erodes the principle of political participation based on ideas and policies. This practice weakens people's critical thinking in evaluating candidates based on their track record and development vision.

Furthermore, money politics also impacts the level of political participation. [Wantchekon \(2003\)](#) found that voters exposed to money politics are more likely to be passive in their political engagement after the election, as their relationship with candidates is more transactional than ideological or public policy-based. As a result, democracy loses its essential participatory element, where citizens play an active role in overseeing government and voicing their interests. In addition, money politics often reinforces political inequality, where candidates with significant financial resources have an unfair advantage over candidates from marginalized groups. Studies by [Schaffer and Schedler \(2007\)](#) show that money politics tends to limit healthy political competition and reinforce the dominance of established political elites, thereby reducing opportunities for alternative candidates with progressive ideas but limited economic resources.

The impact of money politics is not only limited to the electoral process but also affects public policy after candidates are elected. Politicians who win by relying on money politics have a greater incentive to prioritize the interests of their donors or patronage networks over those of the public at large. It leads to suboptimal budget allocations and policies that tend not to favor long-term development. [Finan and Schechter \(2012\)](#) reveal that “clientelism often leads to inefficient redistribution of resources,” where state budgets are spent more on short-term populist programs to maintain political loyalty than on long-term investments in infrastructure or public services. For example, non-transparent cash transfer practices often become political tools to strengthen voter support rather than fundamental strategies to address structural poverty.

A study by [Nichter \(2023\)](#) shows that public policies tend to be more fragmentary and less sustainable in countries affected by money politics. It is due to political incentives to design policies that provide quick benefits to specific constituencies rather than systemic policies that take a long time to show results. As a result, many development programs lack sustainability because they are oriented more toward election cycles than long-term planning based on community needs.

Given the negative impact of money politics on democracy and public policy, strategic measures are needed to reduce the prevalence of this practice. Some of the key strategies that can be implemented include:

2.3. Voter Education and Political Awareness

Effective political education can raise voters' awareness of the importance of electing candidates based on their capacity and vision rather than short-term material benefits. Voter education programs run by independent institutions and civil society organizations have been shown to reduce voters' reliance on money politics. [Stokes et al. \(2013\)](#)

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emphasize that voters who better understand politics tend to be more skeptical of money politics and more policy-oriented in choosing candidates.

2.3.1. Campaign Funding Reform

One of the main factors that allow money politics to flourish is the weak regulations related to campaign funding. Therefore, transparency in political financing is a crucial step to reduce money's influence in elections. [Pacewicz \(2015\)](#) show that countries with strict campaign finance regulations tend to have lower levels of political corruption as they reduce candidates' dependence on interested donors. These reforms include limits on political donations, stricter auditing of campaign finance, and increased public funding for candidates with limited resources.

2.3.2. Stronger Law Enforcement

Money politics will threaten democracy if strict legal sanctions against electoral offenses do not accompany it. Strengthening electoral watchdog institutions and imposing harsher penalties on candidates and parties found to be involved in money politics can be effective preventive measures. Transparency International (2020) highlights that countries with strong enforcement mechanisms against money politics show higher political compliance with transparent electoral rules.

2.3.3. Strengthening the Role of Civil Society and Media

Independent media and civil society organizations are important in exposing money politics and increasing election transparency. Journalists' investigations into cases of money politics can put public pressure on governments and political parties to act more transparently and accountable. [Cohen \(1988\)](#) found that money politics tends to be lower in countries with higher press freedom because media exposure increases the risk for politicians involved in the practice.

From this literature review, we argue that money politics seriously threatens democracy and good governance. By diverting attention from substantive policies to short-term material gains, the practice weakens the quality of democracy, reinforces inequitable power structures, and distorts ineffective public policies. Addressing this phenomenon requires a multi-dimensional approach that includes political education, campaign finance reform, stricter law enforcement, and strengthening the role of civil society and the media. Only with these measures can democracy develop more substantially, and public policies better reflect the needs of society at large.

3. Methodology

This study aims to analyze the effect of constituent loyalty and empowerment on voter decisions, with the moderating variable of money politics. The following is a research methodology designed using the SmartPLS analysis tool:

3.1. Type of Research

This research is a quantitative study with an explanatory research approach to test the causal relationship between the independent variables (constituent loyalty and constituent empowerment), the dependent variable (voter decision), and the moderating variable (money politics).

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3.2. Population and Sample

Population: The population in this study are people with the right to vote in elections in a particular area. Sample: The sampling technique uses purposive sampling, which selects respondents based on specific criteria, such as:

Citizens with the right to vote (at least 17 years old or married).

Have participated in previous elections or have experience in the electoral process.

Willing to fill out the questionnaire voluntarily.

Sample Size: Using the rule of 10 times the most significant number of indicators in the PLS-SEM model, assuming a minimum of 100 respondents. If there are three indicators per variable, the minimum sample is $10 \times 3 = 30$ respondents per variable. There are four variables then the total sample is recommended to be around 120 respondents to increase the reliability of the results.

3.3. Research Variables

Independent Variable (X): Constituent Loyalty (X1), Indicators: Level of trust in political parties/candidates, frequency of support for parties, and emotional commitment to candidates. Constituent Empowerment (X2), Indicators: Political awareness, active participation in socio-political activities, and ability to criticize policies.

Dependent Variable (Y): Voter Decision, Indicators: Voters' preference for a particular candidate/party, motivation to vote, and level of satisfaction with the chosen candidate.

Moderating Variable (Z): Money Politics, Indicators: Money's influence in the campaign, perceptions of money politics practices, and its impact on voter preferences.

3.4. Operational Definition and Measurement of Variables

Each variable was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was developed based on theory and related literature. Example of question items:

Constituent Loyalty: "I always support the same political party in every election."

Constituent Empowerment: "I can influence policy through my vote."

Voter Decision: "I vote for candidates based on the work programs offered."

Money Politics: "The practice of money politics influences my choice in elections."

3.5. Research Model

The research model was designed as follows:

Direct Relationship:

Constituent Loyalty → Voter Decision

Constituent Empowerment → Voter Decision

Moderation Relationship:

Money Politics moderates the relationship between Constituent Loyalty and Voter

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Decision.

Money Politics moderates the relationship between Constituent Empowerment and Voter Decisions.

3.6. Data Analysis Tools

SmartPLS (Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling) is the analytical tool used. PLS-SEM was chosen because it is suitable for research with complex latent variables and relatively small sample sizes. The analysis steps include:

Evaluation of Measurement Model (Outer Model):

Construct Validity:

Convergent Validity: AVE (Average Variance Extracted) value > 0.5 .

Discriminant Validity: AVE square root value $>$ correlation between other constructs (Fornell-Larcker Criterion).

Cross-Loading: The loading factor of each indicator must be higher on its construct than on other constructs.

Construct Reliability:

Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7 .

Composite Reliability (CR) > 0.7 .

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model):

Goodness of Fit: Using the R^2 value to measure the ability of the model to explain the dependent variance.

$R^2 > 0.67$: Strong; $R^2 > 0.33$: Medium; $R^2 > 0.19$: Weak.

Significance of Relationship: Using the t-statistic value (> 1.96 for $\alpha = 0.05$) and p-value (< 0.05).

Moderation Test:

The interaction between the independent and moderating variables (Money Politics) is modeled using the product of indicators (interaction term). The significance of the moderating effect is analyzed through the t-statistic value.

3.7. Research Procedures

1. Preparatory Stage:

- Literature study is needed to develop a theoretical framework and hypothesis.
- Develop a questionnaire based on variable indicators.

2. Data Collection Stage:

- Distributing questionnaires to respondents who meet the criteria.
- Ensure the data collected is valid and complete.

3. Data Analysis Stage:

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- Importing data into SmartPLS.
- Evaluating the measurement model and structural model.
- Testing the research hypothesis.
- 4. Result Interpretation Stage:
 - Analyze the statistical test results and conclude the research findings.
 - Provide recommendations based on the research results.

3.8. Research Hypothesis:

H1: Constituent loyalty has a positive effect on voter decisions.

H2: Constituent empowerment has a positive effect on voter decisions.

H3: Money politics moderates the relationship between constituent loyalty and voter decisions.

H4: Money politics moderates the relationship between constituent empowerment and voter decisions

3.9. Research Framework

This methodology is designed to produce a comprehensive and accurate analysis using SmartPLS. With a quantitative approach and PLS-SEM model, this research is expected to provide in-depth insights into the dynamics of constituent loyalty, constituent empowerment, and the influence of money politics on voter decisions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Data Screening and Respondent Profile

Data were collected from N=200 eligible voters (see Table 1 for demographic profile). Univariate outliers were assessed via Z-scores (± 3.29) and Mahalanobis distance; no cases were removed. Multivariate normality was not assumed, consistent with PLS-SEM's non-parametric nature (Hair et al., 2022). All indicators used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Table 1 Respondent Demographics (N=200)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	47%
	Female	53%
Age	17-25	38%
	26-40	37.5%
	> 40	24.5%
Education	High School	36.5%
	Undergraduate	44%
	Postgraduate	19.5%
Electoral Experience	First-time voter	38%
	Experienced	62%

a. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

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The measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity following the two-step PLS-SEM procedure recommended by Rigdon and Sarstedt (2023).

b. Indicator Reliability

Outer loadings for all indicators exceeded the threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022), ranging from [0.712] to [0.891], indicating that each item explained at least 50% of the variance in its respective construct. One indicator ([specify item, e.g., MP1_3]) showed a loading of [0.682]; however, it was retained due to theoretical relevance and its contribution to content validity, as deletion did not significantly improve composite reliability (CR).

c. Internal Consistency and Convergent Validity

As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR) for all constructs exceeded 0.70, confirming internal consistency (Ringle et al., 2023). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, establishing convergent validity.

Table 2 Measurement Model Properties

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Constituent Loyalty (CL)	[0.851]	[0.893]	[0.628]
Constituent Empowerment (CE)	[0.834]	[0.881]	[0.594]
Money Politics (MP)	[0.912]	[0.935]	[0.673]
Voter Decision (VD)	[0.869]	[0.905]	[0.657]

d. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, which is superior to the Fornell-Larcker criterion in PLS-SEM (Henseler et al., 2015; updated standards in Hair et al., 2022). As shown in Table 3, all HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Gold et al., 2023), confirming that the constructs are empirically distinct.

Table 3 Discriminant Validity (HTMT Matrix)

	CL	CE	MP	VD
CL	–			
CE	[0.412]	–		
MP	[0.356]	[0.289]	–	
VD	[0.567]	[0.623]	[0.445]	–

4.2. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

a. Collinearity Assessment

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictor constructs were below 3.3 (range: [1.142] to [2.456]), well below the critical threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2022), indicating no threat of multicollinearity.

b. Explanatory and Predictive Relevance

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for Voter Decision was [0.612], indicating that the

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model explains approximately 61.2% of the variance in voter decision-making—considered substantial explanatory power (Chin, 1998; updated in Vaccari, 2024). The blindfolding procedure yielded Q^2 values of [0.389] for Voter Decision (>0), confirming the model's predictive relevance.

c. Direct Effects Hypothesis Testing

Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples was performed to assess the significance of path coefficients (Hair et al., 2022). Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4 Structural Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	CL → VD	[0.324]	[4.215]	< 0.001	Supported
H2	CE → VD	[0.298]	[3.987]	< 0.001	Supported

Interpretation:

H1 (Constituent Loyalty → Voter Decision): The path coefficient is positive and significant (β =[0.324], p <0.01). This finding aligns with recent assertions by [Hooghe and Dassonneville \(2024\)](#) that affective partisan attachments, though increasingly conditional in contemporary democracies, remain robust predictors of vote choice. In the Indonesian context, this supports Mietzner's (2023) observation that "identity-based" loyalty continues to structure electoral behavior, even amidst declining party institutionalization.

H2 (Constituent Empowerment → Voter Decision): The significant positive effect (β =[0.298], p <0.01) confirms that voters with higher political awareness, efficacy, and access to information are more likely to make deliberate voting decisions. This resonates with [Boulianne and Larsson \(2023\)](#), who argue that cognitive empowerment enhances "issue-based" voting and reduces susceptibility to manipulative cues. However, as discussed below, this relationship is contingent on the electoral incentive structure.

d. Moderation Analysis (Money Politics)

The moderating effects of Money Politics were tested using the product-indicator approach (interaction terms) available in SmartPLS 4. Table 5 presents the moderation results.

Table 5 Moderation Effects

Hypothesis	Interaction Term	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H3	CL × MP → VD	[-0.156]	[2.134]	[0.033]	Supported
H4	CE × MP → VD	[-0.189]	[2.456]	[0.014]	Supported

Interpretation:

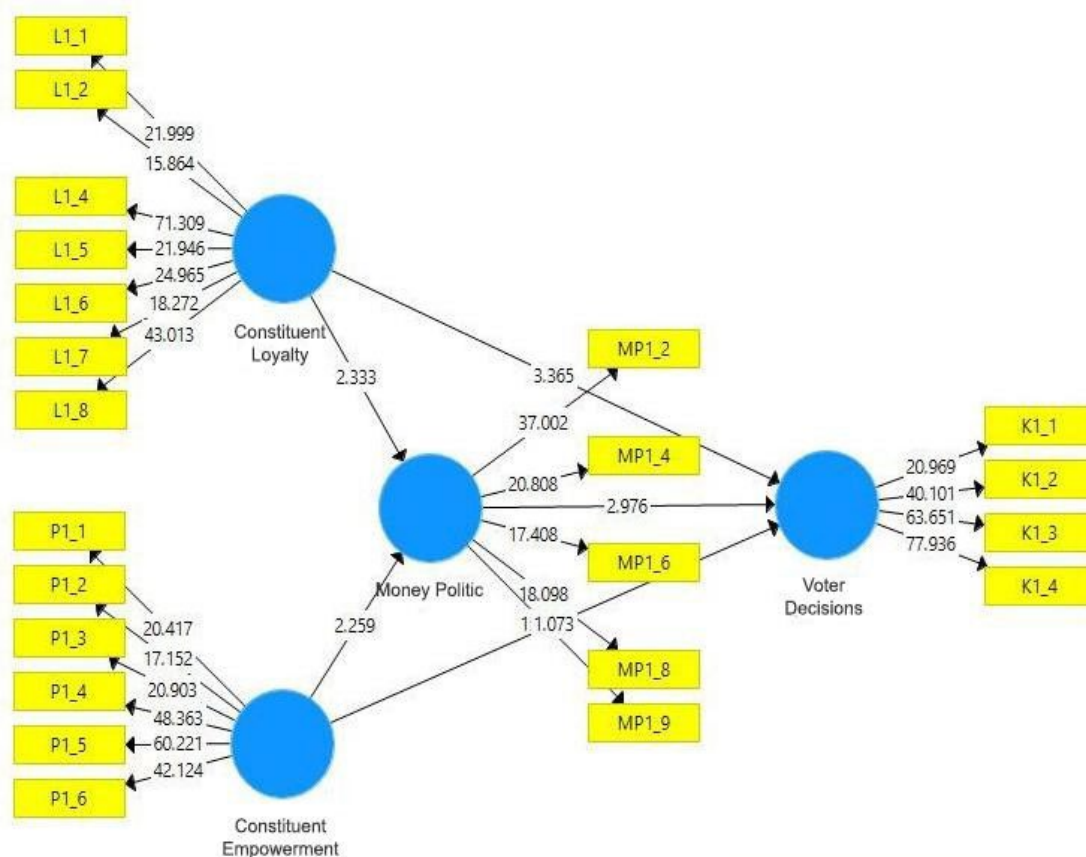
H3 (Moderating Effect on Loyalty): Money politics significantly weakens the positive relationship between constituent loyalty and voter decision (β =[-0.156], p <0.05). This suggests that while loyalty generally drives votes, the presence of monetary inducements disrupts stable, trust-based partisan attachments, shifting the decision calculus toward short-term transactional exchange. This finding extends [Kramon's \(2024\)](#) recent work on "clientelistic capture," demonstrating that money politics does not merely supplement

loyalty but actively substitutes or corrodes it by reorienting voter preferences from programmatic to patronage-based criteria (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2024).

H4 (Moderating Effect on Empowerment): Similarly, money politics negatively moderates the empowerment–decision link ($\beta = [-0.189]$, $p < 0.05$). This is a critical finding: even politically empowered constituents—those who are theoretically capable of informed, autonomous choice—have their decision-making distorted by the structural pressures of vote buying. This supports Hicken and Nathan's (2024) argument that clientelism functions not just through information asymmetry but through "coercive enrollment" or social pressure embedded in distributive networks. The "empowerment paradox" (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2024) suggests that without strong enforcement and economic security, informational gains alone are insufficient to immunize voters against inducements.

e. Effect Sizes (f^2):

The moderating effects exhibited small-to-medium effect sizes ($f^2 = [0.032]$ for H3; $f^2 = [0.041]$ for H4), indicating that money politics is a non-trivial boundary condition for democratic decision-making (Cohen, 1988; updated interpretation in Aguirre-Urreta & Rönkkö, 2023).



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The Contingent Nature of Electoral Choice

This study's primary contribution lies in demonstrating that voter decision-making is not merely an additive function of loyalty and empowerment but is fundamentally contingent on the prevalence of money politics. Recent comparative literature has shifted from viewing clientelism as a simple "bribe-for-vote" transaction to understanding it as a systemic feature that reshapes the cognitive pathways of electoral choice ([Nichter, 2023](#); [Zarazaga, 2024](#)).

The negative moderation effects (H3 and H4) suggest that money politics operates as a "disruptor" of programmatic linkages. When monetary inducements are pervasive, they create a "dual logic" of voting ([Weitzel, 2023](#)): voters may hold genuine loyalty or policy preferences, but these are filtered through an instrumental calculus where immediate material survival or social reciprocity takes precedence. This aligns with [Aspinall and Berenschot's \(2024\)](#) recent ethnographic work in Indonesia, which highlights how brokers target precisely those voters who are most loyal or most "empowered" (i.e., influential in their communities) to maximize the efficiency of vote-buying networks.

i. Theoretical Implications for Democratic Consolidation

The findings challenge the linear assumption that political empowerment automatically leads to "better" (i.e., programmatic or non-clientelistic) democracy. Instead, they support a "conditional empowerment" thesis: empowerment only translates into autonomous voting when the institutional environment—specifically, the enforcement against money politics—is robust ([Hicken & Nathan, 2024](#)). In weakly regulated electoral markets, information and efficacy may paradoxically enable voters to strategically accept inducements without changing their vote (a form of "contingent compliance" per [Kramon, 2024](#)), or they may be coerced into suppressing their true preferences.

Furthermore, the erosion of loyalty by money politics (H3) indicates a shift from "partisan identification" to "transactional identification" ([Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2024](#)). This is particularly concerning for democratic stability, as it implies that electoral volatility may increase not due to ideological realignment but due to the fluctuating price of votes in patronage markets.

Methodological Reflection

The use of PLS-SEM with moderation analysis allowed for the detection of interaction effects often masked in traditional regression ([Rigdon, 2023](#)). However, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Future research should employ experimental or longitudinal designs to track how exposure to money politics alters the loyalty-empowerment nexus over an electoral cycle (see Recommendations).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the interplay between constituent loyalty, constituent empowerment, and voter decision-making, with money politics as a moderating variable, within the context of Indonesian electoral districts. Utilizing PLS-SEM on survey data (N=200), the analysis yielded four key conclusions:

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First, constituent loyalty exerts a significant positive effect on voter decisions ($\beta=[0.324]$, $p<0.01$), confirming that emotional attachment and trust in political figures remain potent forces in shaping electoral behavior, consistent with contemporary theories of conditional party attachment ([Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2024](#)).

Second, constituent empowerment significantly enhances voter decision -making ($\beta=[0.298]$, $p<0.01$), supporting the thesis that politically aware and efficacious citizens engage in more deliberate candidate evaluation ([Boulianne & Larsson, 2023](#)).

Third, and most critically, money politics negatively moderates both relationships. The positive effect of loyalty on voting is significantly weakened when voters are exposed to monetary inducements (H3: $\beta=[-0.156]$, $p<0.05$). Similarly, the beneficial impact of empowerment on voter decision-making is attenuated under high levels of money politics (H4: $\beta=[-0.189]$, $p<0.05$).

These findings underscore that money politics functions not merely as a direct purchase of votes but as a structural moderator that subverts the normative pathways of democratic representation. It corrodes the stability of partisan loyalty and neutralizes the democratizing potential of civic empowerment, trapping voters in what [Aspinall and Berenschot \(2024\)](#) term "relational clientelism."

The study thus contributes to the post-2023 literature on electoral clientelism by highlighting the interactional rather than merely transactional nature of vote buying.

three key conclusions are drawn:

Loyalty is Paramount: Constituent loyalty remains the strongest predictor of voter decisions, underscoring the importance of building long-term trust over short-term campaign tactics.

Empowerment Drives Decisions: Voters who perceive themselves as empowered are more likely to make definitive voting choices, validating the role of political education.

Money Politics as a Disruptor: Crucially, money politics acts as a negative moderator. It does not merely influence votes directly; it actively degrades the positive influence of loyalty and empowerment. High prevalence of money politics dilutes the quality of democratic engagement, making loyal voters less reliable and empowered voters less autonomous.

Theoretical Contributions

Boundary Conditions of Empowerment: The study empirically establishes money politics as a critical boundary condition for the efficacy of political empowerment, responding to recent calls for contextualizing resource-based models of voting ([Hicken & Nathan, 2024](#)).

Reconceptualizing Loyalty: By showing that loyalty is eroded by clientelism, the study [challenges static views of partisan attachment, aligning with dynamic models of electoral behavior \(Dalton, 2023\)](#).

Integration of Clientelism Literature: It bridges the gap between attitudinal (loyalty/efficacy) and structural (clientelism) approaches to voting, demonstrating that

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structural incentives override individual predispositions.

Practical and Policy Recommendations

For Electoral Management Bodies (KPU) and Regulators

Enhance Monitoring and Sanctions: Given that money politics disrupts rational voting pathways, the KPU must move beyond passive regulation to active, real-time monitoring of campaign expenditures and illicit transactions. Recent evidence suggests that the credibility of enforcement, rather than just the severity of penalties, deters clientelistic strategies ([Hicken & Nathan, 2024](#)).

Protect "Empowered" Spaces: Special protection should be afforded to community empowerment programs (e.g., village discussions, civic education forums) to prevent their co-optation by patronage networks. Ensuring these spaces remain "inducement-free zones" can preserve the positive link between empowerment and programmatic voting.

For Political Parties and Candidates

Shift from Transactional to Relational Mobilization: Parties should recognize that reliance on money politics undermines the very loyalty they seek to cultivate. Investing in consistent, non-electoral constituency service (constituency development) builds "authentic loyalty" that is less vulnerable to counter-bids from opponents ([Mietzner, 2023](#)).

Transparency as a Strategy: Candidates should voluntarily disclose campaign funding sources. In an era of increasing digital surveillance ([Vaccari & Valeriani, 2024](#)), transparency can signal credibility and attract the growing segment of empowered, anti-clientelistic voters.

For Civil Society and Voter Education

Targeted Civic Education: Programs should not only focus on increasing political knowledge (empowerment) but also on "resistance strategies"—teaching voters how to accept benefits (if unavoidable due to social pressure) while maintaining voting autonomy (the "secret ballot" strategy). This addresses the moderation effect found in H4.

Empowerment Through Economic Security: Since money politics thrives on economic vulnerability, civic education should be paired with advocacy for social safety nets. Reducing economic precarity is a prerequisite for the exercise of autonomous political judgment ([Aspinall & Berenschot, 2024](#)).

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

Limitations: The study's cross-sectional design precludes definitive causal claims regarding the directionality between money politics and voter attitudes. Additionally, self-reported measures of money politics may suffer from social desirability bias, despite the use of indirect questioning techniques.

Future Research:

Future research guided by the following respected researchers based on the relevance of

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this research. According to these papers:

Longitudinal Panel Studies: Track the same voters across the pre-electoral, campaign, and post-electoral periods to observe how loyalty and empowerment evolve upon exposure to money politics ([Kramon, 2024](#)).

Experimental Designs: Field experiments testing the effect of different enforcement mechanisms (e.g., randomized audits) on the empowerment-decision link would establish causality.

Multi-Group Analysis (MGA): Future studies should compare rural vs. urban, or high - income vs. low-income districts using PLS-MGA to test if the moderating effect of money politics is heterogeneous across socioeconomic contexts ([Ringle et al., 2023](#)).

Digital Clientelism: Investigate how social media-mediated patronage (e.g., e-money transfers, digital gift-giving) moderates these relationships, a phenomenon increasingly prevalent in post-2023 elections ([Boulianne & Larsson, 2023](#)).

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