



Article

Received
21 September 2023

Accepted
12 August 2024

Published online
October 2024

Author(s)
Corresponding Author
 I Made Dwi Hita Darmawan
 0000-0002-3674-9748
 dwihita@primakara.ac.id
 Universitas Primakara Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

Keywords: political cost, democracy, political sponsorship, payback politics

The High Cost of Politics in Indonesia:

An Exploration of Multi-perspectives from Academics, Students, Executive Officials, and Legislative Candidates

I Made Dwi Hita Darmawan

Abstract: The issue of high electoral political costs in Indonesia has been a serious concern since the 1998 reforms. This study aims to explore the factors that contribute to the high political costs in Indonesia's democratic electoral system. The research question posed is: "What are the factors that lead to high political costs in Indonesia's democratic electoral system?" The study employs a qualitative method with an in-depth interview approach. The informants for this study included academics, students, executive officials, and legislative candidates, selected to explore perspectives from various levels of society and the state. The selection of these informants was based on their diverse backgrounds, which were considered capable of providing comprehensive views on this issue. The findings reveal that the high cost of politics is caused by several factors, including an unusual electoral system, a paradigm shift in political parties, the prioritization of popularity over competence, campaign finance sponsorship, payback politics, and the phenomenon of "dawn raids." The conclusion of this study indicates that the high cost of politics is a complex problem that requires a cross-sectoral approach to find a solution. The implication of this study is the importance of a deeper analysis of the mechanisms of political financing and their impact on democracy in Indonesia. This study makes an important contribution to understanding and addressing the problem of electoral political costs in Indonesia and emphasizes the need for cross-sectoral cooperation to achieve sustainable solutions.

About the Author(s)

I Made Dwi Hita Darmawan, is a lecturer at the Accounting Information Systems study programme, Primakara University. The author has an interest in public sector studies and political economy and has experience working in government for two years.

© 2024 The Author(s)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).



I. Introduction

This article aims to explore the phenomenon of high political costs in Indonesia from various perspectives, including those of academics, students, executive officials, and legislative candidates. The goal is to understand the complexity and impact of high-cost politics within the context of a developing Indonesia. The concept of high-cost politics and the public's perspectives on this phenomenon form the primary theoretical basis of this article. High-cost politics refers to political practices that require significant financial investments for campaigns, lobbying, and other political activities. The relevance of this concept to the article's title is that it underscores a major challenge in the context of democracy in Indonesia and its impact on the quality of political representation.

However, in recent years, Indonesia has faced serious challenges related to the phenomenon of high political costs. Participation in the political process, both as a candidate and a voter, is increasingly characterized by significant financial challenges. High political costs can impact the quality of democracy, threaten the principle of equal access to the political arena, and even undermine the integrity of the political system as a whole. KPK Deputy Chairman Alexander Marwata believes that the tens of billions of rupiah spent by regional head candidates to participate in elections has turned the political process into a business transaction. The high cost of politics has led many regional heads to be caught in corruption cases after being elected. Based on a survey conducted by the KPK and the Ministry of Home Affairs, the cost required to run for regent or mayor reaches Rp20-30 billion (Antaranews, 2023).

Amir Arief, the Director of Anticorruption Socialization and Campaign at the KPK, stated that in addition to vote buying, candidates are also required to pay political dowries to parties, often in substantial amounts. This money does not solely come from their own pockets but also from donations made by various parties who expect reciprocal benefits if the candidates are elected. This behavior is commonly referred to as "investment corruption," or investment in corruption. Success in elections, including local elections, is 95.5 percent influenced by

the power of money, much of which is used to finance political dowries. Candidates often need to spend between Rp5-15 billion per person. This practice results in leaders who are unfit to govern, leading to policies and decisions that are less representative and accountable. The interests of the people are secondary to the interests of themselves, donors, or political parties (KPK, 2023).

The existence of a rich literature on political costs suggests that this issue has been widely studied. For example, Howard et al. (2018, p. 83), Prabowo et al. (2018, p. 790) and Spenkuch & Toniatti (2018, p. 1990) have discussed the financial challenges of political participation and its impact on democratic quality. Research from Berenschot (2018, p. 1575), Lehne et al. (2018, p. 70) and Shineman (2018, p. 200) also highlight the negative impact of high political costs on the principle of equal access and the integrity of the political system. In addition, research by Hakim & Muhyidin (2022, p. 19) showed that direct elections have an impact on high costs, while Sjafrina (2019, p. 47) found that money politics is the main cause of high political costs. Sembiring & Simanihuruk (2018, p. 94) also revealed that dynastic politics exacerbates political costs.

However, these studies often focus on only one particular perspective. Therefore, this article fills this under-explored gap by embracing multiple perspectives, including academics, students, executive officials and legislative candidates. This article will explore the root causes of high political costs and identify its implications for a healthy and inclusive democratic process. The article question posed is: "What are the factors that lead to high political costs in Indonesia's democratic electoral system?"

The novelty of this research lies in the holistic approach that combines the perspectives of political elites and the general public to provide a more comprehensive understanding of political costs in Indonesia. By considering the views of various stakeholders, this article is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the understanding and development of the political system in Indonesia.

Furthermore, this article will discuss in depth the findings of the survey and interviews with respondents and analyze their political

implications. The article questions that have been formulated will be elaborated on in the results and discussion section, with the aim of providing a deeper understanding of high-cost politics in Indonesia.

II. Methods

This article uses a qualitative method with an in-depth interview approach. The in-depth interview method allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of respondents' views, experiences and perceptions regarding the phenomenon of high-cost politics. This allowed the researcher to explore the complex frameworks and nuances in the respondents' views.

This article involved a variety of stakeholders, including academics, students, executive officials and legislative candidates. The in-depth interview method allowed the researcher to obtain diverse viewpoints from each of these groups, thus enriching the analysis and interpretation of the results. Respondents feel free and more voluntary if their identity is not exposed to the public because it is sensitive, so researchers are obliged to fulfill it as research ethics.

Table 1. Background of Respondents

Informant Name (Pseudonym)	Background of Respondents
Wayan	Academic of Political Science Department
Made	Student of Accounting Study Program
Nyoman	Student of Political Science Department
Komang	Former Executive Officer (Mayor)
Ketut	Legislative Candidate

This article was conducted during the time period of November - December 2023 which may vary depending on the schedule and availability of informants. Sufficient research duration is important to ensure that the researcher can collect adequate and detailed data from the informants involved.

The objective reason for choosing Bali province may be that it is one of the regions with interesting and diverse political dynamics. Bali also has a rich political history and is a

well-known tourist destination in Indonesia, so high-cost politics in this province can provide important insights in the context of local and national politics. One of the uniqueness of politics in Bali is the role of puri (royal palace) which is still very influential in determining the local political landscape. Puri, as the traditional center of power, plays an important role in local politics with its influence still strong in the structure of government and community life.

In conducting the article, the author followed Creswell's concept of the stages of qualitative research, which consisted of problem identification, literature search, determination of goals and objectives, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and reporting (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 97). The data validation technique uses source triangulation by combining various existing data and sources. Triangulation is useful for checking the truth of data or information obtained by researchers from different perspectives by reducing as much bias as possible that occurs during data collection and analysis.

In this triangulation process, data from each informant is not only collected and analyzed separately, but also compared to see similarities, differences and correlations between their views. For example, Wayan's perspective as a political science academic provides a strong theoretical foundation regarding political costs and their influence on the democratic system. Meanwhile, Made's view as an accounting student highlights aspects of transparency and accountability in campaign financing, which provides a different yet complementary viewpoint to Wayan's perspective.

Nyoman, a political science student, provides insight into the dynamics of political participation among the younger generation and their perceptions of high-cost politics. These views are then compared with the perspective of Komang, a former executive officer, who has practical experience managing political costs during his tenure. Ketut, a legislative candidate, adds another dimension by sharing his first-hand experience of navigating campaign cost challenges, offering a real-world example of how theory and practice intersect.

This triangulation ensured that the research results were not based on just one point of view but were the outcome of synthesizing multiple perspectives, thereby strengthening the validity and credibility of the findings. Triangulation also helps identify potential biases of each informant and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

III. Results and Discussion

A. Political Science Academics' View

1. *Political Costs are Rooted in Systems and Habits*

In an effort to uncover the reality of high political costs in Indonesia, an interview with Wayan emphasized that recent research indicates that political costs have penetrated into the structure of the system and are entrenched as a habit that is difficult to change (Bertrand et al., 2018, p. 867; Hafner-Burton et al., 2018, p. 470).

According to Wayan, empirical research involving campaign finance mapping, political party financing and other related political practices has highlighted that high political costs are not solely the result of individual or candidate initiatives. "Political costs," he said, "have become an integrated element in our political framework. The practice has crossed the boundaries of ordinary expensiveness and become part of the norm in our political system."

Wayan explains that the roots of this problem can be traced back to Indonesia's transition to democracy during the Reformasi era. As political parties began to operate freely and elections became routine, the demand for funds for campaigns and other political activities soared. "At that time, it was crucial for political parties to build a support base and achieve electoral success," Wayan said. "However, as the number of competing political parties increased, so did the costs of appealing to voters."

The interview also revealed that the costly practice of political financing has involved various elements, including private donations, funding from candidates themselves, as well as funds received from the corporate and business environment. Wayan argues that unclear regulations and violations of campaign finance

limits have allowed political costs to escalate. "There is no legal framework strong enough to control the amount of funds that can be used in political campaigns," he said.

In his conclusion, Wayan emphasized that high political costs have turned into an intractable phenomenon. According to him, the right solution requires collaborative efforts between the government, political parties, and civil society to formulate strict regulations regarding political financing and promote transparency in the political process. "It takes strong political will to overhaul the existing norms and bring about the necessary changes," he concluded.

In addition, Wayan added that in Bali, the role of Puri was very central in local politics. Support from Puri not only serves as financial support but also provides significant psychological and social support from the community. "Support from Puri brings its own strength," Wayan said. "If Puri supports us, people tend to follow and provide full support. This is because Puri has a central role and is highly respected in the social and political structure of Bali." This support often carries additional burdens because candidates feel they have to meet Puri's expectations supported by the trust and loyalty of the local community. Wayan underlined, "Puri's role in Balinese politics is not only about money, but also about the legitimacy and public trust they carry."

2. *Why is Politics Costly?*

To detail the factors that contribute to the high costs of politics. First, Wayan highlights the complexity of the political system in Indonesia as one of the main causes of high political costs. "A political system consisting of multiple levels of elections, ranging from local to national, creates a series of requirements that candidates must fulfill," he says. He explained that this process involves various stages, from initial support gathering to mass campaigning, all of which entail significant costs.

Secondly, Wayan emphasized the dominant role of money in politics as a driver of high political costs. According to him, candidates often feel the need to invest large sums of money to gain sufficient visibility, especially on a broad scale such as national elections. "The perception that considerable funds are needed to gain sufficient

support and votes often encourages candidates to spend even more," he said.

Furthermore, Wayan highlighted the aspect of political culture that drives high political costs. "Voters often have certain expectations about the candidates they choose, including in terms of impressive campaigns and taking center stage," he explained. In this context, candidates feel the need to fulfill these expectations by investing in large, high-cost campaigns.

Voters have pragmatic expectations of the immediate benefits that voters can expect to receive from candidates. This could be in the form of financial assistance, local infrastructure projects, or concrete promises that provide direct material benefits to voters. In many cases, these pragmatic expectations drive the practice of money politics, where voters exchange their votes for immediate benefits promised by candidates.

These pragmatic expectations encourage candidates to invest in high-cost campaigns to meet the expectations of pragmatic voters. Practices such as dawn raids (the distribution of money or goods ahead of election day) and the organization of large events involving the giving of gifts or other incentives are clear examples of how pragmatic expectations can affect the cost of politics.

Candidates often feel the need to fulfill these pragmatic expectations to ensure immediate support. They must deliver promises that provide direct benefits to voters and undertake campaign activities that involve the distribution of material incentives. For example, in further interviews, Wayan noted that a successful campaign in Bali requires not only a good, data-driven program, but also the ability to organize engaging and memorable events and provide direct incentives to voters. "Candidates who are able to provide direct benefits tend to have a greater chance of winning the election," he added.

At the end of the interview, Wayan emphasized the importance of understanding that high political costs are not only related to individual decisions, but are also a product of existing political structures, political culture and norms. "To overcome this problem, there needs to be changes in regulations, political awareness, and

adjustments in the existing political dynamics," he said.

It is clear that the high cost of politics in Indonesia is not the result of a single factor, but is the result of a complex interaction between various elements of the political system, political culture, and demanding voter expectations (Chauchard, 2018, p. 357; Dommett & Power, 2019, p. 260; Kapur & Vaishnav, 2018, p. 204).

3. Political Party Costs are Financed by The State

Wayan asserted that one measure that could be considered is to finance political parties through state funds, covering various aspects of costs such as operations, consolidation, and nominations.

In this interview, Wayan argues that public funding for political parties can have a positive impact in reducing the burden of political costs currently borne by parties. "High political costs often result in parties or candidates being trapped in fundraising, which in turn can raise the risk of corrupt practices or the influence of certain interest groups," he said.

In an effort to implement public funding for political parties, Wayan also proposed the possibility of using a Government Regulation in Lieu of Law. "The issuance of a Government Regulation in Lieu of Law regulating political party funding can be a quick step in responding to the urgent need to reduce high political costs," he explained.

Wayan sees that by taking this step, the government can play a central role in controlling the high cost of politics and the associated risk of corrupt practices. "In addition, public funding can help reduce the dependence of political parties on specific individual or group donors, which can affect party independence and political decisions," he said.

In concluding this interview, Wayan provides insight into the importance of public funding for political parties as a strategic measure to reduce the high cost of politics. His analysis illustrates how this measure can address the political cost challenges inherent in Indonesia's political system and potentially bring about positive changes in political processes and democratic integrity.

Some countries have shown that public funding can help reduce money politics and improve electoral integrity. In Germany, the public funding system provides subsidies based on the results of previous elections, with the aim of ensuring that parties have adequate resources for campaigns without having to rely on large donations from individuals or corporations. Studies show that this system has helped to maintain fair political competition and reduce the influence of money in politics (Nassmacher, 2009).

In Sweden, the government provides significant public funding for political parties, with the condition that parties must report in detail all campaign expenditures. This promotes transparency and accountability, and reduces incentives to raise funds illegally (Hamann & Kelly, 2010). Meanwhile, in Canada, public funding includes a partial refund of campaign costs for candidates who obtain a minimum number of votes. This not only helps reduce the financial burden on candidates but also motivates wider participation in the political process (Carty & Eagles, 2005).

Indonesia already has a form of public funding for political parties, but its implementation still faces several challenges. Current funding is often considered insufficient to cover high campaign costs, so parties and candidates still rely on large donations that can influence their political policies. To improve this situation, the amount of public funding needs to be increased to cover the majority of campaign costs, thereby reducing dependence on external funds. In addition, tightening regulations on campaign finance reporting and party spending and imposing strict sanctions for violators will be crucial. In addition, raising public awareness about the importance of public funding and the dangers of money politics through political education can help the public better support a transparent and accountable funding system.

B. Accounting Student's View

1. Accountability and Integrity at Stake

In an effort to gain further perspective on political cost accountability, an interview with Made, a student of the Department of Accounting revealed a critical and rigorous view of political

cost reporting in Indonesia. Made, who has a particular interest in financial accountability and transparency, highlighted the lack of clarity and transparency in political cost reporting.

In this interview, Made strongly indicated that political cost reporting in Indonesia has so far lacked transparency. "The lack of clarity regarding the origin and use of campaign funds often creates a fertile ground for mistrust and speculation," he said. Made also expressed frustration about the difficulty of accessing detailed information on campaign income sources, expenditures, and the use of funds.

Made also observed that students and the general public have little understanding of the role of political sponsors in campaign financing. "Political sponsors are often not explained openly, so students like me feel confused about their impact and role in the political system," Made said. This lack of clarity regarding contributions from various parties makes it difficult for the public to follow the flow of funds and identify potential conflicts of interest.

Furthermore, Made explained that campaign finance revenue procedures are often also ambiguous and difficult to track. "There are no clear rules on how political parties and candidates obtain funds for their campaigns," he said. This can create loopholes that allow unethical practices, including potential funding from unauthorized or prohibited sources.

In order to address this challenge, Made stated that there is a need for concrete efforts to strengthen transparency and accountability in political cost reporting. He recommends the implementation of stricter regulations on campaign finance reporting, including the obligation to clearly explain the origin and use of funds.

2. Dowry and Public Apathy

In Indonesian society, especially among university students, the topic of politics, particularly political fees, has triggered apathetic and sensitive reactions. Made reveals that as soon as this topic comes up, several thoughts immediately cross people's minds, including a distrust of transparency and the concept of "dowry" in politics.

“When it comes to politics, especially about how much money is involved, people often feel a sense of confusion and apathy,” Made said. He observed that the complexity of political costs, especially the lack of clarity around campaign finance and political sponsorship, can fuel indifference and neglect on this topic. Made asserts that these challenges point to the urgency of removing ambiguities in political cost reporting so that the public can feel more engaged and empathetic towards the issue.

At the same time, Made noted that the existing sensitivity to the topic of political costs also reflects distrust in the political system in general. “When we hear the word ‘political cost,’ the first thought that comes to mind is often related to the non-transparency and the concept of ‘dowry’ in politics,” he said. He explained that this perception arises due to the lack of access to clear and transparent information on how funds are collected and used in political campaigns.

Made also feels that the suspicion of political dowries is a factor inhibiting active participation in politics for some people. “When people feel that the political costs and financial contributions required by candidates or political parties are very high, many feel ‘unable’ to get involved or feel that their role is insignificant in the political process,” he explained. In order to overcome this apathy and distrust, Made pointed out the importance of creating an environment where information about the cost of politics is presented in a transparent and straightforward manner.

C. Political Science Student’s View

1. Popular Capital Contestants

An interview with Nyoman, a student from the Department of Political Science, offers deep insight into contemporary trends in Indonesian politics. Nyoman expressed concern about the growing phenomenon of legislative candidates and regional officials emerging from celebrity circles or relying solely on popularity, often without regard to relevant competencies.

According to Nyoman, this trend occurs because politics is increasingly seen as a stage that utilizes narratives that attract public attention. “In a world of social media and information frenzy, popularity can be a factor that greatly influences

public perception of a candidate or official,” he said. He observed that the popularity of widely recognized artists or public figures is often a strategy to attract public attention and win votes in elections.

However, Nyoman also highlighted the negative impact of this trend. “When popularity becomes the main criteria, competence and political experience are often overlooked,” he said. Nyoman expressed concern that many legislative candidates and regional officials rely solely on their image as celebrities or popular figures without having a deep understanding of the policies and political challenges faced.

Nyoman cited several examples where the presence of legislative candidates or regional officials from among celebrities did not necessarily have a positive impact. “Their presence in the political sphere can obscure the focus on important issues, and create the impression that politics is just a form of entertainment that capitalizes on popularity,” Nyoman said. He added that a lack of competence and deep political understanding can hinder effective decision-making.

In an effort to address this trend, Nyoman emphasized the need to increase public awareness of the importance of competence and experience in politics. “People need to understand that choosing candidates based on popularity alone is not enough to realize good policy making and effective government sustainability,” he explained. Nyoman recommends that political parties also play a role in assessing candidates based on more holistic criteria, including competence and political understanding.

The interview with Nyoman Pratama provides an in-depth insight into the impact of popularity trends and celebrity presence in Indonesian politics. With his incisive analysis, Nyoman underlines the importance of political education and public awareness to choose candidates based on competence and a clear policy vision, as well as the role of political parties in prioritizing candidate quality over mere popularity.

2. Polling Station Witness Costs as a Trigger

In the context of the 2024 elections, where there are as many as 823,220 polling stations spread across the country, this issue is a major concern.

Each polling station requires the presence of witnesses from political parties or legislative candidates to observe the voting process and monitor against fraud (Lee & Xenos, 2019, p. 22; Mohr et al., 2019, p. 429; Schneider, 2019, p. 14). “The presence of witnesses at polling stations is an important step to ensure the integrity of the election and prevent potential vote manipulation,” he said.

However, Nyoman also observed that witness participation at each polling station carries significant financial implications. “In the 2024 General Election with that many polling stations, political parties or legislative candidates will have to incur considerable costs to pay witness salaries and ensure their availability at all polling stations,” he explained.

Nyoman calculated that this cost includes transportation, honorarium, as well as logistical and accommodation needs for witnesses stationed at overseas polling stations. “In some cases, witnesses also require special training or preparation, so these costs can be even higher,” he added. In addition, Nyoman also observed that the role of witnesses in elections is an important obligation, but cost factors often prevent wider participation. “Political parties with greater financial resources may be better able to provide witnesses at all polling stations, whereas smaller parties or independent candidates may face cost constraints,” he said.

To overcome this challenge, Nyoman recommends subsidies or support from the government for political parties or legislative candidates who want to place witnesses at polling stations. “Financial support from the government can help reduce the burden of political costs that must be borne by parties or candidates participating in elections,” he said.

The interviews with Nyoman provide an in-depth look at the crucial role of polling station witnesses in elections and the financial impact attached to their participation. His analysis underscores the need for solutions that focus on providing incentives or support for political parties or legislative candidates, so that participation in elections can be more equitable and political costs can be reduced while the integrity of elections is maintained.

D. Former Executive Officer’s View

1. Political Vehicles and Campaign Costs

An interview with Komang, a former executive officer with 15 years of experience in government, reveals an insightful view on the high cost aspect of politics in Indonesia. Komang, who has served as Deputy Mayor for 5 years, then Mayor for 10 years, as well as a candidate for Governor, presents a view from the perspective of someone who has been in a complex political system. “Behind the desire to serve the community and contribute to development, the reality is that political campaigns require significant resources,” he said.

Komang explains that being a serious candidate requires investment in the construction of a political vehicle. “Political vehicles are support networks, voter bases, as well as teams that can help candidates to reach voters with their messages and programs,” he said. According to him, building an effective political vehicle requires substantial time and resources, including money.

Furthermore, Komang observed that campaign attributes, such as t-shirts, billboards, and other props, are also an important factor in the high cost of politics. “The message and image must be clearly transmitted to voters,” he said. “This includes the cost of production, distribution and installation of campaign attributes in various areas, including remote corners.”

Komang also shared his personal experience as a candidate for Governor, where the cost of campaign attributes spread across various regions, including in remote areas, added significantly to the political cost burden. “Although we tried to optimize existing resources, these factors still presented real challenges in terms of finances,” he said.

However, Komang also emphasized that the high cost of politics is not just a matter of money, but also highlights the expansion of political participation and opportunity. “While high political costs can be an obstacle, I believe that individuals who are committed to serving the community and have a strong vision still have opportunities to get involved,” he said.

The interview with Komang provides insights into the complexities of political costs

from the perspective of a former executive with long experience in politics. His views illustrate the importance of building strong political vehicles and effective distribution of campaign messages in influencing election outcomes. Despite the financial challenges, Komang underscored strong commitment and vision as key to overcoming these obstacles.

2. The Dawn Attack Phenomenon

In his long experience as an executive officer with 15 years of experience, Komang also expressed his views on the “dawn attack” phenomenon that has affected the political dynamics in Indonesia. “Dawn attack,” as the term refers to the campaign practice of buying people’s votes with monetary bribes. “When campaign time is narrowed and campaign attacks are launched suddenly and massively, many candidates feel pressured to gain attention and support in a short period of time,” he said.

Komang observed that the practice of “dawn attacks” can obscure the vision and substance of the campaign and make candidates more likely to rely on emotional or controversial rhetoric to attract public attention. “When campaigns only focus on dramatic effects in a short period of time, substance and concrete plans to advance society are often marginalized,” he said.

Furthermore, Komang explained that the impact of “dawn attacks” is not only felt in the rhetorical aspect, but also has an impact on the intensity and cost of the campaign as a whole. “Campaign attacks on a large scale require significant financial investment in a very short period of time,” he explained. This further increases the already high political cost burden, and can ultimately affect the quality of campaigns and the sustainability of political participation.

In the face of this phenomenon, Komang emphasizes the importance of building public awareness and voters who are critical of political practices that ignore substance. “Strong political education is key to helping voters sort out the information they receive and choose candidates based on their vision and concrete plans,” he said.

With his experience and deep understanding of Indonesian politics, Komang provides a valuable perspective on the impact of the “dawn attack”

phenomenon on the democratic process. His analysis underscores the need to refocus on the substance of campaigns and the important role of political education in building a smart and critical electorate.

E. Legislative Candidate’s View

1. The Paradox of the Party as a Tool of Struggle

An interview with Ketut, a legislative candidate who is passionate and determined to bring about positive change in Indonesia’s political system, provides insight into the drivers of high political costs and shifts in the democratic process. Ketut highlights that the public’s focus on popularity has shifted attention away from the vision, ideas and competencies of legislative candidates to the extent that the party is no longer considered a means of struggle.

Popularity has become the main factor that triggers high political costs (Alexander, 2019, p. 24; Cagé, 2020, p. 250; Gao et al., 2019, p. 14; Goodell et al., 2020, p. 29). “People now tend to pay more attention to who is popular than who has strong vision and ideas,” he said. He observed that popularity, which is often measured through social media or presence in the mass media, has a big impact on how much support a candidate can get. “When popularity becomes a priority, legislative candidates feel compelled to build their image to be recognized by the public,” he said. “This includes investments in self-branding, content production for social media, advertising costs, and other promotions that require significant financial resources.”

Furthermore, Ketut explained that the push to appear on various social media platforms and invest in branding campaigns has brought a direct impact on high political costs. “In an effort to appear on various platforms and attract the attention of as many voters as possible, legislative candidates have to spend money on the production of attractive content, paid advertisements, and billboards in various strategic locations,” he said.

However, Ketut also emphasized the importance of creating public awareness about the urgency of choosing legislative candidates based on vision, ideas, and competence. “We need to shift the focus from mere popularity to the

substance and values carried by the candidates,” he explained. He encouraged public participation in understanding the platforms and work plans offered by legislative candidates, so that voters can make smarter decisions.

In this lively interview, Ketut highlights the complexities that come with the shift in focus towards popularity in politics. His views underscore the need for smart and critical voters to choose candidates based on substance and competence, as well as the importance of developing solutions to reduce the high political costs associated with branding campaigns.

2. Political Sponsorship and Balas Budi (payback)

Ketut revealed that he had experienced situations where he was promised operational sponsorship for his political expenses. However, the sponsors made a controversial request: they asked that if elected, Ketut provide “feedback” that supported their business endeavors through the influence he had as a legislator.

Ketut clearly expressed his disapproval of this kind of political payback. “This situation poses a serious moral and ethical dilemma,” he says. “I believe that people’s representatives should prioritize the interests of society as a whole, not the interests of certain individuals or groups.”

In the context of political costs, Ketut describes how the phenomenon of political payback can have an impact on the campaign financing process. “Operational sponsors or donors often want to ensure that they benefit from the financial support they provide,” he explains. “This can create complex expectations and add a political dimension to the financial relationship.”

Ketut observes that such situations can have serious consequences for the integrity of the political system and people’s representation. “When legislative candidates receive sponsorships linked to political promises of reciprocity, this undermines the independence and ability of legislators to make decisions based purely on the interests of the people,” he said.

In the face of this phenomenon, Ketut emphasized that transparency and accountability in campaign financing are essential (Habibi, 2021, p. 427; Lee et al., 2020, p.20). “We must have

strict rules to ensure that financial contributions do not affect the integrity and independence of legislators,” he said. He also underlined the importance of empowering voters to understand ethical political practices and vote for candidates who uphold democratic values, “We are not necessarily mentally corrupt, but forced by circumstances that the cost of contestation is expensive so that income is not proportional to the fantastic expenditure”.

In addition, Ketut highlighted that in Bali, the role of Puri is still very central in local politics. Support from Puri not only serves as financial support but also provides significant psychological and social support from the community. “Puri’s support brings its own strength. If Puri supports us, the community tends to follow and provide full support,” Ketut explained. “However, this also means we must meet the hopes of Puri and the people they influence, which often carries additional burdens.” Puri as a traditional institution has a big influence in forming public opinion and providing legitimacy to candidates. This support often carries additional burdens because candidates feel they have to meet Puri’s expectations supported by the trust and loyalty of the local community.

3. Open versus Closed Proportionality

In the context of an open proportional system, campaigning becomes more decentralized and candidates need to build their popularity at the individual level. “Legislative candidates must be able to attract the attention of voters directly, because voters have more options to choose from various candidates within the same party,” he said.

However, Ketut also noted that this phenomenon can trigger high political costs. “In an effort to win voters’ support, candidates need to spend on a wider and more evenly distributed campaign, which includes the production of campaign materials, advertisements, socialization events, as well as other activities,” he explained.

Ketut sees that the open proportional system has the potential to strengthen individual aspirations and diversity of views in the legislature. However, he also recognizes that in practice, cost and popularity factors can influence who gets elected. “Candidates with greater

financial resources often have an advantage in campaigning and visibility,” he said.

In order to overcome the impact of high political costs from the open proportional system, Ketut urged the need for reforms in campaign financing and increased public awareness on the importance of voting based on substance and competence. “Our democratic system still needs adjustment and improvement in order to realize a fairer and more equitable representation,” he said.

The need to consider reforms in the political system and strong political education to ensure voters choose candidates based on the substance and vision they offer.



Figure 1. Framework of Findings

IV. Conclusion

This study has explored in depth the issue of high political costs in the democratic election system in Indonesia, with a special focus on the Province of Bali. Through a series of interviews with various informants, including academics, students, former executive officials, and legislative candidates, this article succeeded in identifying the main factors that contribute to the high political costs and their impact on political participation and democratic integrity.

The results of the study revealed that the high political costs in Indonesia were caused by various interrelated factors. This study shows that high political costs have been rooted in the Indonesian political system and have become part of the habit. The complexity of political campaigns and increasingly fierce competition encourages candidates to invest in expensive campaigns. In addition, the lack of transparency in reporting political costs obscures the origin of

campaign funds and the role of political sponsors, which increases public distrust of the political system.

Poor political practices, including high political costs, have also triggered apathy and sensitivity from society. This reflects a deep distrust of transparency and integrity of the political system. Legislative candidates observe that the public tends to pay more attention to the popularity of candidates than the substance of their programs, so that candidates are forced to incur high costs for imaging campaigns. The existence of sponsors provides financial support with certain demands to create ethical and moral dilemmas, which have a negative impact on legislative independence and integrity. The open proportional system provides space for individual legislative candidates but also increases the intensity of competition, which in turn encourages high political costs.

The uniqueness of politics in Bali lies in the central role of Puri and traditional villages in determining political landscapes. This traditional structure plays an important role in the local political process and affects the dynamics of political costs in Bali. Puri as the center of customary power and customary villages through traditional *bendesa* has a significant influence in political decision making, which distinguishes Bali from other regions in Indonesia.

From the results and discussion of this research, it can be concluded that the high political cost is a serious threat to the integrity of democracy in Indonesia. Large campaign expenditure tends to distort the political process and limit the access of political participation from groups that are not financially unable. To overcome this challenge, a comprehensive approach is needed, including strong political education to increase public awareness of the importance of substance and competencies of political candidates compared to popularity, as well as strengthen regulations and transparency in campaign funding to reduce the chances of money politics. Providing adequate incentives and support for political parties can also reduce dependence on sponsors who have certain interests.

This study opens opportunities for deeper further research on the specific impacts of high

political costs on various aspects of democracy in Indonesia. Further research can focus on comparative studies, by comparing high-cost political practices in Bali with other regions to understand the differences and equations that exist, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of public funding policies and transparency regulations that have been applied in various countries as a reference for system improvement in Indonesia.

This conclusion confirms that high-cost politics is a complex issue requiring serious attention from various stakeholders to ensure a more inclusive and transparent political process in the future. It is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the high costs of politics and encourage discussions and concrete actions to address this challenge, fostering a healthier and more inclusive democracy in Indonesia.

Acknowledgment

The author is very grateful to the sources who have contributed their thoughts so that the spirit of this paper to explore in-depth can be completed properly.

References

- Alexander, H. E. (2019). *Financing the 1988 election*.
- Antaranews. (2023). *KPK: Mahalnya biaya politik jadi pemicu korupsi*. <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/3616386/kpk-mahalanya-biaya-politik-jadi-pemicu-korupsi>
- Berenschot, W. (2018). The Political Economy of Clientelism: A Comparative Study of Indonesia's Patronage Democracy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(12), 1563–1593. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018758756>
- Bertrand, M., Kramarz, F., Schoar, A., & Thesmar, D. (2018). The Cost of Political Connections. *Review of Finance*, 22(3), 849–876. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rof/rfy008>
- Cagé, J. (2020). Media competition, information provision and political participation: Evidence from French local newspapers and elections, 1944–2014. *Journal of Public Economics*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0047272719301380>
- Carty, R. K., & Eagles, M. (2005). *Politics is local: National politics at the grassroots*. Oxford University Press.
- Chauchard, S. (2018). Electoral handouts in Mumbai elections: The cost of political competition. *Asian Survey*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26494050>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Dommett, K., & Power, S. (2019). The Political Economy of Facebook Advertising: Election Spending, Regulation and Targeting Online. *The Political Quarterly*, 90(2), 257–265. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12687>
- Gao, P., Murphy, D., & Qi, Y. (2019). Political uncertainty and public financing costs: Evidence from US gubernatorial elections and municipal bond markets. Available at SSRN 1992200. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3330970
- Goodell, J. W., McGee, R. J., & McGroarty, F. (2020). Election uncertainty, economic policy uncertainty and financial market uncertainty: a prediction market analysis. *Journal of Banking & Finance*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378426619302584>
- Habibi, M. (2021). A regional head election's political corruption and new styles of clientelism. *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik*. <https://garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/documents/detail/2380036>
- Hafner-Burton, E. M., Hyde, S. D., & Jablonski, R. S. (2018). Surviving Elections: Election Violence, Incumbent Victory and Post-Election Repercussions. *British Journal of Political Science*, 48(2), 459–488. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712341600020X>
- Hakim, Ahmad Burhan & Muhyidin, M. (2022). Demokrasi dan Politik Biaya Tinggi (High Cost Politics). *JOSH: Journal of Sharia*, 1(1), 12–22. <https://doi.org/10.55352/josh.v1i1.149>
- Hamann, K., & Kelly, J. (2010). *Parties, elections, and policy reforms in western Europe: voting for social pacts*. Routledge.
- Howard, P. N., Woolley, S., & Calo, R. (2018). Algorithms, bots, and political communication in the US 2016 election: The challenge of automated political communication for election law and administration. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 15(2), 81–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2018.1448735>
- Kapur, D., & Vaishnav, M. (2018). *Costs of democracy: Political finance in India*. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=EzxsDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT9&dq=political+cost+election&ots=O4HLe45H-qc&sig=MNM8_o0fLZzxEEW0tjExC9UbwWQ
- KPK. (2023). *Waspada! Bahaya Politik Uang, Induk dari Korupsi*. <https://aclc.kpk.go.id/aksi-informasi/Eksplorasi/20230217-waspada-bahaya-politik-uang-induk-dari-korupsi>
- Lee, S., & Xenos, M. (2019). Social distraction? Social media use and political knowledge in two US Presidential elections. *Computers in Human Behavior*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563218303819>
- Lee, W., Pittman, J., & Saffar, W. (2020). Political Uncertainty and Cost Stickiness: Evidence from National Elections around the World. *Contemporary Accounting Research*, 37(2), 1107–1139. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1911-3846.12547>

-
- Lehne, J., Shapiro, J. N., & Eynde, O. V. (2018). Building connections: Political corruption and road construction in India. *Journal of Development Economics*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0304387817300883>
- Mohr, Z., Pope, J. V., Kropf, M. E., & Shepherd, M. J. (2019). Strategic Spending: Does Politics Influence Election Administration Expenditure? *American Journal of Political Science*, 63(2), 427–438. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12422>
- Nassmacher, K. H. (2009). *The funding of party competition*. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG.
- Prabowo, R., Hooghiemstra, R., & Van Veen-Dirks, P. (2018). State Ownership, Socio-political Factors, and Labor Cost Stickiness. *European Accounting Review*, 27(4), 771–796. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638180.2017.1329659>
- Schneider, C. J. (2019). *The responsive union: National elections and European governance*.
- Sembiring, R., & Simanihuruk, M. (2018). Politik Dinasti dan Desentralisasi. *Talenta Conference Series: Local Wisdom, Social, and Arts (LWSA)*, 1(1), 092–098. <https://doi.org/10.32734/lwsa.v1i1.148>
- Shineman, V. A. (2018). If you mobilize them, they will become informed: experimental evidence that information acquisition is endogenous to costs and incentives to participate. *British Journal of Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123416000168>
- Sjafrina, Putri A. G. (2019). Dampak Politik Uang Terhadap Mahalnya Biaya Pemenangan Pemilu dan Korupsi Politik. *Jurnal Antikorupsi INTEGRITAS*, 05(1), 43–53. <https://jurnal.kpk.go.id/index.php/integritas/article/view/389>
- Spenkuch, J. L., & Toniatti, D. (2018). Political advertising and election results. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*. <https://academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/133/4/1981/4993157>
-