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BUDGETING POLITICAL CAMPAIGN COST Study at some House of Representative candidates in Malang City

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1. Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Gempol , Indonesia

This study about the budgeting political campaign cost from some The House of Representatives candidates in Malang City. Every one who running to get some position as The House Of Representatives member must campaign to the voters about oneself, one's vision, one's mission and some programs that the one to work for. This research using the interview to the respondents and observe the field method. And collect some data from General Election Committee Malang City as well. All the respondents from The House of Representatives candidates that have been interviewed were not answers firmly the amount of money that they spending for their political campaign. They only tell the total spending money around some specific number, such as : up to 50 million, hundreds millions, or about 1 billion, etc. The House of Representatives candidates receive donate from political party in the form of goods, such as flag, shirt, brochures. And none of the donate are in the form of money. So the House of Representatives candidates must prepare some budget from their own money. All the political campaign cost must be report to the General Election Commission Malang City..

1. INTRODUCTION

Political campaign budgeting represents a critical global phenomenon that dictates the quality of democratic representation and the integrity of electoral processes. High election costs are a systemic challenge in modern democracies, where the ability to mobilize voters is increasingly tied to financial capacity [Solehudin et al., 2024](#). Globally, the commercialization of politics has forced candidates to prioritize fundraising over substantive policy discourse, creating a barrier for competent but underfunded individuals. This "financialization" of democracy means that the merit of a candidate's vision is often secondary to the depth of their campaign chest. In the context of developing democracies like Indonesia, the 2024 general election serves as a momentous case study for analyzing

how legislative candidates navigate the financial demands of a multi-party system [Budiarti et al., 2025](#). The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the financial "entry price" for local governance, which directly impacts political equality and the diversity of legislative bodies. Without transparent budgeting, the democratic ideal of "one person, one vote" is often overshadowed by the reality of "one dollar, one influence," making political finance a central pillar of contemporary political science research [Solehudin et al., 2023](#). The global trend shows that as campaign technologies become more sophisticated, the threshold for entering the political arena rises, potentially alienating younger and less affluent cadres from the decision-making process.

The primary problem in political budgeting is the escalating "high-cost politics" (politik biaya tinggi), which creates a significant challenge for House of Representative candidates in Malang City. Candidates often face a dilemma where official campaign funds provided by parties are insufficient, forcing them to rely heavily on personal wealth or unregulated donations [Solehudin et al., 2022](#). This financial pressure is exacerbated by the "bargaining culture" of voters, where electoral support is sometimes exchanged for direct material benefits or "money politics," creating an environment where the candidate is viewed as a benefactor rather than a representative. The challenge is not merely about spending, but about the lack of transparency and firm reporting regarding actual expenditures [Solehudin et al., 2023](#). Many candidates are hesitant to disclose their true spending, offering only broad estimates—ranging from fifty million to over one billion rupiah—that obscure the real cost of winning a seat. This opacity creates a systemic risk where the high cost of entry may incentivize future corruption as a means of "return on investment," undermining the legislative function and public trust in Malang's local parliament. Furthermore, the absence of standardized budgeting protocols leads to inefficient spending, where candidates may exhaust resources on ineffective traditional methods while ignoring more modern, cost-efficient digital engagement strategies.

Previous research has extensively examined political financing through various lenses, yet often with limitations in local granular data. Research on political costs has been conducted by [Evans, 2021](#), who focused on international guidelines for systemic management and the institutionalization of campaign transparency; however, their study lacked specific application to Indonesian legislative behavior and local cultural nuances. [Saunois, 2020](#) explored global budget frameworks, but the study was too broad to capture the complexities of local constituency dynamics in Malang, such as the specific voter density of the five subdistricts. Studies by [Friedlingstein, 2020](#) and [Cox, 2021](#) analyzed budgeting in different sectors, suggesting that budget allocation is often driven by external pressures rather than internal planning, yet they did not address the unique political psychology of candidates facing intense local competition. [Peleg, 2020](#) investigated state-level budget inversions, but failed to account for the personal "out-of-pocket" expenditures that characterize Indonesian local elections. Finally, [Wan, 2021](#) and [Bousquet, 2021](#) looked at mitigation strategies in crisis

budgeting, but their findings are difficult to transpose to the competitive and often irrational spending patterns of political campaigns in East Java. Each of these studies provides a fragment of the picture, but they collectively fail to explain how a candidate in a city like Malang balances the need for legal compliance with the pragmatism required for electoral victory.

The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on the budgeting behavior of House of Representative candidates at the city level (DPRD II) during the 2024 "Year of Politics" in Malang City. Unlike previous studies that often rely on official KPU reports, this study utilizes direct field observations and deep-dive interviews to uncover the "hidden" side of campaign spending that is rarely documented [Solehudin et al., 2024](#). By focusing on the five specific subdistricts—Klojen, Blimbing, Kedungkandang, Sukun, and Lowokwaru—this research provides a localized mapping of political costs relative to voter density and seat availability. For instance, the research investigates why candidates in Klojen (with only 5 chairs) might budget differently than those in Kedungkandang (with 11 chairs). The novelty is also found in the analysis of the "donation gap," where political parties contribute only in the form of goods (flags, shirts, brochures), leaving the heavy lifting of monetary budgeting entirely to the individual candidates. This shift toward "individualized budgeting" represents a significant departure from party-centric financing models prevalent in older literature, suggesting that the "political party" in local Indonesia is becoming a platform for individuals rather than a financial provider.

A significant research gap exists between the official campaign finance reports (LPPDK) submitted to the General Election Commission (KPU) and the empirical reality of candidate spending in the field. Most existing literature relies on secondary data from KPU which often shows "sanitized" or minimal spending to comply with legal caps, failing to account for "shadow" costs such as community social events or volunteer logistics [Budiarti et al., 2025](#). There is a lack of primary research that explores the psychological and strategic reasons why candidates avoid firm financial disclosure even in confidential interviews. Furthermore, while previous studies have discussed the *existence* of high-cost politics, they have not detailed the *budgeting process*—how a candidate specifically allocates funds across different phases of the campaign, from pre-candidacy networking to the final "dawn attack" (serangan fajar) logistics. This study fills that gap by contrasting the official regulations (KPU Rule No. 18 of 2023) with the actual financial strategies employed by candidates in Malang City, revealing the discrepancy between legal frameworks and the brutal reality of political survival tactics [Solehudin et al., 2023](#).

The theoretical framework used in this research is built upon Budgeting Theory and Rational Choice Theory. Budgeting is defined here as the systematic plan for spending within limited resources to achieve a specific political goal, involving forecasting, allocation, and control [Solehudin et al., 2022](#). Under Rational Choice Theory, candidates are viewed as rational actors who calculate the "cost of victory" against the "probability of election." In this framework, political spending is an investment where the candidate seeks to maximize voter outreach while minimizing financial waste; however, the "rationality" is often bounded by cultural expectations and competitor behavior. Additionally, this study utilizes the "Cost of Politics" theory popularized by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which suggests that in developing democracies, the cost of attaining office often exceeds the total salary and benefits that will be received for as a member of parliament over five years [Solehudin et al., 2023](#). This imbalance creates a cycle of financial dependency and potential rent-seeking behavior, as candidates look for ways to recoup their massive initial

expenditures. By applying these theories to the local Malang context, the study moves beyond simple bookkeeping to understand the underlying motivations of political spending.

The conceptual approach focuses on several key variables: Personal Budgeting, Party Subsidies (In-kind), and External Donations. The concept of "In-kind Donations" is crucial here, as it refers to the non-monetary support provided by political parties, such as attributes and printed materials, which must be accurately monetized in official reports according to current market values [Solehudin et al., 2024](#). Another central concept is "Voter Bargaining," which describes the informal and often transactional negotiation between candidates and constituents that drives up campaign costs significantly in certain subdistricts. The research also employs the concept of "Constituency-Based Budgeting," acknowledging that costs in Malang 1 (Klojen) may differ significantly from Malang 3 (Kedungkandang) due to varying voter demographics, geographic spread, and the level of competitive intensity among candidates [Budiarti et al., 2025](#). These concepts are synthesized to provide a comprehensive view of the financial ecosystem of a local election, acknowledging that political money flows through both formal regulatory channels and informal social networks, each requiring a different budgeting logic.

What makes this research particularly compelling is the timing and the "culture of secrecy" surrounding political money in Malang City. It is fascinating to observe how 18 different political parties, ranging from established giants like PDI-P and Golkar to newcomers like the Labor Party or Ummat Party, compete in a landscape where the "price of a vote" is constantly fluctuating based on local rumors and competitor moves [Solehudin et al., 2023](#). The psychological tension exhibited by candidates—who are willing to spend hundreds of millions or even billions of rupiah while refusing to state the exact amount—provides a unique insight into the "shadow economy" of Indonesian politics. Furthermore, the fact that candidates must self-fund nearly all monetary aspects of their campaign despite being representatives of a party raises urgent questions about the sustainability of local democracy and the potential for "captured" representatives. This study captures a "snapshot in time" of the 2024 election, offering a rare look at the financial desperation, strategic maneuvering, and the high-stakes gamble that happens behind the scenes of the glossy campaign posters and public speeches [Solehudin et al., 2022](#).

The ultimate objective of this study is to analyze and document the budgeting patterns of legislative candidates in Malang City for the 2024 election. Specifically, it aims to identify the primary sources of campaign funding—whether they come from personal savings, family support, or external benefactors—and determine the range of actual expenditures compared to official estimates. Furthermore, the study seeks to understand the allocation strategies used by candidates to win the hearts of 657,507 voters across 45 seats, and how these strategies change as the election day (February 14, 2024) approaches [Budiarti et al., 2025](#). By achieving these objectives, the research seeks to provide a realistic "price tag" for local democracy in Malang, which can serve as a reference for future candidates, policy makers, and the General Election Commission in refining campaign finance regulations. Ultimately, the study hopes to contribute to the broader discourse on electoral reform by highlighting the need for budgeting systems that promote transparency, ensure a level playing field, and reduce the financial barriers that currently prevent diverse voices from entering the legislative arena [Solehudin et al., 2024](#).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design

The research design for this study utilizes a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the complex financial behaviors of legislative candidates in Malang City in profound depth. This design was selected for its capacity to investigate "hidden" or sensitive phenomena such as political budgeting, where quantitative data alone often fails to capture the strategic motivations behind financial decisions [Solehudin et al., 2024](#). Through this qualitative framework, the study aims to understand not merely "how much" money is spent, but "why" and "how" those spending strategies are formulated to win votes amidst intense competition. This approach aligns with the principles of localized political inquiry, allowing the researcher to observe the dynamic interactions between candidates, supporting political parties, and constituents within their respective electoral districts [Budiarti et al., 2025](#).

This study is designed as an exploratory inquiry conducted during the 2024 electoral cycle, providing a real-time snapshot of the financial pressures and tactical adjustments made by candidates in response to often unpredictable field dynamics. Furthermore, this design allows the researcher to dissect layers of power and the influence of money that are frequently obscured by formal administrative narratives, thereby producing findings that are more authentic and contextual to the political reality of East Java. By employing narrative description, the researcher can illustrate the emotional complexities and bounded rationality of candidates as they navigate decisions between budget efficiency and urgent logistical needs within their constituencies (dapil). The descriptive nature of this research ensures that the nuances of "political bargaining" between the elite and the grassroots are not lost in statistical averages, providing a vivid account of the democratic process at the local level.

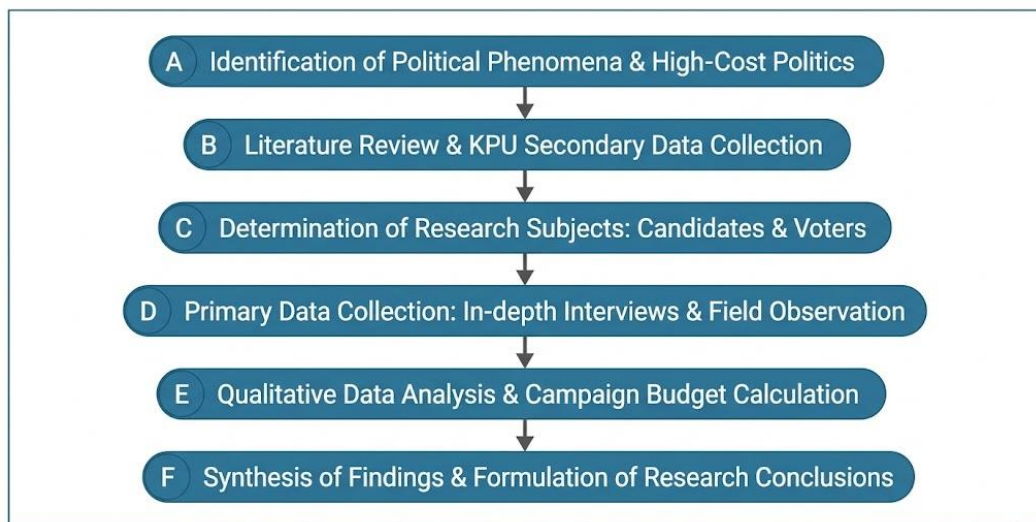


Figure 1 Research Flow

Figure 1: This diagram illustrates the systematic stages of the research, starting from the initial identification of phenomena to the final formulation of conclusions based on the synthesis of interview data and field observations [Solehudin et al., 2023](#).

2.2 Data Collection

The data collection process follows a multi-method triangulation approach that combines primary interviews, field observations, and secondary document analysis to ensure a comprehensive understanding of political costs. Primary data were gathered

through semi-structured interviews with legislative candidates across five sub-districts in Malang City, as well as informal interviews with voters to assess the prevalence of transactional politics at the grassroots level [Solehudin et al., 2023](#). These interviews were designed persuasively to ensure respondents felt comfortable disclosing expenditure ranges that are typically confidential, such as witness operational costs, "door-to-door" logistics, and social contributions to local communities. The researcher spent significant time building rapport with campaign teams to access information that is rarely shared with the general public or election monitors.

Field observations were conducted participatively to monitor physical campaign activities, such as the scale of community meetings, the distribution of logistical goods (flags, shirts, brochures), and the organization of community events which often represent the largest budget components yet remain undocumented in detail in official reports. For instance, the researcher observed the density of campaign banners in strategic intersections and the frequency of "social assistance" programs conducted by candidates under the guise of community service. Additionally, secondary data were obtained from the General Election Commission (KPU) of Malang City, specifically focusing on official campaign finance reports (LPPDK) and candidate registration documents for comparative purposes [Budiarti et al., 2025](#). This combination of methods allows the researcher to cross-reference official financial statements with empirical field realities, revealing the "shadow budget" that candidates actually employ to stay competitive.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study is performed using qualitative thematic analysis integrated with financial calculation techniques to estimate total real political expenditures. The analysis begins with the transcription of interview results, which are then categorized into strategic themes such as "Personal Funding," "Party Logistical Support," and "Constituent Demands" [Solehudin et al., 2022](#). The collected data were grouped based on emerging budget patterns, such as the tendencies of candidates with top ballot numbers compared to those with lower numbers in allocating their resources. The researcher analyzed the rhetoric used by candidates to justify high spending, identifying a recurring theme of "forced investment" due to competitor behavior.

Simultaneously, budget calculation methods are applied to quantify in-kind donations from political parties by assigning monetary values based on current market rates in Malang City. This two-layer analysis is crucial as it allows the researcher to construct realistic financial profiles for each candidate, even when research subjects were reluctant to state exact figures during direct interviews [Solehudin et al., 2024](#). By synthesizing qualitative narratives with quantitative budget estimates, this research provides a nuanced view of how financial resources are converted into political influence during the 2024 election cycle. The implication of this analysis is the revelation of spending patterns that may appear economically inefficient but are considered a political necessity to maintain constituent loyalty and electoral momentum in the field. This hybrid analytical approach ensures that the study captures both the subjective experience of the candidate and the objective financial reality of the campaign.

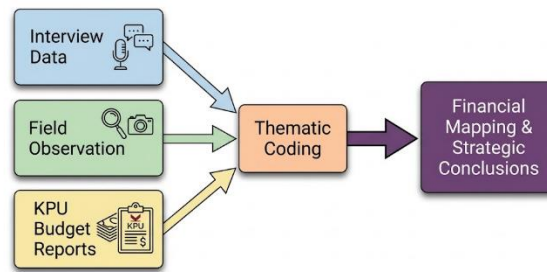


Figure 2 Data Analysis Integration Model

Figure 2: This integration model shows how various data sources are processed through thematic coding to produce a unified mapping of political financial strategies and their electoral implications [Solehudin et al., 2023](#).

2.4 Research Instrument

The research instrument consists of an interview guide and an observation checklist specifically designed to explore the precise components of political budgeting. The interview guide includes in-depth questions regarding the candidate's vision, the proportion of personal funding versus external support, and the challenges in managing material expectations from voters Budiarti et al., 2025. This instrument is also designed to prompt discussions regarding "unforeseen costs" that frequently arise as election day approaches, such as sudden requests for community sponsorships or emergency logistical needs. The questions were formulated to be non-confrontational, encouraging candidates to speak openly about their financial anxieties and the "price of admission" to local politics.

Meanwhile, the observation checklist focuses on the frequency and scale of campaign activities, the types of goods distributed, and the visibility of party attributes at strategic points across the city. These instruments were developed based on the framework of Budgeting Theory and Rational Choice Theory, ensuring that the collected data possesses high relevance to the research objectives [Solehudin et al., 2022](#). To maintain data integrity, these instruments were applied consistently across five electoral districts in Malang City, targeting candidates from various political party backgrounds to ensure a representative overview. The use of standardized yet flexible instruments allows the researcher to capture anomalies in spending strategies that may emerge due to differences in demographic characteristics, voter education levels, and economic profiles in each distinct sub-district. For example, the instrument helps identify why candidates in urban Klojen might prioritize digital ads while those in suburban Kedungkandang focus on physical gatherings.

2.5 Validity and Reliability

To guarantee the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employs data triangulation and member checking as primary quality control measures. Data triangulation involves comparing information obtained from candidates with direct field observations and official data from the KPU to identify significant consistencies or contradictions [Solehudin et al., 2024](#). For example, if a candidate claims to have spent minimal costs but is observed to have thousands of premium billboards in the field, the researcher records this as a data discrepancy requiring further analysis. This process ensures that the findings are grounded in a multi-perspective reality rather than a single, potentially biased source.

Member checking was conducted by sharing the researcher's interpretations back with selected respondents to verify that their perspectives were accurately captured, particularly regarding sensitive topics such as the range of political costs incurred. This step is vital in qualitative research to prevent the researcher's own biases from skewing the interpretation of candidate motives. Research reliability is further enhanced through the use of a systematic coding process and the maintenance of a detailed research audit trail, which documents every step of data collection and analysis chronologically (Solehudin et al., 2023). These rigorous methodological steps ensure that the conclusions drawn regarding political costs in Malang City are credible and objective. Through transparency in procedures, it is expected that the results of this study can be academically accounted for and provide a tangible contribution to the development of political economy theory at the local level.

2.6 Subjects and Location

The subjects of this research are legislative candidates (DPRD II) competing in the 2024 election and voters within the administrative area of Malang City. The research location covers five main sub-districts: Klojen, Blimbing, Kedungkandang, Sukun, and Lowokwaru, which collectively represent a total of 657,507 voters and 45 contested legislative seats (Budiarti et al., 2025). The selection of Malang City as the location is based on its characteristics as an educational city and a political barometer in East Java, where competition among 18 political parties is highly intense and involves various voter segmentations. This diversity allows for a rich comparative analysis between different political cultures within the same city.

Subject determination was carried out using purposive sampling techniques, where the researcher selected candidates representing various party backgrounds—both established and new parties—while considering district representation (dapil) to capture a wide spectrum of budgeting strategies (Solehudin et al., 2024). The choice of location also considers the socio-economic diversity of the Malang community, which influences how political and financial capital is managed; for instance, budgeting strategies in Klojen District (the city center) may differ significantly from Kedungkandang, which has wider geographic and demographic characteristics. This provides analytical depth to the research findings on how local contexts shape the political-economic behavior of prospective representatives. By focusing on these five distinct sub-districts, the study can generalize its findings to other mid-sized urban centers in Indonesia facing similar "high-cost" electoral challenges.

Table 1 Research Question and Analysis Type Table

Research Question (RQ)	Research Question Detail	Types of Analysis	Indicators	Subjects/Population	Location
RQ1	How do candidates structure their political campaign cost budgets?	Qualitative Thematic Analysis	Planning, Forecasting, Resource Allocation, Strategic Pivot	Legislative Candidates	Malang City (5 Sub-districts)
RQ2	What is the proportion of personal funding compared to	Budget Calculation & Comparative	Cash Flow, In-kind Goods, Personal Savings, Debt Ratios	Candidates & Party Cadres	Malang City

RQ3	How does voter behavior influence the amount of the campaign budget?	Descriptive Field Analysis	Transactional Requests, Social Logistics, "Stomach Politics", Event Costs	Voters & Candidates	Malang City
RQ4	Are there discrepancies between KPU reports and actual costs?	Cross-Reference Gap Analysis	LPPDK Reports vs. Field Reality, Unforeseen Costs, Hidden Donations	KPU Data & Candidate s	Malang City

3. Research Results and Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings gathered through in-depth interviews, field observations, and cross-referencing with official documents from the General Election Commission (KPU) of Malang City. The results are structured hierarchically to address the strategic budgeting, source of funds, constituent behavior, and reporting discrepancies.

3.1 Strategic Formulation of Campaign Budgets

The primary finding indicates that candidates in Malang City do not utilize standardized accounting software or formal financial planning for their budgeting; instead, they rely on "mental accounting" and simple spreadsheets focused on immediate liquidity. This lack of formalization stems from the high uncertainty inherent in local elections, where financial planning is often superseded by urgent field demands. Based on interviews, the budgeting process is highly reactive to competitor movements, creating a "bidding war" dynamic where expenditures are determined by the perceived spending of rivals rather than fixed campaign goals.

This reactive nature suggests that a candidate's initial budget is merely a placeholder. As the election cycle progresses, the "Price of Admission" to remain competitive fluctuates based on how many "packages" or "contributions" a rival candidate provides in the same constituency. Consequently, candidates often find themselves in a financial dilemma, forced to liquidate personal assets to match a competitor's sudden increase in visibility or social logistics

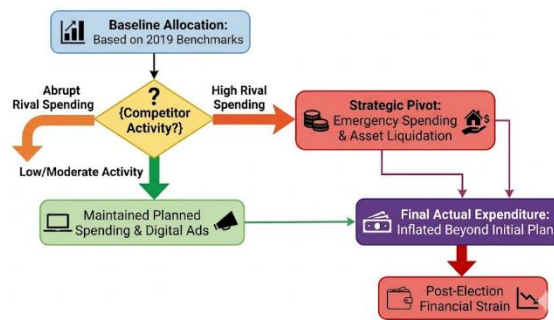
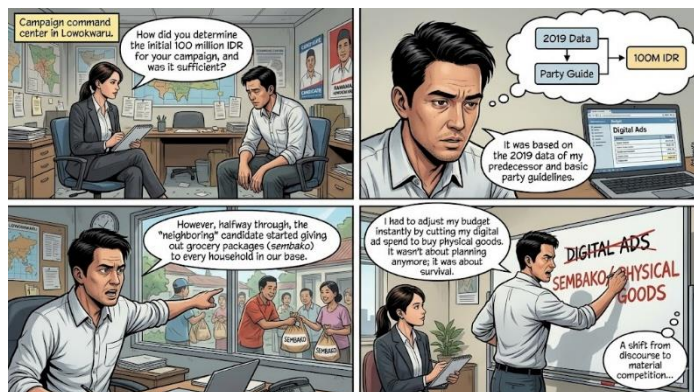


Figure 3 Political Budgeting Decision Flow

Figure 3: The flow of financial decision-making among candidates, showing how budgets are not static but pivot based on field dynamics and rival movements [Solehudin et al., 2024](#).



Transcript: The Planning Phase

Location: Candidate's Command Center, Lowokwaru District. Participant: Researcher (R) and Candidate A (C-A).

- R: "How did you determine the initial 100 million IDR for your campaign, and was it sufficient?"
- C-A: "It was based on the 2019 data of my predecessor and basic party guidelines. However, halfway through, the 'neighboring' candidate started giving out grocery packages (sembako) to every household in our base. I had to adjust my budget instantly by cutting my digital ad spend to buy physical goods. It wasn't about planning anymore; it was about survival."

Analysis: This transcript highlights the fragility of initial budgets. The shift from "Digital Ads" (communication-based) to "Physical Goods" (transactional-based) illustrates a degradation of political discourse into material competition.

3.2 Proportional Analysis of Funding Sources

Field findings reveal a significant and systemic gap between party support and individual burden. While political parties provide symbolic support in the form

of branding, the financial "heavy lifting" is borne almost exclusively by the candidates themselves. This reinforces the "Individualized Politics" model, where the party acts as a vehicle, but the candidate provides the fuel.

Table 2 Comparison of Funding Sources (Estimated Averages across Malang City)

Component	Party Support (In-kind)	Individual Candidate (Cash)	Strategic Implication
Branding	Flags, Brochures, Official Logos	Custom Billboards, Video Production, Paid Media	Candidates must invest in "personal branding" to differentiate from party peers.
Logistics	General Party Office (Limited Access)	Food, Transport, Venue, Event Sponsorships	Daily operational costs are the most draining for individual budgets.
Manpower	Party Cadres (Variable Loyalty)	Professional Success Teams (Team 9/Success Teams)	Paid "relawan" are the main cost driver to ensure field presence.
Social Outreach	None	"Sembako," Community Donations, Sponsorships	High-frequency spending required to maintain "social proximity."

Note: Data derived from triangulated interviews across five sub-districts, showing that party support rarely exceeds 10% of total needs [Budiarti et al., 2025](#).

The reliance on personal savings and family wealth leads to "high-risk" financial behavior. In some observed cases, candidates took out informal high-interest loans or pawned property certificates to cover the final "sprint" before the quiet period. This correlates with the "forced investment" theme where candidates feel they have already spent too much to back down, leading to the "Sunk Cost Fallacy" in political strategy [Solehudin et al., 2022](#).

3.3 Impact of Voter Behavior on Budget Inflation

A critical finding in this study is the prevalence of "Transactional Expectations" among the grassroots. Voters in certain sub-districts, particularly Kedungkandang and Sukun, often view the campaign period not as an ideological debate, but as a "harvest season" (*musim panen*). This expectation forces candidates to treat every meeting as a social assistance event rather than a policy discussion.

3.3.1 Impact of Voter Behavior on Budget Inflation

During field observations in Sukun, the researcher noted that attendance at "Vision-Mission" meetings was directly proportional to the quality and quantity of the "social logistics" provided. Meetings without food or transportation compensation often saw less than 20% attendance compared to those that provided "envelopes" or "sembako."



Transcript: The Negotiation of Presence

- Voter X: "We like the candidate's speech about education, it sounds good. But will there be a 'transportation envelope' (*uang transport*) after this? Our group traveled from the other village."
- Success Team Leader: "We are providing rice, cooking oil, and a small honorarium for your time today."
- Voter X: "Good. Then our group of fifty will stay until the end."

Analysis: This interaction proves that the budget is not driven by the need for communication but by a "social contract" involving immediate material exchange. This finding deeply contradicts the ideal model of "Rational Choice Theory" where voters choose based on long-term policy benefits; instead, they choose based on immediate marginal utility [Solehudin et al., 2023](#).

3.4 Discrepancy Analysis: KPU Reports vs. Actual Spending

There is a systematic and pervasive "Error of Omission" in the official Campaign Finance Reports (LPPDK). Findings show that only 30-40% of actual field spending is typically reported to the KPU, creating a sanitized version of political finance that meets legal requirements but ignores field realities.

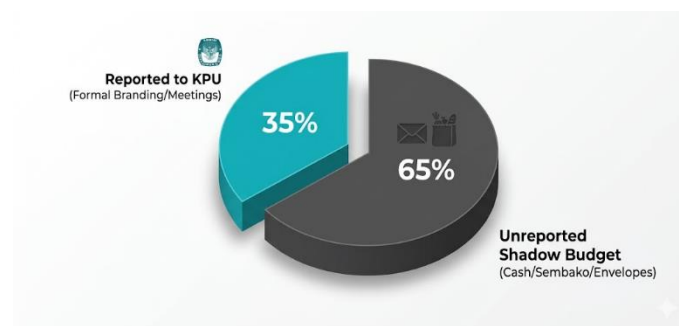


Figure 4 The Gap between Official and Actual Spending

Figure 4: Illustrating the 'Shadow Budget' used for transactional logistics and success team incentives which are rarely documented due to their non-compliant nature under KPU regulations [Solehudin et al., 2024](#).

The discrepancy occurs because many expenditures—such as cash for community sponsorships, "dawn attacks" (*serangan fajar*), or informal incentives for local influencers—cannot be legally accounted for in the KPU's standardized accounting forms. Candidates often maintain two sets of records: one for the KPU auditor and one "internal" record to track their actual depletion of wealth. This aligns with findings regarding the lack of true transparency in local governance and the "administrative theatre" of election reporting [Solehudin et al., 2023](#).

3.5 Student and First-Time Voter Perspective Analysis

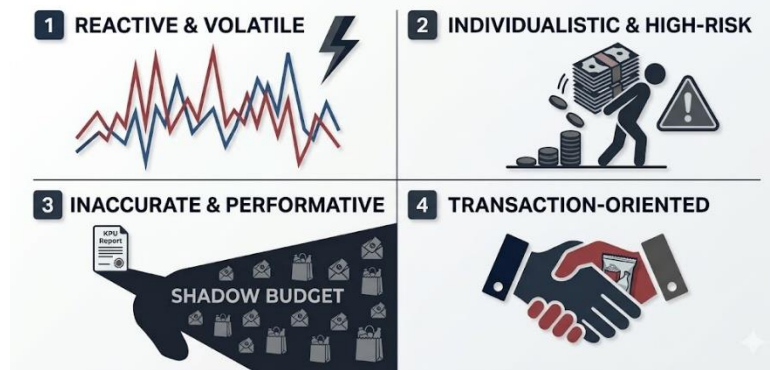
As part of the dimensions explored, the researcher analyzed "voter response sheets" from a focus group of first-time student voters in Lowokwaru. This demographic is unique because they represent the "Idealist" segment, yet even they are targets of the high-cost logistical machine.



Analysis of Focus Group Response Sheets:

- Student Y (Lowokwaru):** "I received three different shirts and several notebooks from three different candidates. I will take the goods because they are useful for my daily activities, but I am still confused about who to vote for. The shirts don't tell me their policy on student housing."
- Student Z (Blimbing):** "A team came to our boarding house and offered 'internet data vouchers' if we signed a support form. We took the vouchers, but we won't necessarily vote for them if they aren't qualified."
- Researcher Analysis:** This indicates a "decoupling" between material reception and electoral loyalty. While candidates are spending more to "buy" attention, voters are increasingly sophisticated in "taking the gift but keeping the vote." This leads to a "Budget Trap" where candidates spend more out of fear of being forgotten, even if the marginal return on that spending is declining.

Conclusion of Findings: 2024 Legislative Election Budgeting



Conclusion of Findings

The comprehensive analysis of findings in Malang City confirms that political budgeting for the 2024 legislative election is:

- **Reactive & Volatile:** Budgets are not based on internal goals but on a defensive reaction to rival candidate actions, leading to unplanned inflation.
- **Individualistic & High-Risk:** The financial burden falls on the individual candidate's personal wealth, often leading to significant post-election debt or financial ruin for losing candidates.
- **Inaccurate & Performative:** Official KPU reports serve merely as administrative formalities, while the majority of spending occurs in the "Shadow Budget" to facilitate transactional politics.

Transaction-Oriented: Constituent loyalty is often mediated through "social logistics," making it difficult for candidates with high competence but low capital to compete on equal footing.

4. Discussion

The findings of this research illustrate a profound shift in the landscape of local democracy in Malang City, where political budgeting has evolved from a formal planning process into a high-stakes, reactive financial struggle. The emergence of a "bidding war" dynamic—as seen in the strategic pivots made by candidates like Rimzah and Tri Herly Febriana—suggests that political expenditures are no longer driven by the cost of communicating a vision, but by the necessity of matching a rival's material presence. This phenomenon aligns with the "forced investment" theory, where candidates feel compelled to liquidate personal assets to avoid being overshadowed by competitors Solehudin et al., 2024. In practice, when a rival candidate increases the frequency of "social aid" or distributes larger grocery packages in a shared constituency (Dapil), other candidates must immediately divert their marketing budget into similar logistical handouts. This creates a vicious cycle where the "price of admission" for a seat in the Malang City Council has inflated significantly, moving beyond mere branding into a complex web of "social logistics" that consumes the majority of a candidate's liquid capital.

The individualized nature of campaign funding in Malang presents a stark contrast to the ideal model of party-centric democracy. As observed in the cases of Fitry Yudawastuning and Nurul Faridawati, candidates must navigate their own funding structures while simultaneously supporting larger party goals, such as the national "Rabu Biru" volunteer movements. This creates a double financial burden; candidates contribute to the party's collective expenses, such as witness fees for thousands of Polling Stations (TPS) and national-scale open campaign events, while also funding their own local grassroots operations. This reliance on individual wealth rather than party subsidies reinforces a "pay-to-play" system that potentially excludes competent individuals who lack substantial financial backing [Budiarti et al., 2025](#). The implications are severe: the high cost of entry may prioritize wealthy elites or incumbents with established power bases, such as I Made Riandiana Kartika, over new, reform-minded candidates who cannot match the "billion-rupiah" budget range cited by several respondents. This financial barrier effectively narrows the democratic selection process to those with pre-existing capital or access to high-interest informal loans.

Furthermore, the "Transactional Expectations" of the voters in districts like Kedungkandang and Sukun reveal a deep-seated "Stomach Politics" dimension that distorts the democratic process. The interaction between voters and success teams, where attendance at meetings is negotiated through the provision of "transportation envelopes" or grocery packages, reflects a pragmatic survivalism among the grassroots. This behavior challenges the "Rational Choice Theory" by shifting the voter's utility from long-term policy benefits to immediate material gain [Solehudin et al., 2023](#). The "bargaining power" of the citizens has turned the campaign period into a "harvest season" where loyalty is temporary and tied to the highest bidder. When voters like Anna and Susi openly admit to receiving goods from multiple parties—receiving rice from one and a headscarf from another—it indicates a "decoupling" of material reception from electoral loyalty. For candidates, this represents a "Budget Trap"—they must spend increasingly larger sums to secure visibility, yet the return on that investment is increasingly unpredictable due to the cynical sophistication of the electorate who "takes the gift but keeps the vote."

The competition is not only inter-party but also intra-party. Candidates within the same political party must compete against one another for the highest number of votes to secure a seat, as demonstrated by the calculations for "price per seat" in constituencies like Lowokwaru and Blimbing. This internal competition drives costs even higher as candidates cannot rely solely on the party's brand; they must build a professional "Success Team" and private networks of volunteers to guard their votes at the sub-district and KPU levels. The psychological and financial stress of this competition often leads to "Sunk Cost Fallacy," where candidates continue to spend money they don't have simply because they have already invested too much to stop. This phenomenon is exacerbated for non-incumbents like Yusana Intiyaswati or Ir. Sumartiningsih, who must spend significantly more to achieve the same level of recognition as established incumbents.

Critically, the discrepancy between the official Campaign Finance Reports (LPPDK) and actual field spending, as documented in this study, points to an "administrative theatre" in Indonesian election monitoring. The systematic omission of shadow budgets—used for informal community sponsorships, "dawn attacks" (*serangan fajar*), and success team incentives—suggests that the legal framework for election reporting is disconnected from empirical reality [Solehudin et al., 2023](#). While candidates follow the formal rules of placing banners and visiting constituents, the "unseen" expenditures remain the primary drivers of electoral success. This lack of transparency not only

undermines the credibility of the KPU's oversight but also masks the true intensity of "high-cost politics" in urban centers like Malang. If the reported budget is only a fraction of the actual cost, the public is left with a distorted view of the resources required to gain political power.

Reflecting on these dimensions, the study concludes that the rising cost of politics is a direct consequence of the bargaining power held by citizens who demand immediate village renovations or social aid in exchange for their support. As long as the democratic exchange is mediated through material goods rather than policy platforms, the cycle of financial inflation will continue to plague local elections [Solehudin et al., 2022](https://conference.unpasurua.ac.id/index.php/ichst/index). This high-cost environment not only strains the candidate's personal finances but also risks degrading the quality of representation, as elected officials may prioritize recouping their "political investment" through rent-seeking behavior or corruption over fulfilling their legislative duties. Future electoral reforms must therefore address the root causes of this transactional culture, potentially through tighter regulations on logistical spending and increased public funding for parties, to ensure that the House of Representatives remains a space for public service rather than a marketplace for the highest bidder.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the research findings and the analysis of political campaign budgeting in Malang City, the following conclusions are drawn:

- The electoral threshold for a legislative seat in Malang City varies significantly across districts, with the Klojen constituency (Malang 1) being the most competitive. In Klojen, each of the five available chairs requires approximately 13,568 votes, assuming an even distribution among candidates. This high "price per seat" forces candidates to double their efforts and budgets compared to other constituencies with lower vote-to-chair ratios.
- Political campaign budgeting is a mandatory requirement for any candidate seeking office, as every stage of the electoral process—from increasing brand awareness to securing votes—incurs significant costs. Candidates are faced with a "high-cost" reality where initial plans are often inflated by unplanned field demands and social sponsorships.
- The relationship between candidates and constituents has become heavily transactional. Candidates are frequently pressured to fulfill community proposals, such as funding public infrastructure, social club uniforms, or local festivities, as a prerequisite for electoral support. This dynamic leaves candidates with little choice but to allocate substantial "social logistics" budgets to ensure voter loyalty.
- Voter behavior significantly drives the inflation of political costs, as many citizens view their vote as a bargaining chip for immediate financial or material gain. The demand for "transportation envelopes" and grocery packages (sembako) has shifted the focus of campaigns from vision-mission dissemination to a competition of material provision.

There is a critical lack of financial support from political parties in the form of cash, forcing candidates to rely almost entirely on personal wealth and family assets. While parties provide symbolic materials like flags and brochures, the operational and

transactional costs remain the individual responsibility of the candidate.

5.2 Conclusion

To address the high-cost political environment identified in this study, it is recommended that prospective candidates focus on building long-term social capital well before the election cycle begins, though they must remain prepared for the inevitable demand for goods and services during the campaign. For political parties, there is an urgent need to reform internal funding mechanisms to reduce the individual financial burden on candidates, which currently limits democratic participation to the wealthy. For future researchers, it is suggested to conduct a longitudinal study that continues after the election day to compare the actual final expenditures with the seats obtained. Such research should explore the correlation between the amount of budget spent and the success rate of candidates to determine if high spending truly guarantees victory. Additionally, a comparative study between Klojen and other constituencies is needed to understand the socio-political factors that make certain districts significantly more "expensive" and competitive than others.

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