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Adaptive Voter Rationality in Celebrity Politics: Evidance from West Bandung's 2024 Local Election

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the rational approach to voting behavior among the public for celebrity candidates and how rational considerations influence voting decisions. The method used is quantitative with a descriptive design. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey of 100 respondents in 3 subdistricts in West Bandung Regency, selected using cluster sampling. There are two main variables measured, namely the rational approach, which includes four main aspects, namely the calculation of benefits and welfare, information orientation and program evaluation, participation costs, and attitudes towards money politics and material gains. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics. The results of the study show that voters continue to demonstrate strong rationality in determining their choice of celebrity candidates. The aspects of information orientation and program evaluation, as well as the calculation of benefits and welfare, are the dominant considerations, while the popularity of candidates serves as a means of information efficiency that reduces the cost of political participation. On the other hand, there is tension between normative and pragmatic considerations in responding to money politics. The main contribution of this study lies in enriching the rational choice perspective by showing that voter rationality in Indonesian local democracy operates adaptively and is integrated with the logic of political personalization, particularly in the context of celebrity candidates.

INTRODUCTION

Electoral democratic practices in various countries show a significant shift from ideology- and party-based politics to personalized politics (REILJAN et al., 2024). Garzia documents the personalization of partisan attachment in Western Europe, empirically demonstrating that voters' attitudes toward party leaders are becoming increasingly important in determining psychological attachment to parties (Garzia, 2013). The entry of celebrities into politics is based on a form of political capital that is unique to personal popularity, which operates differently from traditional resources such as party organization, ideological commitment, and program credibility (Biswas, 2024; Urbinati, 2019) . This situation challenges the classical assumptions in voter behavior studies based on rational choice theory, which assumes that voters make political choices solely based on rational considerations of candidates' programs, performance, and capacity to meet the interests of the community (Bartels, 2010; Bello, 2020; Ferreira da Silva et al., 2021)

This phenomenon is not confined to Western democracies. Across diverse political contexts worldwide the intersection of candidate visibility and voter rationality has emerged as a central concern in electoral studies. In India the personalization of politics through celebrity-style leadership has been documented to coexist with substantive policy evaluation among voters especially when information access through digital media is relatively high (Shome et al., 2024). In Latin America studies of candidate choice show that voters simultaneously process personal attributes and policy positions suggesting that affective cues and programmatic assessment operate as complementary rather than competing logics (Fossati, 2025). In Africa research on heuristic voting confirms that candidate visibility functions as a low-information shortcut through which voters still arrive at reasonably informed choices rather than abandoning substantive consideration entirely (Kartini et al., 2025). Across Southeast Asia specifically Fossati, (2025) finds through candidate choice experiments in five countries that economic performance evaluations and candidate personal traits jointly shape voting decisions reinforcing the argument that no single-factor model is sufficient to explain electoral behavior in developing democracies. These cross-regional patterns collectively suggest that rational choice frameworks must be adapted rather than discarded when applied to contexts where political personalization and entertainment culture shape candidate visibility.

The rational approach according to Anthony Downs views voters as evaluating candidates objectively based on what they can deliver to the public through government policies and performance(Abrão Baloi, 2019; Ferreira da Silva et al., 2021; Rueda, 2021). However, in the era of digital communication and massive mass media, the influence of candidates' personal brands, including celebrities, can significantly affect voter preferences (F. Biswas, 2024; Marsh et al., 2010), so that traditional rationality is often questioned in contemporary democratic practice. This phenomenon is also evident in the context of democracy in Indonesia, especially since the implementation of the direct regional head election (Pilkada) system. The following is a map of the distribution of Pilkada based on provinces, regencies, cities, and the number of voters throughout Indonesia:

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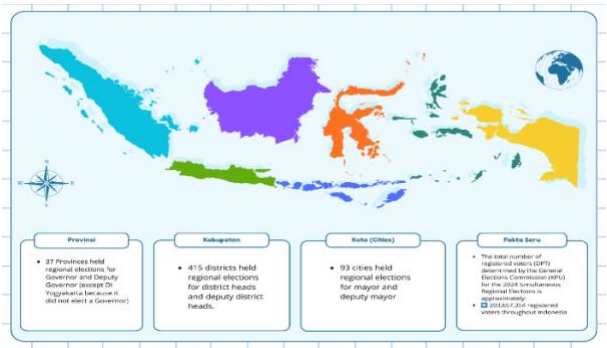

Figure 1. Map of Regional Election Distribution throughout Indonesia

Source: processed by researchers, 2026.

This infographic shows that the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections were held in 37 provinces, 415 regencies, and 93 cities throughout Indonesia. These elections involved 203,657,354 registered voters, reflecting the large scale of public participation in regional head elections nationwide. Survey data also shows that the influence of candidates' personal factors is quite significant. According to studies in several provinces, around 76.6% of respondents stated that candidates' personal factors were their main consideration in choosing regional heads, while policy programs and party support had a relatively smaller proportion. From a regulatory perspective, the implementation of regional elections is regulated in Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors, which is the second amendment to the previous Regional Election Law. This law stipulates that regional head candidates can be nominated through political parties or independently by fulfilling certain formal requirements such as minimum age, support, and legal integrity of the candidate. The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia has confirmed that all requirements stipulated in the law must be legally fulfilled before candidates can be confirmed by the General Elections Commission (KPU). Technical regulations include KPU regulations on candidacy (PKPU), which regulate the stages and administrative requirements for candidacy in direct regional elections.

In the context of the West Bandung Regency elections, the emergence of celebrity candidates has brought new dynamics to the way people vote. The presence of public figures from the entertainment world has not only expanded political choices but also raised questions about how voters interpret rationality in making their choices. Until now voter rationality has often been understood through substantive considerations such as track record, leadership capacity, and candidate policy programs. However the entry of celebrity candidates shows another trend where popularity, fame, and emotional closeness also become the basis for political decision-making especially amid the strong influence of digital media. This phenomenon places voter rationality in a position that is no longer entirely instrumental but rather has the potential to shift towards symbolic and affective rationality. Candidate popularity can serve as a practical reference for voters in simplifying the complexity of local politics so that the logic of popularity becomes intertwined with classical rational considerations.

Despite the growing body of literature on celebrity politics and voter rationality globally existing studies share three common limitations. First most empirical work on celebrity candidacies focuses on national-level elections in established democracies leaving subnational electoral contexts in developing countries significantly underexplored (Fossati, 2025; Buehler et al., 2021). Second studies that examine Indonesian voting behavior tend to analyze presidential or legislative elections rather than regional head elections where candidate personalization and local identity interact in distinctly different ways (Kartini et al., 2025). Third no prior study has examined a context where multiple celebrity candidates compete simultaneously within the same local election an empirical condition that creates a unique opportunity to isolate rational voter responses to celebrity politics independent of single-candidate popularity effects alone. To further confirm this gap the researcher used the Publish or Perish tool with the keywords "rational approach," "voter behavior," and "local elections" yielding 380 documents subsequently analyzed in VOSviewer as shown in Figure 2.

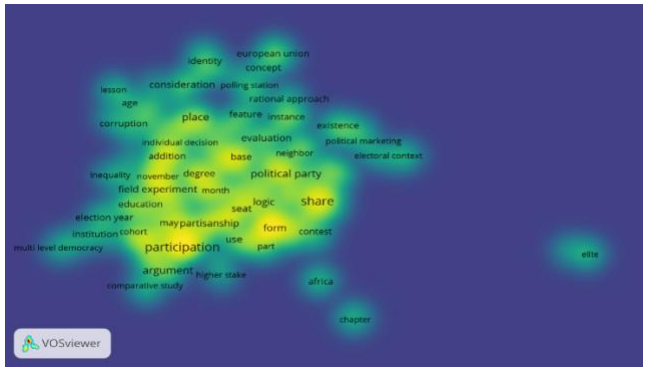

Figure 2. Bibliometric Analysis by VosViewer

Source: processed by researcher, 2026.

The map shows that studies of voter behavior in international literature are still dominated by general themes such as participation, political parties, partisanship, evaluation, and rational approaches, which are generally discussed in the context of established democracies, national elections, or cross-country comparative studies. The focus of research tends to place voters as actors who have strong relationships with political parties, institutions, and formal electoral mechanisms (Arguelles, 2019; Ashworth et al., 2018; Dionne & Horowitz, 2016; Jayasinghe et al., 2020; Lee & Schachter, 2019; Mason et al., 2017; Saud, 2020),while local contexts and the dynamics of personal figures are often marginalized in the discourse. Furthermore, the relationship between voting rationality and the politics of personalization is still mostly discussed conceptually or in the context of Western and African countries, rather than at the level of local democracy in Indonesia (Iwuoha, 2018).

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to shift the focus of analysis from the voter-party relationship to the voter-figure relationship, particularly celebrity candidates, in the context of the West Bandung Regency regional elections. Unlike the dominant literature that places parties and participation at the center of analysis, this research highlights how voter rationality works when the popularity, fame, and emotional closeness of candidates become key variables in political decision-making. Thus, rationality is not understood narrowly as a calculation of programs and policies, but as an evaluative process intertwined with the logic of popularity and political personalization. In addition, this research presents empirical novelty by placing Indonesian local democracy, particularly regional elections, as the main arena of analysis, which has been relatively unexplored in the global research map.

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The central research problem this study addresses is the apparent tension between two competing assumptions in the literature on celebrity politics. On one hand the dominant popular narrative assumes that voters who choose celebrity candidates are driven primarily by name recognition and emotional attachment rather than substantive evaluation effectively treating such voters as irrational or uninformed (Kulachai et al., 2023). On the other hand emerging evidence from diverse democratic contexts suggests that affective responses to candidates and programmatic evaluation are not mutually exclusive processes but rather operate simultaneously within the same voter (Nasr, 2025). This tension has never been empirically tested in the specific context of a local election where multiple celebrity candidates compete against each other simultaneously leaving unanswered the question of whether rational considerations persist when popularity becomes the dominant frame of electoral competition

This study addresses this gap by examining how rational considerations shape voter behavior toward celebrity candidates in the 2024 West Bandung Regency election across four dimensions: calculation of benefits and welfare, information orientation and program evaluation, participation costs, and attitudes toward money politics. The significance of this study operates on two levels. Theoretically it contributes to the rational choice literature by testing whether programmatic voter evaluation persists in a context dominated by entertainment-driven candidate visibility. Understanding this dynamic matters because voter rationality is not merely an academic concern but a determinant of democratic quality itself as substantive evaluation by citizens is what connects electoral outcomes to genuine policy responsiveness (Kostelka et al., 2025). Practically it provides evidence for political parties and electoral institutions in Indonesia where local elections have emerged as the primary arena of citizen-state interaction and where the quality of voter decision-making directly shapes governance outcomes at the level closest to everyday life (International IDEA, 2025).

METHOD

This research employs a quantitative descriptive method. Quantitative research involves collecting numerical data and analyzing it through statistical procedures, emphasizing objectivity and systematic measurement of social phenomena (Chambers et al., 2015; Nassaji, 2017; Park, J. J., Kim & Han, 2024). A descriptive design was selected because this study aims to map the tendency and pattern of community voting behavior toward celebrity candidates rather than to test causal relationships between variables. This design is appropriate when the research objective is to describe the characteristics and distribution of a phenomenon systematically within a defined population (Sugiyono, 2016).

The main variable in this study is community voting behavior for celebrity candidates in the 2024 West Bandung Regency Election. This variable is operationalized through the rational choice framework and broken down into four analytical dimensions: calculation of benefits and welfare, information orientation and program evaluation, participation costs, and attitudes toward money politics and material gains.

Population and Sample

The population of this study is the number of votes cast for celebrities in electoral district 1 of West Bandung Regency, which is 169,815 people. If the research population is large, it is impossible to use the entire population for the sample due to limitations in budget, time, and manpower. Therefore, a sample can be studied and the conclusions can be applied to the population. The sample in this study was drawn using the Slovin formula, as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Description : n = Number of samples
N = population (169.815)
e = error tolerance limit (10%)

The sample calculation based on the Slovin formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{169.815}{1 + 169.815\ (0{,}01)^2}$$

n= 99,89 / 100

Based on the results of the above calculation, the number of samples taken from the population is 100 respondents who will be distributed across 3 sub-districts in West Bandung Regency using the following formula:

$ni = \frac{Ni}{N} x\, n$

Explanation:
n = number of samples
ni = sample size
N = population size
Ni = population size of the 1st sample (number of subdistricts in the population)

Table 1. Samples per subdistrict

No	Subdistrict	Number	samples
1	Padalarang	79.713	47
2	Saguling	13.160	8
3	Ngamprah	76.942	45
Total		**169.815**	**100 Responden**

source: created by researchers, 2026

In determining the 100 respondents, the researchers divided them using cluster sampling (Nassaji, 2017), at the sub-district level as in the sample above. Thus, each sub-district has a different number of samples according to the number of votes obtained by celebrities in each sub-district. To distribute the questionnaires, the researchers will distribute them throughout the villages in the three subdistricts, namely Padalarang, Ngamprah, and Saguling, with the number of respondents per village having been determined. Respondents in each village will be representative in filling out the research questionnaire, and the gender of the community, whether male or female, will also be the basis for determining the respondents in each village. The following is the number of villages in each subdistrict that will be the research respondents.

Table 2. Number of Respondents at the Village Level

No.	Subdistrict	Number of Villages	Respondent	Qty
1.	Padalarang	10	47	4/5 respondent

2.	Sagulin g	6	8	1 / 2 respond en
3.	Ngampr ah	11	45	4/5 respond en

source: created by researchers, 2026

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through a structured closed-ended questionnaire to obtain responses from respondents. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Items for the participation cost dimension and money politics dimension included reverse-scored items to control for response bias and to capture both positive and negative orientations toward rational voting considerations.

Data Processing Techniques

In conducting this study, the author was assisted by a data processing program, namely Microsoft Excel, using validity and reliability tests.

1. Validity Test, a validity test was conducted to measure whether questionnaire items could be considered valid as measurement tools (Hashemi & Babaii, 2013; Tian et al., 2019) (Hashemi & Babaii, 2013; Tian et al., 2019). The measuring instrument used was the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. An item is considered valid if its correlation coefficient $r \geq 0.30$. With 100 respondents the r-table value at a 5% significance level is 0.195. All 39 items of the rational approach instrument exceeded this threshold with r values ranging from 0.224 to 0.791 confirming the validity of all items.
2. Reliability Test, reliability testing was conducted to ensure the instrument is trustworthy as a data collection tool (Chambers et al., 2015; Cooney & Siegel, 2019). The internal reliability method was used through Cronbach's Alpha. An instrument is considered reliable if its Cronbach's Alpha value > 0.70. The rational approach instrument yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.941 indicating high internal consistency and confirming that the instrument is reliable for repeated use in measuring the same construct.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rational voting behavior in local elections is rarely straightforward, particularly when celebrity candidates introduce new dynamics into the electoral process. In the 2024 West Bandung Regency election, where multiple public figures from the entertainment world competed simultaneously, voters faced a political environment shaped as much by personal popularity as by programmatic considerations. The findings of this study reveal that despite this context, rational considerations remained central to how voters made their choices. Across four dimensions calculation of benefits and welfare, information orientation and program evaluation, participation costs, and attitudes toward money politics voters consistently demonstrated evaluative behavior grounded in rational logic. The following analysis discusses each dimension in detail.

Programmatic Rationality: Information Evaluation and Welfare Calculation as the Dominant Logic of Voter Choice

The two highest-scoring dimensions are Calculation of Benefits and Welfare (M = 3.973, SD = 0.68) and Information Orientation and Program Evaluation (M = 4.019, SD = 0.67). As shown in Table 3, 78.50% of responses for the benefits and welfare dimension fell within the positive range (SA + A), with items 5 and 6 concerning voters' belief that celebrity candidates will improve family economic welfare and expectations of direct or indirect benefits upon election both recording the highest mean of 4.04 within the dimension. This finding is in line with what Guire stated, that voters choose candidates whose positions are closest to their policy preferences, which in this context reflects the alignment between celebrity candidates' visions and the real needs of the people of West Bandung Regency, such as infrastructure improvement, poverty alleviation, or strengthening education and health services.

Table 3. Frequency of Calculating Benefits and Welfare

Number of respondents	Item	Responses	reque ncy	Percen tage
100	10	Strong Agree (SA)	202	20,20%
		Agree (A)	583	58,30%
		Disagr ee Slight (DS)	202	20,20%
		Disagr ee (DA)	12	1,20%
		Strongl y Disagree (SD)	1	0,10%
		Total	1000	100,00 %

Source: created by researchers, 2026

Table 4 presents the frequency distribution for the information orientation and program evaluation dimension, which recorded the highest positive response rate among all four dimensions at 80.90% (SA = 22.10%, A = 58.80%). Voters in this dimension do not merely play the role of passive recipients of campaign messages, but are active actors who sort, compare, and evaluate the various political information available, including the track records, visions and missions, and consistency of the programs offered by celebrity candidates (Carreras et al., 2025; (Chang & Wu, 2023; (Cwalina et al., 2012). The item with the highest individual mean concerns respondents' assessment of the consistency between celebrity candidates' statements on social media and their official programs (Item 9) an indicator that voters used to assess the seriousness and credibility of candidates (Yaghi & Antwi-Boateng, 2017). The near-absence of strongly disagree responses (n = 1, 0.10%) further underlines the near-universal relevance of programmatic information in voters' decision-making.

Table 4 Frequency of Information Orientation and Program Evaluation Aspects

Number of	Item	Respon nses	reque ncy	Precen tage

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respomd ents				
100	10	Strong Agree (SA)	221	22,10%
		Agree (A)	588	58,80%
		Disagre e Slight: (DS)	181	18,10%
		Disagre e (DA)	9	0,90%
		Storngl y Disagree (SD)	1	0,10%
		Total	1000	100,00 %

Source: created by researchers, 2026

The dominance of both dimensions demonstrates that voters did not select celebrity candidates on the basis of affective attachment alone. Voters are positioned as actors who conduct interest-based evaluations, both in the short and long term, particularly in relation to economic welfare and the direct and indirect benefits of policies (Hollanders & Vis, 2013; Jacobs, 2016). They engaged in active cognitive evaluation scrutinizing whether candidates' publicly communicated commitments were substantively credible and materially relevant to their everyday lives. The centrality of social media consistency as the top-scoring item reveals that voters effectively converted the informal digital presence of entertainment-background candidates into a political accountability mechanism, tracking the coherence between campaign promises and official programs.

This pattern is consistent with Anthony Downs' spatial voting model, which positions the rational voter as systematically evaluating candidates based on expected policy delivery and proximity to personal preferences (Ferreira da Silva et al., 2021; Rueda, 2021; Abrão Baloi, 2019). In the present context, "proximity" is interpreted not ideologically but practically as the alignment between candidates' articulated visions and the material needs of the West Bandung Regency electorate, such as poverty alleviation, infrastructure improvement, and access to health and education services. These findings extend the rational choice framework by demonstrating that programmatic evaluation can occur through social media channels rather than traditional party platforms.

These results resonate with comparative evidence from Southeast Asia. Fossati, (2025), through candidate choice experiments across five countries, finds that economic performance evaluations and personal candidate traits jointly shape voting decisions confirming that no single-factor model suffices in developing democracies. Shome et al., (2024) document in the Indian context how celebrity-style leadership coexists with substantive policy evaluation when digital media provides relatively high information access, mirroring conditions in West Bandung Regency. Nasr, (2025) further demonstrates that voters actively seek political information during campaigns, an agency-based dynamic reflected in the dominance of the program consistency item here.

The primacy of programmatic rationality challenges the widespread assumption that celebrity voters are uninformed or emotionally driven (Kulachai et al., 2023). Instead, celebrity candidacies appear to have created new information pathways through which voters engage substantively with political choices. This finding suggests that the quality and accuracy of celebrity candidates' digital communication carries genuine democratic consequences warranting policy attention to social media transparency and candidate accountability standards in subnational elections.

Popularity as a Cognitive Heuristic: How Celebrity Visibility Reduces the Cost of Political Participation

The Participation Cost dimension yielded a mean score of 3.889 (SD = 0.84), with the frequency distribution presented in Table 5. A total of 72.40% of responses fell within the positive range (SA = 22.80%, A = 49.60%), while a notable 22.70% registered slight disagreement. This dimension recorded the lowest positive response rate among the four, yet still represents a clear majority orientation. In the context of modern voting behavior, ease of access to information is a crucial factor that can lower barriers to participation, especially amid the intensity of social and economic activities in society (de Vries & Giger, 2014). The item with the highest individual mean concerns social media content from celebrity candidates helping voters make decisions faster, thereby reducing time costs (Item 5).

Table 5 Frequency of Participation Cost Aspects

Number of respondents	Item	Responses	requency	Percentag
100	10	Strong Agree (SA)	228	22,80%
		Agree (A)	496	49,60%
		Disagree Slight (DS)	227	22,70%
		Disagree (DA)	35	3,50%
		Strongly Disagree (SD)	14	1,40%
		Total	1000	100,00%

Source: created by researchers, 2026

The comparatively higher disagreement rate in this dimension 22.70% DS compared to 18.10% and 20.20% in the programmatic dimensions signals that participation cost considerations function as secondary rather than primary determinants of voter choice. The cost-reduction function of celebrity popularity appears to operate selectively, benefiting voters who rely on digital platforms for political information while having a more limited effect on those who access information through other channels or who prioritize direct political engagement. This internal variation implies that heuristic efficiency is conditional on the digital habits of individual voters, not a universal feature of celebrity candidacy.

These findings are grounded in the Downsian framework on voting costs (Schnellenbach & Schubert, 2015), which holds that rational voters evaluate whether expected voting benefits exceed associated costs in terms of time, effort, and cognitive load. Celebrity candidates, by virtue of their pre-existing media presence and social media activity, function as what Nicell, (2022) terms "information efficiency mechanisms," allowing voters to rapidly form an overview of candidates' programs and personalities without extensive effort. In this framework, popularity does not corrupt rationality; it reduces its operating cost. This finding Fossati, (2025) argument that affective cues

and programmatic assessment operate as complementary rather than competing logics in developing democracies.

The heuristic function of candidate visibility is consistent with evidence from broader political behavior literature. Lau & Redlawsk, (2006) argue that voters rely on cognitive shortcuts to reduce information-processing costs, enabling them to make reasonably sound decisions even with limited knowledge. Empirical research further demonstrates that such heuristics often contain meaningful informational cues that guide voter judgment (Lupia, 1994). More recent work also shows that candidate prominence and visibility themselves can function as heuristic signals in low-information electoral environments (Villa-turek, 2023). Collectively, these findings support the view that heuristic voting represents an adaptation of rationality to high-information-cost contexts rather than its abandonment.

If celebrity candidates' social media presence functions as an information efficiency tool, then the quality, accuracy, and completeness of that presence becomes a matter of democratic consequence. Platforms that facilitate distorted or superficial candidate communication may systematically reduce the quality of voter heuristics, even among otherwise programmatically rational voters. This points to the need for media literacy initiatives and candidate accountability frameworks that extend into the social media sphere, particularly in subnational elections where formal accountability mechanisms are less developed (International IDEA, 2025).

Normative Pragmatic Tension: Voter Ambivalence Toward Money Politics as Evidence of Adaptive Rationality

The dimension of Attitudes toward Money Politics and Material Gains recorded a mean score of 3.950 (SD = 0.95) the highest standard deviation across all four dimensions. As shown in Table 6, 76.78% of responses fell within the positive range (SA = 28.67%, A = 48.11%), indicating majority agreement with statements related to critical awareness of money politics. However, the combined negative response rate of approximately 23.22% markedly higher than those observed in the programmatic dimensions reflects genuine variability in attitudes. The highest-scoring individual item (Item 9) concerns respondents' willingness to change their political choice if a competing candidate offered a greater material reward, creating an internal tension between normative rejection of vote-buying and pragmatic material calculation.

Table 6. Frequency of Attitudes Towards Money Politics and Material Gain

Number of respondens	item	Respo nses	reque ncy	Percen tage
100	9	Strong Agree (SA)	258	28,67%
		Agree (A)	433	48,11%
		Disagr ee Slight (DS)	145	16,11%
		Disagr ee (DA)	34	3,78%
		Strongl y Disagree (SD)	30	3,33%
		Total	900	100,00 %

Source: created by researchers, 2026

The co-occurrence of high mean agreement and high variance is theoretically significant. It reveals not confusion or low political literacy, but genuine ambivalence: voters simultaneously hold normative commitments against money politics and acknowledge the pragmatic material calculus that vote-buying activates. Money politics thus occupies a structurally different position in the voter's decision architecture rather than reflecting a settled evaluative stance, it represents a contested domain where ethical norms and socio-economic interests are actively negotiated at the individual level.

This finding resonates with Susan C. Stokes' perspective on vote-buying as a rational strategy for short-term benefit maximization in electoral democracy, particularly at the local level where socio-economic vulnerabilities are pronounced. It also aligns with Hendry et al., (2023) who document the coexistence of normative rejection and practical benefit calculation in attitudes toward money politics in Indonesian local elections. Importantly, this ambivalence does not undermine the broader argument of rational voter behavior; rather, it demonstrates what this study terms adaptive rationality the integration of ethical norms and material interests into a politically consistent, if internally negotiated, decision framework. This interpretation is consistent with Ashworth et al., (2018), who find that voter rationality is learned and context-dependent, adjusting to structural features of the electoral environment.

Sofia et al., (2023) document the complex moral landscape of money politics in Indonesian electoral contexts, where voters are simultaneously aware of its democratic harms and confronted with its material immediacy. (Hollanders & Vis, (2013) theorize the voter commitment problem in welfare-sensitive democratic contexts, arguing that short-term material incentives rationally compete with long-term programmatic preferences when institutional credibility is limited. These theoretical perspectives collectively situate money politics ambivalence not as a failure of rationality but as its context-sensitive expression under conditions of socio-economic inequality and limited institutional trust.

The normative-pragmatic tension documented here suggests that vote-buying resistance is not yet institutionally anchored in the West Bandung Regency electorate. Strengthening this resistance requires not only legal enforcement under Law Number 10 of 2016 and KPU technical regulations, but structural interventions that reduce voters' socio-economic vulnerabilities thereby diminishing the rational utility of short-term material exchange. Voter education programs must also engage the material realities of local communities, rather than treating money politics as a problem of individual moral failure alone.

Taken together, the findings across all three analytical subheadings reveal that voter rationality in West Bandung Regency operates as an integrated, adaptive system rather than a single-logic mechanism. The overall composite mean of the rational approach (M = 154.36, SD = 17.15) confirms internal consistency across all four dimensions. Celebrity candidacies did not displace rational voter behavior; they reshaped its operating environment introducing new information channels, lowering participation costs, and generating novel normative challenges. This finding enriches the rational choice literature by

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demonstrating that voter rationality in Indonesian local democracy is dynamically integrated with the logic of political personalization, a conclusion that both extends and contextualizes prior work from Southeast Asia (Fossati, 2025; Kartini et al., 2025), South Asia (Shome et al., 2024) and comparative electoral studies (Nasr, 2025; Kostelka et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that voters in the 2024 West Bandung Regency election exercised rational considerations even when confronted with celebrity candidates whose political capital rested primarily on personal popularity. Across four dimensions of the rational approach, the findings consistently show that voters engaged in substantive evaluation rather than emotionally-driven choice. Information orientation and program evaluation emerged as the dominant dimension (M = 4.019), indicating that voters actively assessed the credibility and consistency of candidates' programs including through social media as a basis for their decisions. The calculation of benefits and welfare (M = 3.973) further confirms that voters anchored their choices in expectations of concrete material improvement. Participation costs (M = 3.889) reveal that celebrity visibility functioned as a cognitive heuristic that lowered the informational burden of voting without displacing substantive considerations. Attitudes toward money politics (M = 3.950, SD = 0.95) reflect an adaptive rationality, where normative resistance to vote-buying coexists with pragmatic material calculation a tension shaped by local socio-economic conditions rather than political ignorance.

Theoretically, these findings enrich the rational choice perspective by demonstrating that voter rationality in Indonesian local democracy is not static but adaptive, integrating the logic of political personalization into its evaluative framework. Celebrity popularity, rather than undermining rational behavior, reshapes the informational environment through which rational decisions are made.

This study is not without limitations. First, the sample was drawn exclusively from three subdistricts in electoral district 1 of West Bandung Regency, which limits the generalizability of findings to other local electoral contexts in Indonesia. Second, the use of a purely quantitative descriptive design, while appropriate for mapping the distribution of rational behavior, does not allow for a deeper exploration of the subjective meanings and motivations behind voters' choices. Third, the study does not include a comparison group of voters who supported non-celebrity candidates, making it difficult to isolate the specific effect of celebrity candidacy on rational voting behavior.

Future research should address these limitations by adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines survey data with in-depth interviews, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how symbolic and affective dimensions of rationality operate alongside programmatic considerations. Comparative studies across multiple regions and between celebrity and non-celebrity electoral contexts would also strengthen the external validity of these findings. Additionally, longitudinal research tracking voter rationality across election cycles would provide insight into whether the adaptive rationality observed here reflects a durable shift in democratic behavior or a context-specific response to the novelty of celebrity candidacy in local elections.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Sintia Lisnawati : Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing – original draft. Ratnia Solihah : supervision, Conceptualization , review. Yusa Djuyandi : supervision, Conceptualization , review.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no financial or personal conflicts of interest that could affect the objectivity of this study. This study was funded by the Ministry of Religious Affairs Indonesia Bangkit Scholarship. The funder had no role in the study design, data collection and analysis, the decision to publish, or the preparation of the manuscript.

Ethical Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants and was approved by the Ethics Committee of Universitas Padjadjaran. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used QuillBot, and Grammarly to assist with language editing, improving grammar, clarity, readability, and the overall presentation of the manuscript. All AI-generated outputs were carefully reviewed and revised by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the scientific content, originality, accuracy, and integrity of this article.

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