When Freedom of Speech and Neo-feudalistic Buzzers Collide: A Note for the Politics of Citizenship

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Article Info	Abstract
	The term "buzzer" was initially employed in business marketing to promote a product or service by initiating a broader discourse and increasing popularity and sales. However, the function of buzzers has evolved from business to politics, where they are utilized by politicians for political campaigns and maintaining power. This article endeavors to propose a novel concept for contemporary Indonesian political buzzers. The new concept is introduced with the term "Neo-feudalistic Buzzers". The term "Neo-feudalistic" is derived from the characteristics of the actions of political buzzers who attack critics of the government and its officials, which resembles the practice of feudalism in the era of pre-capitalism. This conceptual article has identified that the use of buzzers in Indonesian politics has become a significant propaganda tool. Furthermore, it has been found that government-supporting buzzers are often involved in intimidating government critics. The actions of government-supporting buzzers can discredit freedom of speech and create fear among people who are critical of the government. Theoretically, neo-feudalistic buzzers add a new vocabulary to the politics of citizenship studies. Meanwhile, neo-feudalistic buzzers can provide practical insights for policymakers and democracy activists to regulate and supervise the activities of political buzzers.

Introduction

The term "buzzer" was initially employed in business marketing to introduce products or services to the public. The objective of utilizing buzzers in business is to stimulate a widespread discourse surrounding the product or service, enhancing its popularity and sales (Rosen, 2000). In the initial stages of the project, the selected buzzers were individuals with significant influence within the community. However, the use of buzzers has evolved from a business context to a political one, where they are employed by politicians for political campaigning (Krestianti, 2018; Mustika, 2019). The transformation of the function of buzzers from a business tool to a political one has considerably impacted Indonesia's social and political dynamics. These buzzers are frequently employed to disseminate political messages continuously, to imprint them on the public consciousness and influence

public opinion (Arianto, 2020). The use of political buzzer has also given rise to novel dynamics, where this term, originally devoid of any pejorative connotations, is now frequently associated with the spread of hoaxes and attacks on those who are perceived as critics of the government and its officials (Abbiyyu & Nindyaswari, 2022; Firdausi, 2021). Consequently, there is a lack of clarity regarding the precise definition of a buzzer (Arianto, 2020). Furthermore, this phenomenon raises concerns about the potential threat to freedom of speech in a democratic country like Indonesia.

Previous research suggests that political buzzers in Indonesia often engage in activities that support the government and its officials and criticize political opponents. For example, buzzers disseminate positive information about the government and its officials while launching attacks on critics via social media (Faulina *et al*., 2021; Firdausi, 2021). In addition, some studies suggest that political buzzers can sway public opinion and impede freedom of speech, a fundamental tenet of democracy (Abbiyyu & Nindyaswari, 2022; Anugerah, 2020).

In this paper, I propose a novel conceptual framework for contemporary Indonesian political buzzers. This new concept aims to provide a framework for understanding the actions of political buzzers who attack critics of the government and its officials. The new concept is introduced with the term "neo-feudalistic Buzzers". The term "neo-feudalistic" is selected to reflect the characteristics of the actions of political buzzers attacking critics of the government and its officials, which bear a resemblance to the practice of feudalism in the era of pre-capitalism. Furthermore, this article analyzes the role and impact of political buzzers on freedom of speech.

This paper is a conceptual article based on the linguistic theory of signifier and signified as developed by Ferdinand de Saussure. This theory is employed to analyze the identity of political buzzers. "Feudalism" and "neo-feudalism" are also employed to identify the nature, behavior, or actions of political buzzers who support the government. In my view, this conceptualization is relevant to defining the various terms "buzzers" or "political buzzers" that are considered confusing and to predicting the implications of the operation of neo-feudalistic buzzers as a means of social control and maintaining power. The structure of this paper is divided into five sections. The first section presents a definition and historical overview of the use of buzzers in business and politics. The second section offers a definition of feudalism. The third section elaborates a detailed examination of the concept of neo-feudalism, divided into two sessions. The fourth section analyzes the characteristics of those political buzzers that support the government. Finally, the fifth section analyzes neo-feudalistic buzzers divided into two parts.

Definition of Buzzer

The term "buzzer" was initially employed to introduce a trade product or service (business). The objective of using buzzers is to make the product or service being introduced the center of conversation in the community (Rosen, 2000). It is evident that for the marketing effort to be successful, the buzzers recruited are influencers with a significant community reputation. At that time, the term "buzz marketing" was commonly used.

Although the role of buzzers is of significant consequence, it has been demonstrated that there are, in fact, various types of buzzers. Following the coverage from Kumparan.com, buzzers can be classified into two categories: those who act of their own volition and those who are instructed to do so. Buzzers based on orders are typically more appealing to politicians seeking to recruit them for political campaigns (Pilkada, Pileg, or Pilpres) (Krestianti, 2018). That is where the shift in the function of buzzers from business interests to political interests began (Mustika, 2019).

The two buzzer concepts, which are used for product or service introductions (business) and political campaigns (elections), are still within the definition of buzzer itself. The focus is on how these buzzers facilitate introducing and disseminating a message or content about a product, service, or politician, thereby ensuring its memorability and influence on public opinion (Arianto, 2020). In particular, the term "buzzer" in politics exhibits an intriguing dynamic. Initially neutral, the term "buzzer" has recently acquired a negative connotation (Arianto, 2020). It is, therefore, necessary to definitively determine what is meant by the term "buzzer". Notably, the CIPG report indicates no consensus regarding the definition of "buzzer" (Esti *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, despite efforts to define the term, the resulting explanations remain provisional. In other words, there is no consensus among social or economic scientists regarding the definition of a buzzer.

Following the definitions provided by Cambridge Dictionary Online (2024), a buzzer is an electronic device that produces a buzzing sound. That indicates that the term "buzzer" encompasses a device or object that produces a sound that is identical to a sound, such as "*dengung*" (in Indonesian phonetic imitation) or "buzz" (in English phonetic imitation). For example, when a bell button is pressed in front of a house, and the resulting sound is identical to a buzzing sound, the set of bell buttons can be referred to as a buzzer. In other words, the word "buzzer" is formed with the suffix "-er". In order to ascertain the etymology of the term "buzzer," it is necessary to trace it back to the root word "buzzer," which is "buzz". What, then, does the word "buzz" signify?

The term "buzz" continues to be defined by the Cambridge Dictionary Online (2024) as a continuous, low-pitched sound akin to a bee. In other words, the term "buzz" describes the continuous, low-pitched sound produced by a bee. The term "buzz" is employed here to indicate the imitation of sounds that originate in nature. It is a mere attempt to capture sounds that appeal to humans. This definitive review indicates that "buzz" and "buzzer" are neutral. The terms in question do not imply any positive or negative connotations. Indeed, they have no bearing on the realms of business or politics. One might inquire as to how these two words are connected to the realm of marketing or business. I speculate that the term "buzz" is employed to delineate a specific aspect of its meaning, namely, its capacity to convey the notion of a continuous, uninterrupted sound. That is because the function of the buzzer is to disseminate the message repeatedly so that it appears uninterrupted.

So, what caused this word to shift in value from neutral to negative? In fact, according to the Center for Innovation Policy and Governance (CIPG) (Esti *et al.*, 2017), the entry of social media buzzers into the political sphere is a way to deal with black campaigns and

boost the candidate's good name so that the election rate increases significantly. Based on recent literature, a negative stigma against buzzers emerge*s* because few of these buzzers spread hoaxes on the sidelines of fighting information and herding opinions in the election era (Firdausi, 2021; Mustika, 2019). Buzzers supporting the government and its ranks do not hesitate to attack netizens who are critical of the Joko Widodo administration (Abbiyyu & Nindyaswari, 2022; Firdausi, 2021). There is also a role as a communication tool of power (propaganda tool) to change public opinion (Faulina *et al.*, 2021).

Early Feudalism in Europe and the Dutch East Indies

The practice of feudalism in different parts of the world is different. It depends on the various conditions in which the system operates. However, the practice of feudalism in the European part of the world was based on a similar pattern, namely land tenure (Harding, 2019). The system began to develop after the collapse of the Roman Empire. It continued to evolve over the centuries as European society underwent various political and social changes. The origins of feudalism can be traced back to the early Middle Ages when central authority weakened. The need for security and protection created feudalistic relationships between rulers and their vassals (Comninel, 2000). An example is the Kingdom of England. In the early stages of the Medieval period in England, King William the Conqueror introduced a feudal system in which he granted land to loyal barons in return for military service (Hollister, 1963). These barons then granted smaller estates to knights and peasants who, in turn, swore allegiance and provided military support to their lord. This hierarchical structure facilitated the preservation of social order and stability amidst political uncertainty.

In Europe, feudalism was the dominant social and economic system in the Medieval period, especially from the 9th to the 14th century. In this system, land was the primary source of wealth and power, and the structure of society was based on a pattern of hierarchical relationships between social classes. Key features of feudalism included the granting of land (*fief*) by a king or lord to a vassal (nobleman or knight) in return for loyalty and military service (Brown, 1974; Chibnall, 2002; Hilton, 1974; Schumpeter, 2012). The vassal would provide protection and support to workers, peasants or serfs, who labored on the land. The system was characterized by a complex web of obligations and duties between different social classes, with a clear hierarchy and limited rights for the lower classes. The church also played an essential role in feudal society, owning land holdings and influencing the economic and social aspects of the system.

Feudalism was characterized by a decentralized political structure, with power dispersed among various lords and vassals, and this system formed the basis for social and political life during the medieval period (Katz, 1993). The main components of feudalism in medieval Europe can be summarized as follows: 1) King, at the top of the feudal hierarchy, the king granted *fiefs* or lands to lords in exchange for loyalty and military service; 2) Lord, received *fiefs* from the king and distributed them to the vassals. They were responsible for providing protection and support to their vassals; 3) Vassal, holding land (*fief*) from lords and promising loyalty and military service. Obligations to their lords bound them; 4)

Knights (Nobles), at the bottom of the feudal hierarchy, knights were vassals who performed military duties for their lords; 5) Homage, a formal act of respect and loyalty performed by subordinates to their masters, involving special rituals such as placing a hand between the master's hands; 6) Slavery, a system in which peasants worked on the land of masters in exchange for protection but were tied to the land and had limited rights; and 7) Church, played an important role in feudal society, owning land and influencing the system's economic and social aspects.

This hierarchical structure forms a rigid social order. That meant individuals must be self-aware and realize their place and responsibilities within the system. The feudal system also provided stability and security, as each depended on his or her lord for protection and support in times of need (Herlihy, 1970). However, this stability came at a cost, as peasants and serfs were often tied to the land they tilled, having limited freedom to pursue their interests or opportunities. The feudal system also fostered a culture of loyalty and obligation, as individuals were expected to faithfully serve their masters in exchange for protection and resources (Hyams, 2001). This sense of obedience and hierarchical order permeated all aspects of medieval society, shaping relationships and interactions between individuals of different social classes. Despite its flaws and limitations, the feudal system remained the dominant force in Medieval Europe for centuries, significantly influencing the political, economic, and social landscape.

It is important to note that in the early phase of feudalism, agriculture relied heavily on human and animal labor due to the lack of agricultural technology development. Landlords extended peasants' working hours and added burdensome obligations and taxes to increase income. That created a fundamental contradiction between the feudal landlord class and the peasants, who often responded with passive resistance or rebellion against the harsh working conditions. Later, agricultural technologies such as the introduction of more efficient iron plows, the use of horses to replace oxen, and the use of windmills and watermills began to be used to increase agricultural production. While these developments benefited those landlords who could adopt them, peasants often did not benefit from them due to limitations in land ownership and working conditions set by feudal landlords.

The feudal system has existed in Indonesia since before the Dutch East Indies era. The feudal system had already occurred before foreign colonials began to become entrenched in the archipelago. As quoted from the JDIH page of the Yogyakarta City Government, feudalism in the era of ancient kingdoms in the archipelago was also based on land tenure (Pemerintah Kota Yogyakarta, 2016). The ancient kingdoms were, for example, ancient Mataram, Kediri, Singasari, and Majapahit. The land was believed to belong to the gods during the ancient kingdoms. Meanwhile, kings were believed to be incarnations of gods. Therefore, the kings felt they had the right to control and own the land in their territory. In addition, the kings also had the right to distribute plots of land to *sikep-sikep*. The *kerik* (*sikep* candidates), *bujang-bujang,* and *numpang-numpang* (in some places, the term varies) are also given land. In addition, the term *perdikan* land is also used. *Perdikan* land was given as a gift to a person of merit to the kingdom. The owner of *perdikan* land was exempt from taxes and tribute. Apart from land allotments, commoners who did not have access to power had to

work and deposit a portion of the harvest as tribute. The tribute was paid through the *sikep* and passed on to the king. There was also additional work to be done for the kingdom.

The feudal system in the archipelago began to drop by Raffles in the era of British colonialism (Ginting & Sutono, 2011). As happened in England, Raffles also changed the land paradigm that land does not belong to God. The king was not an emanation of God. Land, therefore, belongs to the state. The consequence was that landowners and cultivators had to pay *landrente* (land tax) to the state. Despite Raffles' efforts to change the land paradigm, colonialist-capitalist factions used local feudalists to maintain power. So, instead of bringing about fundamental social change with their capitalist ideology, the colonialists had an affair with the local feudalists. It can be said that the emergence of capitalism in Indonesia nourished and established the economic, social, and political order of feudalism for the benefit of colonialism. This symbiotic mutualism of the colonialists-capitalists and local feudalists further cornered the people as objects of oppression and exploitation from both parties (Rahmawati, 2023).

These colonials created new hierarchical social strata in the archipelago (Mayshurah & Sair, 2023). The stratification was divided into three parts: the upper, middle, and lower. The upper class is European, the middle class is East Asian, and the lower class is indigenous or native. The indigenous class was further subdivided. Among the indigenous people, there were several divided social classes: First, the *priyayi* consisted of indigenous individuals with a high social status and were made more "civilized" by the Dutch colonial government. They were often descended from Javanese aristocrats and received education from Dutch educational institutions. Second, the ordinary people, consisting of indigenous individuals with low social status and limited access to education, generally work as farmers or laborers. Third, the unrecognized natives, a group of indigenous people who were considered culturally inept by the Dutch colonial government and ignored by society.

Neo-feudalism as the Incarnation of the "Ghost of Feudalism"

The entry "feudalism" can be considered an archaic political science vocabulary, at least in Indonesia. It is a word we rarely hear or talk about among social science scholars or activists. Isms that we often hear in contemporary Indonesia are neo-liberalism, conservatism, radicalism, and terrorism. So, is the "ghost of feudalism" really on the rise, and do we need to take another look at its symptoms?

One of the allegations about the re-emergence of the "ghost of feudalism" was made by Jodi Dean. The "ghost of feudalism" is now allegedly transformed into neo-feudalism. In an article entitled *Communism or Neo-Feudalism*, Dean presents an in-depth analysis of neo-feudalism in contemporary capitalism. Dean (2020) also identifies and explains the main features of neo-feudalism, such as the fragmentation of sovereignty, social hierarchy, inequality between marginalized regions and big cities, and widespread insecurity. Fragmentation of sovereignty occurs when state functions are vertically and horizontally fragmented, with different forms of political and economic authority claiming different rights and jurisdictions. That is reflected in political and economic practices that are no longer bound by a clear rule of law but instead, resort to arbitration and compromise.

Vertically, there is a division of political and economic authority between different levels of government, such as the central government, regional governments, and other local authorities. Each level of government may have different claims to rights and jurisdiction in making decisions and implementing policies. Horizontally, it divides political and economic authority among different non-governmental institutions and entities. For example, in an economic context, global financial institutions, technology companies, and other business entities may have significant power and influence in determining economic policy and wealth distribution.

Hierarchy and expropriation also characterize neo-feudalism. An example is the use of debt by global financial institutions and digital technology platforms to distribute wealth from the poor to the rich. That demonstrates the existence of economic inequality that further reinforces social hierarchies in neo-feudal societies. Inequality between marginalized regions and major cities is also evidence of neo-feudalism in practice. Global wealth concentrated in offshore accounts to avoid taxes creates significant economic inequality between marginalized regions and urban centers. Insecure practices are also evident in the allocation of more funds to build prisons than schools, strengthen the police rather than basic infrastructure, and subsidize corporations rather than social services.

Milan Zafirovski (2007) defines "neo-feudalism" as a concept that describes the resurgence of feudal-like power structures and dynamics in contemporary American society, particularly among conservative groups or adherents. This revival is characterized by Anti-labor and pro-capital ideas, slave-like jobs and environments, and reshaping the economy and society into a new feudal system. In the context of American conservatism, "neo-feudalism" emerged as a form of neo-patrimonialism, producing a new patrimonial capitalism dominated by an aristocratic plutocracy reminiscent of the robber barons of industry. In the context of United States history, industrial robber barons are often associated with the Gilded Age period, which was characterized by rapid economic growth but accompanied by great social inequality. They are often regarded as extreme examples of unbridled capitalism and excessive business power. This new social structure was characterized by master-servant style capital-labor relations or forced labor rationalized as "*all-American*" free enterprise for the wealthy elite, in opposition to the workers' freedom.

Neo-feudalism's implications for American society include maintaining an oligarchic or capitalist-aristocratic authoritarian political-economic system, reminiscent of historical periods such as late 19th-century robber baron capitalism or the Southern aristocracy before the Civil War. This maintenance creates a society where power dynamics are skewed heavily in favor of the elite, which positions America as the traditional pseudo-feudal society of the West. Overall, "neo-feudalism" highlights the resurgence of feudalism-like power structures and relationships in contemporary American society.

Harrison's article entitled "*Digital Feudalism: Sharecropping, Ground Rent, and Tribute*" discusses the phenomenon of digital feudalism in the information and communication technology (ICT) industry. Harrison (2021) argues that ownership and control over the *digital commons*, which includes hardware, software, infrastructure, and data, has been monopolized by technology companies, which is equivalent to the position of feudal

landlords. The article presents three main arguments associated with digital feudalism, i.e., digital landlords monopolize digital territories, digital tenant-landlords exploit agrarian relations of production to generate land rent, and digital loyalty and deference are required to maintain digital royal power. The article also discusses three equivalent forms of land rent in digital feudalism, *viz.* labor rent, goods rent, and money rent. In conclusion, this article is a significant contribution to understanding how digital feudalism can occur within the ICT industry and calls for our consciousness to rethink what technology users give and receive in terms of the advantages and disadvantages that arise.

Neo-feudalism in Indonesia

Indonesia is a unitary state with a republican form of government. The republican form of government is characterized by appointing the head of state based on general elections for a certain period. The legitimacy of its power comes from the people, not from God, as in the monarchical form of government. Based on this consideration of the legitimacy of his power, the head of state is not the embodiment of God's perfection. The head of state acts as the executor of the people's will. The head of state cannot just ignore the people when it is considered detrimental to the people. The head of state is obliged to listen to the people's voice. Thus, the head of state is likely, or possibly, to be wrong.

Based on the agreement of the *Founding Fathers* in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution, the political system used by Indonesia is democracy. Democracy itself develops over time. The principles of democracy include (Surbakti, 2011):

1. The basic principle of democracy lies in guaranteeing and protecting citizens' rights and freedoms, including human rights. The government or any particular entity does not grant these rights and freedoms; it is innate to each individual as a creation of a higher power. Examples of such rights are freedom of association, freedom of speech, access to information, protection from oppression, freedom from hunger, freedom of religion, and the right to education.

2. The concept of participatory democracy highlights the importance of citizens being actively involved in political and social affairs. This involvement includes influencing the development and implementation of public policies and demonstrating the importance of the role of the individual in a democratic society.

3. Selecting and replacing government officials at the national and local levels through direct, open, and impartial elections is critical to ensuring a democratic system. Democracy is a form of government in which power is vested in the people and exercised through elected representatives, aiming to serve the public interest. Representative democracy is a fundamental aspect of a democratic political structure.

4. The principle of the rule of law states that all individuals, regardless of their social standing or economic status, are subject to the same laws and legal procedures. In addition, government administration must be carried out within the confines of these laws. Democracy is a system of government based on the principles of law,

not arbitrary decisions made by individuals. It is important to note that laws are made and passed through a democratic process.

5. The fair and equitable allocation of state power, as well as the existence of a system of checks and balances between the branches of government, including the legislative, executive, and judicial, as well as other state institutions, are essential to ensure transparency in the administration of the state, the division of duties and powers between institutions and to prevent one branch from exerting undue influence over another. This framework is primarily designed to safeguard against abuses of state power that may violate individual rights and freedoms, human rights, and the broader public interest.

6. The concept of effective governance and opposition is determined by the capacity of the government and bureaucracy to establish laws and public policies to achieve the country's goals. A reliable opposition is not based on its ability to overthrow the government but on its role in providing a counterweight to the government (and its affiliated political parties in parliament) by participating in the formulation of laws that are in line with the wishes and expectations of the people, as well as monitoring the enforcement of those laws.

7. The local government system is run on the principle of decentralization, which allows regions to manage their affairs and finances independently. That includes the right for residents to govern themselves based on their unique characteristics and capabilities. Autonomous regions can organize government affairs if they are equipped with budgetary resources, which can be obtained through budget allocations or revenue-sharing agreements with the central government.

8. Constitutionalism refers to the principles and structures in the constitution that limit state power to prevent abuse of power for personal or group interests and safeguard citizens' rights and freedoms. State power is used to achieve the goals of government.

9. The concept of majority rule in a democracy involves the party or candidate that receives the most votes in an election. This majority is defined as exceeding the votes other parties or candidates receive. On the other hand, a minority in a democracy refers to a party or candidate that does not receive a majority of votes. The basic rights of minorities include individual rights and freedoms outlined in the constitution, including the right to voice opinions and participate in decision-making processes. These rights cannot be ignored or overridden through decisions taken solely by the majority.

10. Pluralism is a hallmark of democratic societies beyond government institutions' mere structure and procedures. In a democratic system, institutions, including political parties, private economic organizations, civil society groups, and the media, operate independently of the state, contributing to diverse perspectives, interests, and preferences. This diversity requires channels through which public input can be conveyed to decision-makers and implemented. While political parties have traditionally served as intermediaries between society and the state,

civil society organizations and the media also play an important role in representing people's interests.

11. Democratic culture, also known as civic culture, refers to the attitudes and behaviors of individuals who demonstrate a strong sense of national loyalty, adherence to constitutional and legal norms, and commitment to rational political practices. That includes engaging in the political process fairly and respectfully, such as abiding by the game's rules, respecting opponents, and being open to compromise in decision-making.

The republican form of government with a democratic political system has significant consequences for citizens' freedom of expression. On the one hand, it guarantees human rights, including freedom of expression and encourages active citizen participation in the political process. On the other hand, threats to freedom of expression, such as criminalization and intimidation, remain challenges that must be addressed to ensure that democracy functions well and citizens' rights are protected. Imagining that Indonesia still adopts a feudalist social system seems to be an exaggeration. That is because, from the basic law alone, the value or elements of feudalism are challenging to find in the text. No more concepts or words synonymize with the monarchical form of government. Ergo, it should be confident that Indonesia is a country far from the social system of feudalism. Herein lies the difficulty of understanding social phenomena. Humans, who are its actors, can never be guaranteed to comply with the agreement set voluntarily. In America, for example, there has been a tendency towards feudalism. The United States is often considered the main carriage of democracy.

The information technology of global capitalism, which initially raised hopes of bypassing bureaucratization, has recently been suspected as a practice of feudalism. Information technology driven by global capitalism turns out to be practicing feudalism. In the era of pre-capitalists, the controlling party controlled the land. The controlled party was only given the right to cultivate the land and get a small portion of the profits from the land he cultivated. The controlled party did not have the right to control the land. Feudalism in the contemporary era (neo-feudalism) is characterized by fragmented sovereignty, social hierarchy, inequality between marginalized regions and big cities, and widespread insecurity (Dean, 2020). Other practices include promoting anti-labor and pro-capital ideas, the existence of slave-like jobs and environments, and reshaping the economy and society into a new feudal system (Zafirovski, 2007). Digital feudalism also occurs in the information and communication technology (ICT) industry (Harrison, 2021).

Based on the practice of feudalism and neo-feudalism in the world, it can be formulated that the core of the feudalism social system is the control of the weak, whether socially, economically, or politically. The controller is the socially, economically, or politically strong party to maximize privileges or benefits. In this case, the controlling party will manipulate in such a way, both mentally and physically, in controlling the controlled party. Then, how can the feudalism system be said to still operate in Indonesia?

Political Buzzers Discrediting Freedom of Speech

In this section, I will argue that political buzzers discrediting freedom of speech are nameless or formless politicians. By examining Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory of the existence of formless or nameless organizations (OTBs), the author finds that these political buzzers who restrict freedom of speech play the role of politicians. This type of politician is somewhat different from the commonly known existence of politicians because they are often formless or without a clear persona identity. However, to the extent that they carry the same values, namely attacking critics of the government and its officials, then, in essence, the accounts of political buzzers who devalue freedom of speech are representations of a political actor or politician in charge of each institution per se.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary online (2024), the word "politician" is (1) an expert on state administration and (2) a person who is involved in politics. The politician referred to by the author in this article does not refer to the first meaning but the second. That is because the various roles played by political buzzers who restrict freedom of speech, such as influencing public opinion, twisting what is right into wrong and vice versa, and attacking critics, are a capacity that can only be done by a politician. Although they can be called politicians, politicians in the form of political buzzers devaluing freedom of speech somewhat differ from mainstream politicians. That is because politicians in the form of political buzzers who devalue freedom of speech are often formless or without a clear persona identity. The presence of political buzzers who devalue freedom of speech is somewhat synonymous with the term organization without form or name (OTB). This formless organization can change its name, form, or identity. For example, filing or registering with the local government as a mass organization for social activities, but the manifestation may be completely different (Antaranews.com, 2016).

Is there anything wrong with formless or nameless organizations? This formless organization is, in fact, implicitly protected in the 1945 Constitution article 28E paragraph 3, which reads that everyone has the right to freedom of association, assembly, and expression. If a group gathers to express their thoughts, there is no reason to consider that action wrong. Apart from the rights of citizens to associate, assemble, and express opinions, the author considers that formless organizations have their problems. Unlike formless organizations, registered organizations can be dissolved if they are deemed to have deviated from government regulations. Registered organizations have a recorded management and secretariat so that control from the public and the government can be carried out quickly. The ease of supervision and legal action are much more effortless for registered organizations than formless organizations. In other words, these formless organizations are more dangerous than registered organizations (Wikrama, 2018).

Whether we realize it or not, the flexibility of this formless organization is undoubtedly more beneficial in realizing goals. By not detecting the composition of the board, the people involved in it are not easy to get attacks, interference, or intimidation from the opposing party. This flexibility is what probably made the Joko Widodo-Ahok's team use a formless organizational strategy to win the 2012 DKI elections (Malau, 2012).

Conceptually, the existence status of the formless organization can be explained by the Saussure's concept of signifier and signified (Saussure, 2013). Judging from these two concepts, the formless organization has a signified, which is the meaning represented by a signifier. That means that formless organizations exist to convey a particular message or purpose. In light of Saussure's theory of language, the distinctive aspect of formless organization is the absence of a signifier. The presence of a signifier is vital so as to obtain a sign. The presence of a signifier will be complete when each signifier can show the differences or similarities between them. As the name suggests, this formless organization certainly does not have a clear organizational structure, line of instruction, vision, mission, and so forth.

I took the benefit of Saussure's concept of signifier and signified in contrast with Jean Baudrillard when analyzing the consumer society. Baudrillard (2017) states that advertisements (through the media) displayed to the public ignore the signified (product or service) and emphasize the signifier (packaging of product or service advertising messages). The problem is that the signifiers displayed barely show the functionality of the advertised product or service. So, when people shop, they are presumed not to consume goods or services but to consume signs that are only based on consideration of the signifier and ignore the sign.

Based on the discernment through Saussure's linguistic theory of the formless or nameless organization, the author concludes that political buzzers who devalue freedom of speech also have identical or similar characteristics to formless organizations. So, to clarify the political buzzer's existence status that devalues freedom of speech, the author calls it a nameless politician. In the context of political ethics, these nameless politicians will damage the image of the noble goals of politics. That is because if actions are signaled to have the potential to trigger horizontal conflict by these nameless politicians, then no one can be held accountable.

Neo-feudalistic Buzzers:
A New Concept for Government-Supporting Political Buzzers

I observed that the practices of neo-feudalism in Indonesia seem to have begun to demonstrate themselves openly in the form of public conversations on social media. Public conversations on social media have begun to indicate disruptions to citizens' freedom of speech. The disruption of freedom of speech occurred at least during the campaign of the DKI Jakarta gubernatorial candidate pair in 2012. Why is the disruption of freedom of speech on social media considered to correlate with the emergence of the neo-feudalism social system in Indonesia? In this section, I will argue that "neo-feudalistic buzzers" is the nameless political buzzer that emerges as an anonymous social media account that addresses verbal violence to the government and its official critics using *ad-hominem* arguments.

From various scientific articles published in academic journals in Indonesia on the topic of "political buzzers," I found that the researchers were concerned that the social media

accounts of government supporters would erode public participation in controlling the course of government.

Anugerah (2020) revealed that buzzers are often involved in government political activities in Indonesia. They are helpful for the government to support specific policies or agendas and respond to or attack the opposition. A concrete example of buzzers' involvement with the government is when the government uses buzzers to spread positive information about government policies or achievements or to attack political opponents who are critical of the government. Buzzers can also create narratives that support the government and influence public opinion under the government's interests. As such, buzzer engagement with the government can significantly influence political dynamics and public opinion.

Firdausi (2021) reveals accounts on social media called buzzers, especially in Indonesian politics during President Jokowi's time. Buzzers often spread narratives that are not true and corner their targets. There are two patterns of buzzer tasks, namely cursing and reporting to the police regarding public posts that criticize the government. One of the buzzers, Permadi Arya or Abu Janda, has been active on social media since 2015 and started to get busy in the 2019 elections. Buzzers have become part of political communication and often worsen Indonesia's conditions on social media.

Faulina *et al.* (2021) stated that the role of buzzers changed when they began to be used in political issues, especially in 2012, when the Jokowi-Ahok pair used social media to amplify their political discourse. Political buzzers in Indonesia are known as political "*BuzzerRp,*" which aim to amplify the campaign messages of candidates and political parties. In political contestation, political buzzers bring down political opponents or opposition, make audiences favor the government or political parties, and divide and conquer society. Political buzzers are also helpful as propaganda tools to influence and change public opinion under specific goals. They can spread provocative messages or attack personal issues to achieve political goals.

Abbiyyu and Nindyaswari (2022) reviewed the vital role of buzzers who actively shape public opinion in favor of the government. Buzzers use gifting, bots, and visual content to influence trends and public perception of specific issues. They promote positive images of current leaders while attacking critics to dominate public discourse. They also assessed the impact of buzzers on democracy as unfavorable, given that they inhibit freedom of expression and critical thinking and limit balanced information. Buzzer activities contribute to the polarization of political debates, block opposition voices, and manipulate public support, often in unethical ways. They concluded that the existence of buzzers is a phenomenon that threatens democratic principles, such as fairness, transparency, and accountability. In addition, they also suggested the importance of stricter regulation and supervision to limit buzzer activity and maintain democracy in Indonesia.

Sisrinaldi and Alamsyah (2023) said that the buzzers involved in the discourse around the "Jakarta Bay Reclamation" project used strategies to counteract rejection and negative perceptions. One example can be seen in how buzzers responded to criticism and provided alternative perspectives to shape public opinion in favor of the project. When faced with

opposition from groups or individuals who question a reclamation project's environmental impact or necessity, for example, buzzers may highlight the project's potential benefits, such as economic development, infrastructure improvements, or flood prevention measures. They present arguments supporting the project's long-term goals and emphasize the importance of government initiatives for urban development and coastal protection. The buzzers discredit dissenting voices by questioning their credibility, motives, or sources of information. By casting doubt on opposing viewpoints or raising doubts about the accuracy of adverse claims, the buzzers intend to undermine the integrity of the critics and strengthen their narrative in support of the project. Through these actions, buzzers seek to influence public perception, shape the discourse around the "Jakarta Bay Reclamation" project, and reduce opposition by providing counterarguments, alternative perspectives, and discrediting dissenting voices.

Based on the findings of several scientific articles on the work of political buzzers that restrict freedom of speech, it can be said that these buzzers exercise control over government critics. The control is intended so that the image of the government is always considered good and is considered to have carried out its duties properly. The ultimate goal of the political buzzers who devalue freedom of speech is for every citizen to be obedient, submissive, or loyal to the government without questioning the right or wrong and good or bad government policies. This act of control that leads to loyalty to the ruler is a form of feudalism political system. The political system of feudalism is certainly not compatible with citizens' right to freedom of speech. That is because freedom of speech is the right of every citizen in a republic with a democratic political system. The right to control the government has been undermined by the actions of political buzzers who devalue freedom of speech. Political buzzers who devalue freedom of speech have canceled control over the government. That means that one of the elements of democracy in the form of freedom of speech by enjoying the "public space" (resembling "land" in the feudal system) of social media is trying to be killed by political buzzers who restrict freedom of speech.

This act of imposing a single truth on all government policies carried out by nameless political buzzers who devalue freedom of speech is what the author calls the emergence of new-faced feudalism or neo-feudalism in Indonesia. The new face of feudalism carried out by nameless political buzzers who devalue freedom of speech is what I called the concept of "neo-feudalistic buzzers." The mode used by neo-feudalistic buzzers on social media is by launching verbal violence. Verbal abuse is the practice of using specific words or expressions directed at an individual to lower self-esteem, feeling inappropriate, insulting, or intimidating based on race, gender, sexual orientation, age, or demeaning. This practice includes using sarcasm, demeaning intonation, or unwanted and excessive levels of familiarity in communication (Afnizal *et al.*, 2023), inducing fear, blaming, and insulting the victim (Dwi Utami & Raihana Hamdan, 2023), and using harsh words, ridicule, and threats (Winardi & Malau, 2023). In short, they prefer using *ad-hominem* arguments in responding to the public interest that the critics address.

The Politics of Neo-feudalistic Buzzers: A Note for the Politics of Citizenship

A clear understanding of citizenship is essential due to its diverse nature and different interpretations. The diversity in defining citizenship underscores the variety of perspectives and traditions within the field of citizenship studies. Citizenship is generally associated with claims to fundamental rights for citizens. The emphasis is on the *right to have rights*, as expressed by Hannah Arendt (Somers, 2008), which is the foundation on which a person can have rights. Other perspectives view citizenship as requiring active participation in public affairs and argue that such involvement is essential for recognizing and protecting rights (Janosky & Gran, 2002). Alternatively, some scholars emphasize belonging to a political community as an essential aspect of citizenship (Walzer, 1992). Meanwhile, Charles Tilly (1996) examines citizenship with the relationship between state institutions and individuals.

The politics of citizenship is a field of study that explores the concepts, practices, and dynamics of the relationship between individuals and the state in the context of citizenship (Hiariej & Stokke, 2017). The definition of citizenship in the politics of citizenship includes a person's legal status. It involves the rights, obligations, political participation, and citizen identity associated with membership in a political community. The politics of citizenship highlights aspects such as the politics of recognition, the politics of welfare redistribution, and the politics of representation.

There are two main paradigms in citizenship studies: the static and the dynamic. T.H. Marshall exemplifies the static paradigm, whereas Michael Mann and Bryan Turner represent the dynamic paradigm. Marshall (1950) posits that the citizenship process will evolve and become institutionalized. In contrast, Mann and Turner argue that it will be shaped by class struggle. Marshall's paradigm is deemed unfeasible for fostering democratic citizenship in the southern states due to its failure to acknowledge class-based conflicts and struggles (Mann, 1987). This perspective is echoed by Bryan Turner (1992), who posits that class-based conflicts are inherent to oppressed social classes, exemplified by cultural identity groups in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (politics of identity and politics of difference).

Mann and Turner begin with the concept of citizenship and then argue that it must be viewed in the context of the politics of citizenship. They define "politics" in such a way that citizenship status is also actively sought by individuals or groups who are marginalized, unrecognized, or have their rights violated. In addition, they contend that there are closed access and limited opportunities for participation in the political process for these same individuals or groups.

The neo-feudalistic buzzer concept introduces a new vocabulary to Turner's analysis of class conflict. However, the formulation of the concept of neo-feudalistic buzzers might not be appropriate if it is situated within the context of culturally-based identity politics. For the time being, I situate the formulation of the concept of neo-feudalistic buzzers within the context of class conflict between the government (and its officials) and the public. The operation of neo-feudalistic buzzers, based on previous research findings, demonstrates the characteristics of marginalization, denial, violation, and restriction of citizens' access to

become members or elements of the state. Citizens are not regarded as integral elements of the state, limiting their ability to control the government's operations. Citizens' involvement in the government's functioning seems confined to the payment of taxes and participation in elections. Beyond these roles, neo-feudalistic buzzers appear to impede the involvement of citizens in ensuring the government's proper and constitutional functioning.

Based on the brief description of the politics of citizenship above, the existence of neo-feudalistic buzzers should be questioned about their position in the relationship between individuals and the state. Are neo-feudalistic buzzers on the side of individuals (citizens) or the side of the state (represented by the government)? In that case, these neo-feudalistic buzzers should not need to use words to rebuke, degrade, put down, and discredit government critics. There is no benefit gained from using such words to fellow citizens other than the division between the nation's children.

Let us say that the neo-feudalistic buzzers are individuals (citizens). Then, it is worth exploring their motives, benefits, and who is behind them. It is difficult to understand if neo-feudalistic buzzers prefer to corner government critics. Criticism of the government is an act that is guaranteed in a republic system and adopts a democratic political system like Indonesia. In other words, neo-feudalistic buzzers who claim to be individuals (citizens) should not need to exist in a republic and a democratic political system. That is because their existence has canceled the guarantee of freedom of expression of individual citizens as a form of control (checks and balances) against the government. When described in mathematical calculations, individual (citizen) criticism (represented by the positive integer "1") of the government if added (represented by the addition symbol "+") with the cornering or attacking actions of neo-feudalistic buzzers (represented by the negative integer "-1") against individual government critics, then the result (represented by the equation symbol "=") is zero ("0")—$1 + (-1) = 0$. The integer 1 represents the position of a fellow individual (citizen).

What if it turns out that these neo-feudalistic buzzers represent the government? This question is difficult to answer. Until this article was written, there was no official statement from the government that such neo-feudalistic buzzers were part of the government. After all, the government has an official spokesperson who can socialize and respond to individual criticism (citizens) as a form of transparency. In other words, neo-feudalistic buzzers are unnecessary because they will create the impression that the government cannot communicate with individuals (citizens) in two directions.

Conclusions

This article examines the phenomenon of "buzzers" in contemporary Indonesian politics, investigating their profound implications for free speech in a democratic republic like Indonesia. Referred to as "neo-feudalistic buzzers", these actors are described as a means of social control, manipulating public opinion and limiting free speech. This study highlights how the thing that began as a marketing strategy has evolved into a powerful political propaganda tool, particularly in intimidating government critics and fostering an atmosphere of fear among the public.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in its exploration of how digital platforms and social media can be wielded to undermine public discourse and consolidate political power, echoing dynamics reminiscent of feudalistic systems. By introducing the concept of neo-feudalistic buzzers, the article expands scholarly discourse on contemporary politics of citizenship studies, adding nuance to existing theories of citizenship studies. Moreover, it underscores the critical need for regulatory frameworks to curb the misuse of digital platforms, protect democratic values, and ensure the vitality of public discourse in Indonesia.

The article calls for future research to adopt a blended approach of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to comprehensively assess the impact of neo-feudalistic buzzers on freedom of speech. That includes exploring variations across different geographical and cultural contexts and evaluating the efficacy of diverse regulatory strategies. Such efforts are crucial for advancing academic understanding and informing policy decisions aimed at preserving democratic principles and promoting a robust civic environment in an increasingly digitalized world.

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