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The Influence of Money Politics on the Implementation of Democracy in East Aceh: A Qualitative Analysis of Its Impact on Local Political Processes

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ABSTRACT: Money politics remains a serious issue in the implementation of local democracy, including in East Aceh Regency. Money politics not only violates electoral legal provisions but also affects the quality of participation and fairness in political processes. This study aims to analyze the practice of money politics and its impact on the implementation of democracy in East Aceh. The research employs a qualitative approach, with data collected through interviews, observation, and documentation studies. The findings indicate that money politics is carried out in various forms, including the distribution of cash, goods, and certain promises, involving candidates, campaign teams, and local intermediaries. These practices influence the orientation of political participation, shift voters' rational considerations, and create inequality in political competition. Moreover, money politics contributes to a decline in public trust in democratic processes and political institutions. This study concludes that money politics has a negative impact on the quality of democratic implementation in East Aceh and requires sustained control efforts through strengthened electoral oversight and enhanced political awareness among the public.
KEYWORDS: Vote Buying, Local Democracy, Electoral Processes, Political Participation, East Aceh.

I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy constitutes one of the fundamental principles in the organization of state life, positioning the people as the ultimate holders of sovereignty. In a democratic state, general elections are understood as the primary mechanism through which citizens may freely, honestly, and fairly express their political will. Through elections, the public is afforded the opportunity to determine the direction of public policy and to select representatives and leaders deemed capable of advancing collective interests. Accordingly, the quality of democracy is largely determined by how electoral processes are conducted and the extent to which the values of justice, freedom, and equality are genuinely realized in political practice.(Su'adah & Royhan, 2024)

Nevertheless, in the political reality of various regions in Indonesia, the implementation of democracy frequently encounters serious challenges. One persistent issue recurring in every electoral cycle is the practice of money politics. Money politics refers to the act of providing

money, goods, or other forms of material benefit to voters with the intention of influencing their political choices. This practice not only undermines the principle of free choice but also has the potential to erode the very meaning of democracy itself, as the people's votes no longer stem from rational consideration and political awareness, but rather from short-term material incentives.(Bunda et al., 2025)

Money politics has become a phenomenon that is difficult to separate from the dynamics of electoral politics in Indonesia, both at the national and local levels. Although various laws and regulations explicitly prohibit such practices, in reality money politics continues to occur and is even increasingly regarded as a commonplace aspect of political contestation. In many instances, it is no longer perceived as an ethical or legal violation, but rather as part of a political strategy to secure voter support. This condition indicates the existence of fundamental problems in the implementation of democracy, particularly with regard to public political awareness and the effectiveness of electoral law enforcement.

In the context of local democracy, the practice of money politics has more complex implications. At the local level, relationships between candidates and voters are often personal in nature, shaped by social proximity, kinship ties, and power structures embedded within society. Such conditions render money politics more readily accepted and more difficult to expose, as it often takes place covertly and is shielded by certain social norms. Consequently, local political processes that should serve as arenas for democratic learning instead risk producing unhealthy patterns of power relations.

East Aceh represents a particularly compelling region for examination in the context of money politics and the implementation of local democracy. As an area with distinctive historical, social, and cultural characteristics, East Aceh exhibits political dynamics that cannot necessarily be equated with those of other regions.(Januru, n.d.) The community in East Aceh is characterized by strong social bonds, the dominant role of local elites, and historical experiences that shape perspectives on power and politics. Under such conditions, elections are not merely understood as formal mechanisms for selecting leaders, but also as arenas of social interaction imbued with interests and negotiation.

The practice of money politics in East Aceh cannot be separated from the socio-economic conditions of the community. A segment of the population continues to face economic constraints, causing the distribution of money or goods prior to elections to be perceived as assistance deserving acceptance, rather than as an attempt to influence political choices. Such perceptions blur the boundary between social assistance and money politics. In this situation, voters are often placed in a vulnerable position, forced to navigate between

economic necessity on the one hand and their political rights on the other.

The impact of money politics on the implementation of democracy in East Aceh can be observed from several dimensions. First, money politics affects the quality of political participation. Although voter turnout in elections may be relatively high, such participation does not necessarily reflect conscious and critical political engagement. Voters who base their choices on material incentives tend not to consider the vision, mission, or competence of the candidates. As a result, elections lose their function as a means of producing qualified leadership.(Ramadhani, 2025)

Second, money politics undermines fairness in political competition. Candidates or political groups with greater financial resources enjoy a higher likelihood of winning elections compared to those relying primarily on ideas and policy programs. This condition generates inequality in political contestation, whereby electoral success is no longer determined by capability and integrity, but by economic power. In the long term, this may hinder the emergence of local leaders who are genuinely committed to the public interest.

Third, the practice of money politics also affects public trust in the democratic process. When elections are perceived as transactional events, public skepticism toward electoral outcomes and the institutions responsible for administering them increases. Declining public trust may lead to political apathy, wherein citizens feel that their participation yields no meaningful change. Such a situation clearly contradicts the objectives of democracy, which emphasize active citizen engagement in political life.(Rahawarin, 2022)

Despite various efforts undertaken to prevent and address money politics, the results have remained suboptimal. Electoral supervision at the local level faces numerous obstacles, ranging from limited resources to low levels of public participation in reporting violations. Moreover, money politics is often difficult to prove legally, as it is conducted covertly and involves unwritten agreements between providers and recipients. This condition creates the impression that prohibitions against money politics are merely formalistic, lacking strong practical enforcement.

A number of previous studies have examined money politics in the context of Indonesian elections from legal, political, and sociological perspectives. However, many of these studies remain general in nature and have not sufficiently explored the experiences and perceptions of communities at the local level. In fact, understanding how communities interpret and respond to money politics is crucial for assessing its impact on democracy. Without a nuanced understanding of local contexts, efforts to combat money politics risk being ineffective or misdirected.

Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that money politics constitutes a serious problem affecting the implementation of democracy in East Aceh. It is not merely an issue of electoral law violations, but also involves political awareness, fairness in competition, and public trust in democratic processes. Therefore, an in-depth study is required to understand how money politics operates within local political processes and how its impacts are experienced by the community.

This research is important in providing a clearer depiction of the influence of money politics on the implementation of democracy in East Aceh. Employing a qualitative approach, the study seeks to explore community perspectives and experiences related to money politics and to analyze its implications for the quality of local political processes. The findings are expected to contribute academically to the development of local democracy studies, while also serving as a reference for policymakers and stakeholders in formulating more effective and context-sensitive strategies to prevent money politics in East Aceh

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with the objective of gaining an in-depth understanding of the influence of money politics practices on the implementation of democracy in East Aceh. The qualitative approach is chosen because the study is not oriented toward numerical measurement or statistical causal relationships, but rather toward exploring the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of research subjects regarding the phenomenon of money politics within local political processes. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to describe social realities as they are experienced and understood by the community, particularly in the context of the administration of general elections in East Aceh.(Iqbal et al., 2025)

The type of research conducted is descriptive research, focusing on the presentation and analysis of the phenomenon of money politics in the practice of local democracy. Descriptive research enables the researcher to systematically explain how money politics operates, identify the actors involved, and examine how such practices influence the political behavior of the community. Thus, this study not only describes the existence of money politics but also analyzes its impact on the quality of political participation and the democratic process at the local level.

The research location is determined to be East Aceh Regency, based on the consideration that this region exhibits distinctive local political dynamics relevant to the focus of the study. East Aceh is selected due to its high level of political contestation in each electoral cycle, as well as its social and economic characteristics that may influence the practice of money politics. The research is conducted within a specific time frame aligned with the

stages of the most recent election, ensuring that the data collected reflect the actual conditions of democratic implementation in the region.

Research subjects are selected purposively by identifying informants who are considered to possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic. Informants in this study include voters, community leaders, traditional leaders, village officials, and individuals involved in or knowledgeable about the electoral process at the local level. The selection of informants takes into account variations in social and economic backgrounds, as well as roles within the community, in order to obtain diverse perspectives on money politics practices and their impact on local democracy.

Data collection techniques consist of in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews serve as the primary technique for exploring informants' views, experiences, and assessments of money politics practices. The interviews are conducted using a semi-structured format with open-ended guiding questions, allowing informants the flexibility to express their opinions and experiences in detail. Through these interviews, the researcher seeks to capture how the community interprets money politics and how such practices influence their political choices.

Field observations are conducted to complement interview data through direct observation of social and political conditions at the research site. These observations include monitoring political interactions at the village level, the atmosphere preceding elections, and forms of political activity related to voter mobilization efforts. By conducting observations, the researcher gains a more comprehensive understanding of the social context in which money politics occurs and is able to identify patterns of political behavior that may not be fully revealed through interviews alone.

Document analysis is employed to obtain supporting data relevant to the study. The documents examined include electoral laws and regulations, election supervision reports, mass media coverage, and other official documents related to the conduct of elections in East Aceh. This documentation serves to strengthen the analysis and provide a normative framework for discussing money politics practices and their impact on local democracy.

Data analysis is conducted in stages beginning from the data collection process. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation are first classified according to research themes, such as forms of money politics practices, reasons for public acceptance or rejection of money politics, and its impact on political participation and trust. Subsequently, the data are analyzed by interpreting the meanings of informants' statements and experiences and relating them to the social and political context of East Aceh.

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher maintains consistency and rigor by comparing data from multiple

sources. This comparison is conducted to minimize bias and ensure that the research findings accurately reflect actual conditions. Where differences in perspectives among informants arise, these differences are analyzed as part of the social dynamics that illustrate the complexity of money politics practices at the local level.

Data validity is ensured through several measures, including rechecking information with informants, extending the duration of field observations, and comparing interview findings with documentary data. These measures are undertaken to enhance the credibility of the research findings and to ensure that the interpretations made by the researcher are supported by adequate evidence.

By employing the research methods outlined above, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive depiction of the influence of money politics on the implementation of democracy in East Aceh. This methodological approach enables the researcher to understand money politics not only as a violation of electoral law, but also as a social practice that has tangible effects on local political processes and the quality of democracy.

III. RESULT & DISCUSSION

A. The Practice of Money Politics in Local Political Processes in East Aceh

The practice of money politics in local political processes in East Aceh is a phenomenon that cannot be separated from the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the local community. In the context of general elections, money politics does not always manifest in overt and explicit forms; rather, it frequently operates through subtle and covert mechanisms. The provision of money, goods, or certain forms of assistance to voters is often framed with socially acceptable justifications, making it difficult to distinguish between money politics and ordinary acts of social concern. This condition renders money politics relatively difficult to identify and prove, although its presence is clearly perceived by the community.

Based on field findings, the practice of money politics in East Aceh generally occurs in several recurring forms. The most common form is the direct distribution of cash to voters prior to election day. Such funds are typically channeled through intermediaries, such as campaign teams or local community figures, with amounts adjusted to the economic conditions of the voters.(Muklir & SH, 2025) In addition to cash, money politics is also practiced through the distribution of basic necessities, including rice, cooking oil, sugar, or household goods. This form of distribution is often considered safer by political actors, as it can be framed as social assistance or an expression of concern for the community.

Furthermore, money politics also takes the form of development assistance or promises of access to certain programs. For instance, candidates or

their teams may promise the construction of village roads, assistance for farmer groups, or easier access to employment opportunities for voters' family members. Although these promises are not always accompanied by direct monetary transfers, they are commonly understood by the community as part of a political transaction that anticipates electoral support in return. In practice, such forms of money politics are often more difficult to distinguish from conventional campaign activities, as the boundary between political promises and material inducements becomes blurred.

The actors involved in money politics in East Aceh are not limited to candidates for local executive or legislative offices. Campaign teams play a crucial role in mediating the relationship between candidates and voters. These teams generally consist of individuals with social influence at the local level, such as traditional leaders, religious figures, or non-structural village officials. Their presence facilitates the distribution of money or goods due to the emotional closeness and trust they enjoy within the community. In many cases, voters feel more comfortable accepting such provisions from individuals they know personally rather than directly from the candidates themselves.

The involvement of community leaders in money politics demonstrates that this phenomenon does not operate in isolation but is embedded within existing social structures. Local elites often function as agents who provide social legitimacy to these practices. When a respected community figure conveys that assistance from a particular candidate is appropriate to accept, community members are less likely to question the underlying political intentions. This illustrates how social authority can shape public acceptance of money politics.

The timing of money politics in East Aceh also follows a discernible pattern. Such practices tend to intensify as election day approaches, particularly during the so-called "cooling-off period." During this phase, formal campaign oversight decreases, while efforts to mobilize voter support become more intensive. The distribution of money or goods is conducted discreetly, often at night or through small, informal gatherings that attract little public attention. This pattern indicates that political actors are aware of legal prohibitions against money politics, yet continue to seek opportunities to circumvent them.(Heryanto, 2019)

Public perceptions of money politics in East Aceh vary considerably and are shaped by individuals' socio-economic backgrounds. Some community members regard money politics as a normal and unavoidable aspect of elections. This perception emerges from repeated experiences in electoral contests in which nearly all candidates engage in similar practices. Under such circumstances, voters may feel that refusing money politics would place them at a disadvantage, as other

candidates are likely to offer comparable inducements.

For some voters, money politics is understood as a form of "entitlement" that can be accepted without creating a moral obligation. Voters may receive money or goods while still casting their ballots according to personal preferences. This perspective reflects an attempt to separate material acceptance from political choice, although in practice such separation is not always consistent. In many cases, the acceptance of money politics continues to influence voters' attitudes and electoral tendencies, even if this influence is not consciously acknowledged.(Abdullah Muzakar, n.d.)

Conversely, there are also segments of the community who recognize that money politics undermines democratic values but feel they lack sufficient power to reject it. Economic vulnerability is a major factor placing voters in a dilemma. Under conditions of urgent economic need, offers of money or goods prior to elections become difficult to refuse. This situation demonstrates that money politics is not merely a matter of political awareness, but is also deeply connected to the socio-economic conditions of the community.

The practice of money politics in East Aceh further reveals an imbalance of power relations between candidates and voters. Candidates or their campaign teams occupy a stronger position due to their access to financial resources, while voters remain in a comparatively weaker position. This imbalance creates circumstances in which voters tend to comply with prevailing practices and accept what is offered, without sufficient space to reflect on the long-term implications of their political choices. In this context, money politics functions as an instrument for reinforcing certain forms of political dominance at the local level.

The persistence of money politics is also influenced by weak oversight mechanisms and low levels of public reporting of violations. Although electoral supervisory bodies have been established down to the village level, their effectiveness remains constrained by various challenges. Community members are often reluctant to report money politics due to concerns over social repercussions, such as conflict with neighbors or pressure from influential actors. Moreover, the complexity of proving money politics legally leads many to believe that reporting violations will not yield meaningful outcomes.

In practice, money politics frequently operates through informal and unwritten agreements that are difficult to substantiate legally. The absence of written evidence or witnesses willing to testify means that cases of money politics rarely result in firm legal sanctions. This condition reinforces the perception that money politics can be conducted relatively safely, provided it is carried out cautiously and through appropriate intermediaries. Such perceptions encourage political actors to

repeatedly engage in these practices in successive electoral contests.

From the perspective of local political processes, money politics in East Aceh not only shapes the relationship between candidates and voters but also structures patterns of political competition. Electoral contests increasingly become arenas for competing financial resources, where success is determined not solely by ideas and policy programs, but also by the ability to reach voters through material inducements. As a result, public deliberation on substantive issues—such as regional development and public service delivery—becomes increasingly marginalized.

Money politics also affects how communities perceive political campaigns. Campaigns are no longer understood primarily as platforms for articulating visions and missions, but rather as occasions for receiving material benefits from candidates. This perception shifts voter orientation from rational evaluation toward pragmatic considerations. In the long term, such conditions risk weakening a healthy culture of political discourse and hindering the development of critical political awareness among citizens.(Moekahar, 2021)

In sum, the practice of money politics in local political processes in East Aceh is a complex phenomenon involving multiple actors and intersecting interests. Money politics is not merely a violation of electoral regulations, but also a social practice rooted in power relations, economic conditions, and local political culture. Understanding this practice is essential as a foundation for assessing its impact on democratic governance and for formulating more context-sensitive and effective strategies to improve democratic processes at the local level

B. The Impact of Money Politics on the Quality of Democratic Implementation in East Aceh

The practice of money politics not only influences individual political choices but also generates broader consequences for the quality of democratic implementation, particularly at the local level such as in East Aceh. Democracy, which should function as a space for the free and rational expression of popular will, undergoes a shift in meaning when political preferences are shaped through material transactions. In this context, money politics cannot be understood merely as a violation of electoral regulations, but rather as a factor that fundamentally affects how democracy is practiced and perceived by society.

One of the primary impacts of money politics is the transformation of the orientation of political participation. National data indicate that money politics continues to exert a significant influence on voter behavior. A survey conducted by Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) in 2023 revealed that approximately 44 percent of respondents considered money

politics to be a normal practice, while 11 percent explicitly stated that their political choices could be influenced by the provision of money or goods. These figures suggest that although not all voters are willing to openly acknowledge the influence of money politics on their decisions, societal tolerance toward such practices remains relatively high.

These survey findings are relevant for understanding conditions in East Aceh. Based on field interviews, many voters stated that receiving money or goods prior to elections is not perceived as unusual. Although some informants claimed that such acceptance did not determine their final choice, the practice nonetheless creates a transactional electoral environment. Political participation under these circumstances tends to be formalistic, characterized by voter turnout on election day, but not accompanied by critical engagement in assessing candidates' programs and capacities.

Money politics also affects voter rationality. In an ideal democratic system, voters are expected to make decisions based on considerations such as policy programs, track records, and the vision of political leaders. However, when material incentives become a dominant factor, such considerations are often marginalized. A survey conducted by Indikator Politik Indonesia prior to the 2024 General Election showed that approximately 35 percent of respondents admitted to having received offers of money or goods from electoral participants, and some of them associated this acceptance with a tendency to support certain candidates. These findings reinforce qualitative evidence that money politics has the potential to undermine the rational foundations of political decision-making.

Another significant consequence of money politics is the decline in fairness within political competition. Money politics creates unequal opportunities between candidates who possess substantial financial resources and those who rely primarily on ideas, programs, and grassroots engagement. This condition directly affects electoral outcomes, as competition no longer revolves around policy proposals and leadership capacity, but rather around the ability to distribute material incentives. In the context of East Aceh, this is evident in the tendency for candidates with strong economic backgrounds to more effectively reach voters at the village level through extensive campaign networks.

Data from the Election Vulnerability Index (Indeks Kerawanan Pemilu/IKP) published by the Indonesian Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) also indicate that money politics consistently emerges as a major vulnerability factor in elections. In the 2019 and 2024 Election Vulnerability Index, money politics was categorized as a high-risk factor in several regions, including Aceh Province. Although the IKP does not provide detailed figures at the district level, reports from the Aceh Provincial

Bawaslu note that allegations of money politics remain among the most prevalent findings in electoral supervision. This indicates that money politics is not a sporadic phenomenon, but one that recurs across successive electoral cycles.

In addition to influencing participation and electoral fairness, money politics also affects public trust in democracy and electoral institutions. When elections are perceived as transactional processes, the legitimacy of electoral outcomes is weakened in the eyes of the public. Surveys conducted by Indikator Politik Indonesia show that voters who perceive money politics as widespread tend to exhibit lower levels of trust in election results and political institutions. This condition may lead to political apathy, in which citizens believe that their participation will not result in meaningful change.

These impacts can be summarized more concisely through the following data presentation.

Table 1. National Data on Money Politics and Voter Behavior

No	Data Source	Main Findings
1	SMRC (2023)	44% of respondents consider money politics normal; 11% state their choices can be influenced by money politics
2	Indikator Politik Indonesia (2024)	Approximately 35% of respondents admit to having received offers of money or goods from electoral participants
3	Bawaslu RI – IKP 2019 & 2024	Money politics identified as a major vulnerability factor in elections across various regions
4	Indikator Politik Indonesia	Perceptions of widespread money politics correlate with declining trust in election outcomes

Source: SMRC (2023); Indikator Politik Indonesia (2024); Bawaslu RI.

Although these data are national in scope, field findings in East Aceh demonstrate similar tendencies. Money politics shapes how communities perceive democracy, not as a process for selecting the most capable leaders, but rather as an opportunity to obtain short-term material benefits. This perception reduces public demands for accountability from elected officials. Voters who feel they have already "received something" during elections are less likely to seriously demand the fulfillment of political promises after the election period ends.(Suryana, 2022)

In the long term, the practice of money politics risks creating a detrimental cycle for local democracy.

Candidates who secure electoral victory through money politics tend to prioritize the recovery of political capital, either through policy decisions or other forms of power practices. Consequently, public policies are not fully oriented toward the broader public interest, but rather toward the interests of specific groups. This condition weakens the function of democracy as a mechanism for oversight and control of political power.

Thus, the impact of money politics on the quality of democratic implementation in East Aceh is not limited to the electoral stage, but extends into post-election governance processes. Money politics alters the meaning of participation, undermines voter rationality, creates inequality in political competition, and diminishes public trust in democracy. These findings underscore that efforts to address money politics are a crucial prerequisite for improving the quality of local democracy and ensuring that elections genuinely serve as instruments for the exercise of popular sovereignty.

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C. CONCLUSION

Based on the qualitative analysis of money politics practices in the local political process in East Aceh, this study concludes that money politics remains a persistent and recurring phenomenon in every electoral contest. These practices manifest in various forms, including the distribution of cash, basic necessities, specific forms of assistance, as well as promises of access to programs and resources. Money politics is not only carried out directly by candidates but also mediated through intermediaries such as campaign teams and local community leaders, making it difficult to separate from the social relations embedded at the local level.

The findings indicate that money politics significantly influences the way communities participate in elections. Political participation tends to be formalistic and pragmatic, wherein voter turnout at polling stations is not necessarily accompanied by rational consideration of candidates' visions, missions, and capacities. Money politics encourages a shift in voter orientation from programmatic evaluation toward short-term material considerations. This condition weakens the quality of political participation as a fundamental element of democratic practice.

Furthermore, money politics adversely affects fairness in political competition. Candidates with substantial financial resources possess greater opportunities to win elections compared to those who rely primarily on ideas and track records. This situation creates inequality in political competition and narrows the space for the emergence of leaders selected based on competence and integrity. In the context of East Aceh, this dynamic contributes to the formation of political contestation patterns that prioritize financial capital over leadership quality.

Money politics also undermines public trust in democracy and political institutions. The perception that

elections are dominated by material transactions diminishes the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and weakens public confidence in democratic processes. When elections are viewed as arenas of interest exchange, democracy's function as a mechanism for expressing popular sovereignty and exercising oversight over political power becomes suboptimal.

In conclusion, money politics has a negative impact on the quality of democratic implementation in East Aceh. These effects are not limited to the electoral phase but extend into the post-election governance process. Therefore, sustained efforts to curb money politics are essential, including strengthening public political awareness, enhancing the effectiveness of electoral oversight, and enforcing the law firmly and consistently. Without such measures, local democracy will continue to operate under the shadow of transactional practices that erode the values of justice and participation that form the foundation of democracy.

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