



## Money Politics as a Threat to the Integrity of Indonesian Democracy

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the practice of money politics as a threat to the integrity of Indonesian democracy by using a descriptive qualitative approach. The data in this study was obtained from various secondary sources, including official documents, reports of survey institutions, scientific journals, and laws and regulations related to elections in Indonesia. The data collection method was carried out through a literature review, while the data analysis used a descriptive-analytical approach to explore the causative factors, forms of money politics practices, and their impact on the democratic system in Indonesia. The results of the study show that money politics contributes to low leadership quality, decreases public political participation, worsens political polarization, and strengthens the culture of corruption in government. To address this problem, a comprehensive strategy is needed, including firmer law enforcement, improved political education for the public, and reform of the electoral system and campaign financing. It is evident that collective efforts from the government, the community, and non-governmental organizations are needed to ensure the sustainability of a clean and integrity democracy in Indonesia.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Money politics has become a serious threat to the integrity of democracy in Indonesia. This practice not only harms the principle of honest and fair elections but also contributes to the low quality of leadership and increasing political polarization in society. Data from the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) shows that in the 2019 election, more than 50% of voters in several regions admitted to being involved in money politics, both as recipients and givers. This phenomenon indicates that money politics has become part of a political culture that is difficult to eradicate.[1] In practice, money politics is carried out through various means, ranging from giving cash and distributing necessities to political promises that lead to interest transactions. If left unsupervised and unchecked, money politics will continue to undermine the democratic system and undermine the legitimacy of the government that is formed.[2]

Under ideal conditions, democracy should run on the principles of transparency, justice, and rational political participation. Voters should make their choice based on the competence, track record, and vision and mission of the prospective leader, not because of material rewards. [3]. However, the reality on the ground shows that money politics is still the main strategy in winning elections. Candidates with greater financial resources tend to have a higher chance of getting votes, thus undermining the essence of elections as a mechanism for realizing people's sovereignty.[4]

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Some previous studies have discussed the impact of money politics on democratic systems. Studies conducted by Aspinall and Sukmajati (2016) show that money politics does not only occur on a national scale but is also rampant at the local level, especially in regional head elections and legislative elections.[5] Another study by Umam (2021) highlights how money politics reinforces political oligarchy, where elected leaders are more likely to prioritize personal and group interests over public interests. [6]Meanwhile, a study from Myanmar (2018) found that money politics contributes to the high level of corruption among public officials, as they feel the need to "return the investment" that has been spent during the campaign.[7] Although various studies have discussed money politics from various perspectives, there are still few studies that offer concrete and comprehensive solutions to systematically eradicate this practice.

This research presents a new perspective by examining money politics not only as a practice that violates democratic ethics but also as a threat to long-term political stability. In contrast to previous studies that tended to focus on the impact of money politics on election results, this study will highlight how money politics affects public participation in politics and how its prevention mechanisms can be applied effectively. [8]The approach used in this study focuses on identifying the factors that cause money politics, its forms of practice, and strategies that can be applied to strengthen the integrity of elections in Indonesia. Thus, this research not only provides theoretical insights but also offers policy recommendations that can be implemented by various related parties.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the impact of money politics on the integrity of Indonesian democracy and formulate strategies that can be applied to minimize this practice. In particular, this study seeks to answer two main questions: first, how does the politics of money affect the quality of leadership, the political participation of the people, and the stability of democracy? Second, what steps can be taken by the government, election agencies, civil society, and voters themselves to overcome money politics? By understanding the root of the problem and the impact it causes, this research is expected to contribute to strengthening a more transparent and accountable electoral system. The importance of this research lies not only in the urgency of eradicating money politics but also in its impact on the sustainability of Indonesian democracy. [9] If left unchecked, money politics can exacerbate a crisis of trust in democracy, which will ultimately increase political apathy among the public. Therefore, this study emphasizes that the eradication of money politics is not only the responsibility of the government but also requires the active role of the community in building a more critical political awareness based on integrity values.

Furthermore, the study also argues that money politics cannot be seen as a stand-alone problem, but as part of a broader political ecosystem. Money politics is often rooted in economic inequality, low political literacy in society, and weak law enforcement systems. Therefore, the solution to overcome money politics must involve a multidimensional approach that includes aspects of legal, education, and electoral policy reform. Through this research, it is hoped that strategies can be found that are not only repressive in the form of law enforcement but also preventive through political education and community empowerment. By considering these various factors, this research is expected to contribute to efforts to build a cleaner, fairer, and more integrity democratic system. This study is not only for academics and policymakers but also for the wider public who want to understand the impact of money politics and how they can play an active role in preventing the practice. Through a combination of theoretical analysis and practical recommendations, this research offers a holistic approach to eradicating money politics and maintaining the quality of democracy in Indonesia.

## 2. LITERATURE STUDY

### Money Politics

Money politics is the practice of giving or receiving material rewards in the form of cash, goods, or certain promises to influence political decisions, especially in elections. Money politics is often used by candidates or political parties to gain voter support, either directly or through intermediaries.[10] This practice occurs not only in developing countries but also in established democracies. Money politics hurts the principles of democracy because it replaces competition based on ideas and policies with competition based on financial power. In many cases, money politics includes not only giving money to voters, but also

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other forms such as illegal campaign funding, political office promises, and influence on certain policies after a candidate is elected. This phenomenon often occurs at various levels of elections, ranging from legislative elections, and regional head elections, to presidential elections. Money politics reinforces the culture of transactional politics, where voters no longer consider the candidate's leadership qualities or work programs but rather prioritize the short-term gains they derive from the electoral process.[11]

### Integrity

Integrity is a basic principle in a democratic system that includes honesty, transparency, and accountability in every aspect of government, including the conduct of elections. In the context of elections, integrity means that the election process is carried out fairly, free from pressure, and reflects the will of the people in a real way. [12] Election integrity includes several key aspects, such as the neutrality of election organizers, transparency in campaign financing, and law enforcement against fraudulent practices, including money politics. When the integrity of the election is maintained, the election results can be trusted and accepted by the wider community. On the other hand, if the integrity of elections is disturbed by the practice of money politics, then the legitimacy of the government that is formed becomes weak.[13] This can lead to public distrust of the political system, increase political apathy, and worsen corruption in government. Therefore, maintaining integrity in elections is not only important to ensure fair elections, but also to ensure political stability and the effectiveness of the government formed after the election.

### Democracy in Indonesia

Indonesia is a democracy with a direct election system that gives the people the right to choose their leaders freely. Since the 1998 reforms, the democratic system in Indonesia has continued to develop with various mechanisms to increase public participation and transparency in the electoral process. [14] However, despite progress in the electoral system, Indonesia still faces various challenges in maintaining the quality of democracy, one of which is the rampant practice of money politics. Democracy in Indonesia is still vulnerable to the influence of economic forces in politics.[15] Money politics is often used as a tool to gain power, both at the legislative and executive levels. This causes democracy in Indonesia to not fully run according to its ideal principles because the election process is still often colored by unhealthy political transactions.[16] To strengthen democracy, continuous efforts are needed to reform the electoral system, increase public political awareness, and enforce stricter laws against the practice of money politics. By understanding the concepts of money politics, integrity, and the conditions of democracy in Indonesia, we can see how money politics is a serious threat to the quality of democracy and how efforts can be made to improve the integrity of elections in Indonesia.[17]

## 3. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the phenomenon of money politics and its impact on the integrity of democracy in Indonesia. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of various aspects of money politics, including causative factors, practice patterns, and implications for the electoral system. [18] With this method, the study not only describes the phenomenon of money politics but also analyzes how the practice affects the legitimacy of government and public trust in democracy.

The data in this study is sourced from secondary literature, including academic journals, reports from survey institutions, official government documents, as well as laws related to elections and money politics. In addition, this research refers to reports from independent institutions such as Transparency International Indonesia, the General Election Commission (KPU), and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu). Data collection was carried out through library research with a focus on data from the last five years to ensure relevance to the current political conditions in Indonesia.

The data analysis in this study was carried out with a qualitative descriptive approach, using content analysis to identify patterns and relationships between money politics and election integrity. The data collected was analyzed to understand the impact of money politics on people's political participation, leadership quality, and democratic sustainability. Through this method, this

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research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding and offer solutions that can be applied to minimize money politics in the Indonesian democratic system.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Money Politics and Its Impact on Democracy

Money politics has become a phenomenon that is rooted in the electoral system in Indonesia, both at the national and regional levels. This practice occurs in various forms, ranging from giving cash, and distributing necessities, to political promises in the form of development projects or certain positions.[19] The results show that money politics is not just a campaign strategy, but has become a key instrument for candidates to gain support, especially in areas with low levels of political literacy and weak economic conditions. As a result, voters are more likely to vote based on short-term material gains rather than considering the qualities and competencies of potential leaders.[20]

The impact of money politics on democracy is significant, especially in terms of lowering the quality of leadership. Candidates elected through the practice of money politics often do not have a clear vision for the interests of the people but are more oriented towards the interests of the individual or group that has supported them financially.[21] This leads to ineffective governance, where the resulting policies are more pragmatic and benefit certain groups than oriented towards the public interest at large. In addition, money politics also exacerbates corruption in the government sector, as officials who have spent large sums of money during the campaign will look for ways to return their investments through abuse of power and nepotistic practices.[22]

#### Money Politics and Community Political Participation

The results of the study also show that money politics harms people's political participation. In an ideal democratic system, voters should participate actively based on a high level of political understanding and awareness.[23] However, money politics has turned political participation into a mere economic transaction, where voters tend to see elections as an opportunity for personal gain. This leads to a reduction in public involvement in substantial political discussions, as well as weakening their awareness of the importance of electing leaders who are competent and with integrity.[24]

In addition, the practice of money politics also gives rise to political apathy, especially when people feel that elections no longer reflect their aspirations, but are only a place for capital competition for candidates who have greater financial power.[25] This attitude further worsens the condition of democracy, because people no longer believe that their votes have a real impact in determining the direction of government. As a result, the level of trust in democratic institutions decreases, which in the long run can threaten political stability and state governance.[26]

#### Money Politics and Social Polarization

In addition to influencing political participation, money politics also contributes to increasing social polarization in society. In many cases, the practice of money politics triggers tensions between different groups of candidate supporters, especially when the distribution of financial or material incentives is uneven.[27] This political competition based on economic transactions often creates horizontal conflicts in society, where voters no longer judge candidates based on policies and track records, but on how much benefit they receive during the campaign.[24]

The social polarization caused by money politics is also exacerbated by voters' dissatisfaction that they feel that the candidates they vote for are not fulfilling the political promises that have been given beforehand. This creates a cycle of distrust of the political system, which in the long run can weaken the legitimacy of the government and exacerbate social fragmentation in society. Therefore, money politics not only undermines the democratic process itself but also has an impact on social cohesion and national stability.[28]

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### Efforts to Overcome Money Politics in Elections

To overcome the negative impact of money politics, a more comprehensive approach is needed that includes reforming the electoral system, improving people's political literacy, and strengthening law enforcement against fraudulent practices in elections. One of the main steps that can be taken is to tighten regulations related to campaign financing, including increasing transparency in reporting campaign funds and strengthening supervision of political party funding sources. [29]

In addition, political education to the public needs to be improved so that they have a better understanding of the importance of voting based on the candidate's competencies and work programs, not just material gains. Political education programs involving local communities, academics, and mass media can help raise public awareness of the dangers of money politics and its impact on the quality of leadership and governance. With the increase in political awareness, it is hoped that the public can be more critical in rejecting money politics and more active in guarding the integrity of elections.[30]

### 5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that money politics poses a significant threat to Indonesia's democratic system. This unethical practice not only diminishes the quality of leadership by allowing unqualified candidates to gain power through financial influence but also perpetuates systemic corruption within governmental institutions. Moreover, money politics weakens the role of citizens in the democratic process, as financial incentives often override genuine political participation, leading to a disengaged and manipulated electorate. Additionally, the prevalence of money politics exacerbates social polarization by fostering a culture of transactional politics rather than one based on policy debates and public interest. To combat this issue, a comprehensive and collaborative approach is required, involving strict law enforcement, voter education, transparency in campaign financing, and active participation from civil society organizations. Only through these measures can Indonesia foster a more transparent, fair, and integrity-driven electoral system, ensuring that democracy truly represents the will of the people rather than the interests of the financially powerful elite.

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