



Money Politics in the 2021 Election of the Head of Mekarwangi Village, Saketi District, Pandeglang Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the practice of money politics in the 2021 Mekarwangi Village Head Election (Pilkades), Saketi District, Pandeglang Regency, as well as identify the underlying factors. Money politics is a phenomenon that continues to appear in every democratic contest at the local level and is often considered commonplace. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through interviews, documentation, and literature studies. The results of the study show that the practice of money politics is carried out in a planned and systematic manner by the village head candidate and his successful team through the distribution of cash, basic necessities, and personal goods ahead of election day. The main factors behind the occurrence of this practice include the low economic condition of the community, the lack of political education, and the culture of money politics that has taken root in the community. This practice shows the weakness of democratic awareness and makes people pragmatic in making their political choices. Money politics not only undermines the essence of democracy, but also lowers the quality of leadership at the village level. Therefore, it is necessary to increase political education and strict supervision so that the implementation of the upcoming Regional Elections will run more cleanly and democratically.

Keywords: *Money Politics, Village Head Election, Local Democracy, Political Participation*

I. Introduction

Democracy is one of the main pillars in the Indonesian system of government that guarantees the right of the people to participate in determining the country's leaders and policy direction. One of the tangible forms of democratic practice is general elections that are held from the national level to the village level. The election of the Village Head (Pilkades) is a direct reflection of the application of democratic principles at the grassroots level. However, in its implementation, the Regional Elections are often colored by various irregularities, one of which is the practice of *money politics*, which threatens the purity of democratic values itself.

Money politics has become a deep-rooted phenomenon in the Indonesian political system, and village head elections are no exception. Money politics is defined as giving or promising in the form of money, goods, or other forms of material to voters with the aim of influencing their political choices. This practice is contrary to the principles of honesty, justice, and equality in democracy. As stated by Goodpaster Gary (2001), money politics is part of the act of corruption in the electoral process. On the other hand, this practice also creates a patron-client relationship between the prospective village head and the community, where power and personal interests are the main motives.

The phenomenon of money politics actually occurred in the 2021 Mekarwangi Village Head Election, Saketi District, Pandeglang Regency. Based on the results of initial research and interviews with residents, it was found that some village head candidates practiced money politics openly or covertly to gain public support. These forms of practice include the distribution of money, basic necessities, and promises to provide

assistance to the community if the candidate is elected. This condition shows that money politics is still considered commonplace in the election process at the village level.

Some of the factors that affect the emergence of money politics in Mekarwangi Village include the low economic condition of the community, the lack of political education, and a permissive political culture against the practice of bribery in elections. Economic factors are the main cause because people tend to see the momentum of elections as an opportunity to gain material benefits. Meanwhile, the low level of political education causes people to lack understanding of the bad impact of money politics on the quality of village leadership. Furthermore, the entrenched culture of patronage and clientelism strengthens the transactional relationship between candidates and voters.

The practice of money politics not only has an impact on the election process, but also has long-term implications for the implementation of village government. Village heads who are elected through the practice of money politics tend to prioritize personal interests and their support groups as a form of retribution. As a result, governance becomes non-transparent, prone to corruption, and far from the values of social justice. This directly undermines the local democratic order which should be a means for the community to channel their aspirations honestly and responsibly.

Based on this reality, this research is important to understand in depth how money politics plays out in the Mekarwangi Regional Elections and what factors encourage this practice. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this study seeks to provide a real picture of the dynamics of money politics at the village level as a reflection of the condition of local democracy. The results of the research are expected to be an academic contribution to the development of government science studies and become the basis for efforts to improve the village head election system in the future.

Thus, this study not only examines the phenomenon of money politics as a political aberration, but also highlights the roots of the social, economic, and cultural problems that accompany it. It is hoped that the results of this research can be a reflection material for the government, election organizers, and the community to build a healthier political awareness and uphold the values of clean and fair democracy at the local level.

Literature Review

Literature review is a theoretical foundation used to scientifically understand the phenomenon of money politics in the election of village heads. In this study, a literature review was prepared by referring to theories of voter behavior, the concept of money politics, and the political relationship between patronage and clientelism which are often the basis for the emergence of transactional political practices at the local level.

Voter Behavior Study

In the context of electoral politics, voter behavior is one of the aspects that is very important to understand how people's political decisions are formed. According to voter behavior theory, there are three main approaches that explain the pattern of people's behavior in elections, namely sociological, psychological, and rational approaches (Campbell, 1960).

The sociological approach emphasizes that the decision to choose a person is influenced by social factors such as the environment in which they live, economic status, employment, religion, and social affiliation. In the context of Mekarwangi Village, the social closeness between the village head candidate and the community is an important factor that influences political choices, especially in rural communities that still uphold the values of kinship and kinship.

The psychological approach looks at voting behavior as a result of the emotional bond between voters and candidates. Voters tend to choose candidates who are considered to have personal closeness or the same moral and social values. In this condition, money politics is often used to strengthen the pseudo-emotional relationship between candidates and voters through the provision of material or symbolic assistance.

While the rational approach assumes that voters act calculatively by considering profits and losses. Voters choose candidates who are considered to provide real benefits, both in the form of policies and direct

benefits. This explains why people with weak economic conditions are more susceptible to the practice of money politics, because the decision to vote is based on pragmatic, not ideological considerations.

The Concept of Money Politics

Money *politics* is a phenomenon that has long been part of political dynamics in Indonesia. According to Lomulus Johny (2007), money politics is the act of giving a certain amount of money or goods to individuals or groups with the aim of gaining certain political support. Goodpaster Gary (2001) called money politics a form of political corruption that occurs in the election process.

In the election of village heads, money politics is often carried out through various methods such as the distribution of cash (vote buying), the provision of personal goods, to the promise of giving projects and positions after the candidate is elected. Edward Aspinall (2014) calls this kind of practice part of patronage politics, in which candidates use economic resources to buy people's loyalty and votes.

In Indonesia, money politics in the Pilkades is often considered as "ordinary" or even "reasonable". This is because people have become accustomed to seeing elections as a transactional event, not as a substantive democratic process. The massive practice of money politics also creates long-term effects in the form of weakening of the political morality of the community and declining the quality of village government.

The Politics of Patronage and Clientelism

The phenomenon of money politics cannot be separated from two important concepts, namely patronage and clientelism. According to Sunyoto Usman (2004), patronage is the practice of distributing resources by political elites to individuals or groups in exchange for political support. Meanwhile, Wolfgang Muno (2017) explained clientelism as a reciprocal relationship between patrons (leaders) and clients (followers) that is unequal, where patrons have the power to influence the political choices of clients.

In the context of the Mekarwangi Regional Elections, the village head candidate acts as a patron who has economic and social resources, while the community plays the role of a client who provides political support in exchange for assistance or money received. This relationship creates a political dependence that recurs each election period.

The politics of patronage and clientelism have become forms of transactional politics that hinder substantial democracy. Power is gained not through leadership capabilities or vision, but the ability of the economy to buy votes. As a result, elected village heads are more likely to prioritize their support groups over the public interest.

The Impact of Money Politics on Local Democracy

Theoretically, local democracy aims to encourage community participation in public decision-making. However, the practice of money politics actually erodes these values. According to Mahfud MD (2012), money politics is a serious threat to the sustainability of democracy because it can damage the integrity of elections and hinder the emergence of qualified leaders.

Money politics has three main impacts. First, it lowers political legitimacy, because the public no longer votes based on rational assessments of the candidate's competence. Second, it strengthens the economic oligarchy, where power can only be achieved by those who have large capital. Third, lowering the quality of governance, because village heads who are elected through money politics tend to view positions as an investment that must be returned through corruption or budget abuse.

Relevance of Studies to Research

Based on the above theories, this study places money politics as a manifestation of voter behavior that is economically rational but morally and politically weak. The study of voter behavior, patronage politics, and clientelism was used to explain how and why the practice of money politics continues to be repeated in the Mekarwangi Regional Elections.

By combining the three theoretical frameworks, this study seeks to uncover the relationship between economic, social, and cultural factors that shape the practice of money politics at the village level. This study also strengthens the argument that local democracy can only run healthy if the community has a critical political awareness and a firm legal system in cracking down on money political violations.

II. Research Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method that aims to describe in depth the phenomenon of money politics in the 2021 Mekarwangi Village Head Election, Sageti District, Pandeglang Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social and political realities based on the views and direct experiences of informants. This research does not focus on numbers or statistical data, but on the meaning and context of social actions carried out by political actors at the village level.

Approaches and Types of Research

A descriptive qualitative approach is used to delineate the phenomenon of money politics as it is without manipulation. According to Moleong (2018), qualitative research aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perception, motivation, and actions holistically. Researchers are the main instrument in data collection, analysis, and interpretation, so direct involvement in the field is important to obtain objective data.

Descriptive research is intended to explain and describe the practice of money politics in a systematic, factual, and accurate manner. Thus, the results of this study are expected to be able to provide a comprehensive understanding of the forms, patterns, and factors that cause money politics at the village level.

Research Location and Time

The research was carried out in Mekarwangi Village, Saketi District, Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province. This location was chosen because it is one of the regions that held simultaneous village head elections in 2021, and has a strong indication of the practice of money politics. In addition, the heterogeneous socio-economic conditions of the community make Mekarwangi Village relevant as a research location.

The research period lasted for six months, starting from the preparation stage, data collection, analysis to the preparation of reports. The researcher directly conducted observations and interviews with several community leaders and parties involved in the Pilkades process.

Data Source

Research data sources consist of two types, namely primary data and secondary data.

Primary data was obtained directly from the results of in-depth interviews with key informants who had involvement or knowledge about the Pilkades process in Mekarwangi Village. The informants include candidates for village heads, members of the election committee, village officials, community leaders, and voters.

Secondary data was obtained through official documents such as village archives, local government reports, mass media news, and the results of previous research relevant to the topics of money politics and local democracy.

These two types of data are used to complement and reinforce research findings in order to produce valid and credible conclusions.

Informant Determination Techniques

The technique of determining informants uses *the snowball sampling method*, which is the determination of a sample on a rolling basis from one informant to another based on recommendations and information linkage. This technique was chosen because the phenomenon of money politics is sensitive and not everyone

is willing to give open information. With this approach, researchers can reach a wider and more relevant source of information without generating social resistance.

Data Collection Techniques

There are three main techniques in data collection, namely:

- 1) In-depth *interview*: is conducted in a semi-structured manner so that informants have the flexibility to provide information. The questions were adjusted to the role and involvement of informants in the Pilkades process.
- 2) Field observation: the researcher conducts direct observation of the social situation, community dynamics, and campaign activities of the village head candidate. Observation is carried out in a participatory manner so that researchers understand the social context in the field.
- 3) Documentation study: in the form of collection of archives, activity records, photos, news, and other supporting data related to the village head election process.

These three techniques are carried out simultaneously and continuously to obtain a complete picture of the phenomenon being studied.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out interactively by following the stages according to Miles and Huberman (1992), namely:

- Data reduction, which is the process of simplifying, sorting, and focusing data that is relevant to the research objective.
- Data presentation is in the form of organized information in the form of narratives, tables, and interview excerpts to facilitate interpretation.
- Drawing conclusions is carried out by interpreting the meaning of the data that has been presented to find the patterns, relationships, and main themes of the research.

The entire analysis process is carried out from the time the data is collected to the final stage of report preparation, so that the research results remain consistent and verified.

Data Validity Test

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the researchers used triangulation techniques which include:

- Triangulation of sources, by comparing information from various different informants.
- Triangulation techniques, through the use of more than one data collection method such as interviews, observations, and documentation.
- Time triangulation, by collecting data at different times to ensure the consistency of informant answers.

Through this technique, researchers can minimize bias and ensure that the data obtained truly reflects the social realities at hand.

The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, researchers play the role of the main instrument that determines the success of the research. The researcher functions as a data collector, observer, as well as an analyst who interacts directly with the research subject. Therefore, researchers must maintain objectivity, build trust with informants, and maintain research ethics by not revealing the identity of informants without permission.

With this research method, it is hoped that the results of the research will be able to provide an in-depth overview of the practice of money politics in the Mekarwangi Regional Elections, as well as reveal the social,

economic, and cultural factors that affect it. This approach not only illustrates the facts, but also interprets the meaning behind the phenomenon of money politics as a form of challenge to the quality of democracy at the local level.

III. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of research obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation conducted in Mekarwangi Village, Sageti District, Pandeglang Regency. The focus of the discussion was directed to two main things, namely the factors that encourage the practice of money politics and the forms of money politics practice in the 2021 Mekarwangi Village Head Election (Pilkades).

Factors That Encourage Money Politics

The results of the study show that the practice of money politics in the Mekarwangi Regional Elections is influenced by three main factors, namely economic factors, political education, and community culture.

a. Economic Factors

Most of the people of Mekarwangi Village work as farmers and daily laborers with low income levels. Weak economic conditions make the community easily influenced by material rewards from prospective village heads. For people who have difficulty meeting basic needs, money or basic food assistance from candidates is considered a form of attention. In interviews, some residents admitted to receiving money ahead of the election out of "urgent need", not out of political awareness. This shows that poverty is one of the main entrances to the practice of money politics at the village level.

b. Political Education Factors

Low political education causes some people to not understand that receiving money or goods in exchange for choice is a form of violation of democracy. For them, this kind of practice is considered natural and part of the electoral tradition. The lack of socialization and political education from the village government and related institutions exacerbates this condition. As a result, people do not have the critical awareness to reject the practice of money politics and tend to be pragmatic.

c. Political Culture Factors

The culture of patronage and clientelism has been firmly rooted in Mekarwangi Village. The relationship between the prospective village head (patron) and the community (client) is based on the exchange of services and loyalty. The community considers that the assistance provided by the village head candidate must be reciprocated with voice support. This attitude gives birth to a transactional political culture that is difficult to eliminate, because it has been going on for generations and has become part of social practices in rural communities.

Forms of Money Politics Practice

The results of interviews with informants show that money politics in the Mekarwangi Regional Elections is carried out in various systematic ways. These forms of practice can be classified into three categories: the distribution of money, the giving of goods, and political promises.

a. Cash Distribution (*Vote Buying*)

The most common form of money politics is the distribution of cash to voters ahead of election day. The village head candidate and his team successfully distributed money between Rp30,000 and Rp50,000 per person. The distribution was carried out secretly with a "dawn raid" system, in which teams successfully visited people's homes on the night before the election. Some residents stated that the giveaway was considered a "sustenance" that had nothing to do with politics, even though the purpose was clearly to influence choices.

b. Provision of Goods and Basic Necessities

In addition to cash, another form of money politics is the distribution of basic necessities such as rice, oil, and sugar. The items were given to voters as a "token of gratitude" for their support. In some cases, candidates also share campaign attributes such as clothes, veils, or calendars accompanied by messages to vote for a specific candidate. This kind of giving pattern creates the impression that the village head candidate cares about the community, even though it is essentially a strategy to buy votes.

c. Departmental Promises and Rewards

Another practice found was to give promises to successful teams and supporters to obtain a certain position in the village government if the candidate wins. Promises in the form of placement as village officials, honorary workers, or village project workers are often used to build political loyalty. Thus, the successful team plays an important role as a mediator between candidates and the community in the process of distributing money and goods.

The Impact of Money Politics on Local Democracy

The practice of money politics in the Mekarwangi Regional Elections has a significant negative impact on the quality of local democracy. First, there is a distortion of democratic values, where people choose not based on the capacity and integrity of candidates, but because of material rewards. Second, the declining legitimacy of the village government, because the elected village head is considered to win because of the power of money, not because of public trust. Third, the emergence of the politics of revenge, in which the elected village head feels that he has a moral obligation to return his political capital through policies that benefit certain groups.

Another impact is the weakening of public trust in the election process itself. When money politics is considered a natural thing, people lose political idealism and make democracy a momentary profit. In the long run, this can perpetuate a cycle of transactional politics that is difficult to break.

Analysis and Reflection

Based on the theory of voter behavior and patronage politics that have been put forward in the literature review, the phenomenon of money politics in Mekarwangi Village reflects a combination of rational and cultural behavior. Rationally, people consider the short-term economic benefits of receiving money or goods. However, culturally, these actions are influenced by social traditions and the value of reciprocity inherent in the lives of rural communities.

This phenomenon shows that the politics of money is not just a moral problem of the individual, but also part of a complex social structure. To overcome this, a sustainable political education strategy, transparency in the implementation of elections, and strict law enforcement against election violations are needed.

Thus, money politics in the Mekarwangi Regional Elections is a reflection that democracy at the local level is still facing great challenges. Democracy can only run healthily if people have a critical political consciousness, are free from material influences, and put common interests above personal interests.

These findings affirm the importance of joint efforts between the government, educational institutions, and the community to build a more dignified and integrity political culture for the realization of clean and democratic village governance.

IV. Conclusions and Suggestions

Conclusion

Based on the results of research on money politics in the 2021 Mekarwangi Village Head Election, Sageti District, Pandeglang Regency, it can be concluded that the practice of money politics is still a real and institutionalized phenomenon in the democratic process at the local level. Money politics does not only occur sporadically, but is carried out in a planned and systematic manner by the village head candidate through the

support of his successful team. The form of practice includes the distribution of cash, the provision of basic necessities, and the promise of positions for supporters. The main goal is to influence people's choices to vote for certain candidates.

There are three main factors behind the practice of money politics in Mekarwangi Village, namely economic factors, political education, and community culture. Economic factors are the strongest drivers because most people have low income levels, so giving money or goods is considered valuable assistance. The political education factor is also very influential, because the lack of public understanding of democratic values makes them view money politics as a natural thing. Meanwhile, the cultural factors of patronage and clientelism also strengthen the pattern of transactional relationships between the village head candidate and the community.

The impact of the practice of money politics is very significant on the quality of local democracy. Money politics lowers the legitimacy of government, weakens the political morality of the community, and changes the orientation of democracy from ideal values to pragmatic. Village heads who are elected through the practice of money politics tend to prioritize the interests of certain groups as a form of political retribution. This condition hinders the birth of village leaders who are honest, fair, and oriented towards the welfare of the community.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several strategic steps can be taken to minimize the practice of money politics in the election of village heads.

First, it is necessary to improve public political education through continuous socialization programs involving local governments, academics, and community leaders. Political education must instill awareness of the importance of voting based on integrity and leadership vision, not for material rewards.

Second, law enforcement must be strengthened. Election supervisory officials at the village to district levels need to be given adequate authority and resources to crack down on money politics violations firmly. Strict law will provide a deterrent effect for perpetrators and strengthen public trust in the democratic system.

Third, transparency and accountability in the implementation of the Regional Elections need to be improved. The election committee must ensure that each stage of the election is open and monitored by various parties, including civil society and local media.

Fourth, it is necessary to strengthen the role of religious leaders and youth as agents of social change. They can be the pioneers of the anti-money politics movement through a moral and social approach that is closer to society.

Through these measures, it is hoped that the practice of money politics can be suppressed and local democracy can develop in a healthy, honest, and integrity manner for the realization of transparent and fair village governance.

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