

DEMOCRACY *GAMPÔNG* AS AN INITIATIVE TO ELLIMINATE MONEY POLITICS IN ACEH SINGKIL

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ABSTRACT. Money politics conducted by political actors has inadvertently harmed the order of democratic civilization, which seeks to produce exemplary leaders with competence and morality. The practice of money politics is still prevalent in the local community of Singkil Regency, where it is considered pervasive. This is evident in every political contest for the *Pileg* and *Pilkada*, where candidates distribute cash, goods, and basic necessities. Observations on the ground indicate that there is a strong suspicion that the people there are extremely pragmatic in their political choices; they do not see the potential figures of the candidates but rather candidates who can give money to the people they favor. For the analysis of the aforementioned issues, a qualitative method involving observation, interviews, and documentation was employed. The study's conclusion demonstrates that money politics is a form of buying and selling votes, which is one of the issues that must be addressed in general elections. However, state election supervisors in the regions, such as Panwaslih, continue to have limited manpower, time, and resources to oversee the practice of money politics during elections. As a result, the establishment of *Gampông Politik* as a socio-political institution is an important strategy for eradicating money politics by instilling democratic values, providing political education, and enforcing the law.

Keywords: The *Gampông* of Democracy; Alternative Solutions; Money Politics

ABSTRAK. Politik uang yang dilakukan oleh aktor-aktor politik secara tidak sengaja telah mencederai tatanan peradaban demokrasi yang berupaya melahirkan pemimpin-pemimpin teladan yang berkompeten dan bermoral. Praktik politik uang masih marak terjadi di masyarakat lokal Kabupaten Singkil yang dianggap merajalela. Hal ini terlihat dalam setiap kontes politik *Pileg* dan *Pilkada*, di mana para kandidat membagikan uang tunai, barang, dan sembako. Pengamatan di lapangan menunjukkan adanya dugaan kuat bahwa masyarakat di sana sangat pragmatis dalam pilihan politiknya; mereka tidak melihat calon-calon yang berpotensi, melainkan calon yang bisa memberikan uang kepada orang-orang yang disukainya. Untuk menganalisis permasalahan tersebut di atas, digunakan metode kualitatif yang meliputi observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Kesimpulan studi menunjukkan bahwa politik uang merupakan salah satu bentuk jual beli suara yang merupakan salah satu isu yang harus dibenahi dalam pemilihan umum. Namun, pengawas pemilu negara di daerah, seperti Panwaslih, masih memiliki keterbatasan tenaga, waktu, dan sumber daya untuk mengawasi praktik politik uang selama pemilu. Oleh karena itu, pembentukan *Gampông Politik* sebagai lembaga sosial politik menjadi strategi penting untuk memberantas politik uang dengan menanamkan nilai-nilai demokrasi, memberikan pendidikan politik, dan penegakan hukum.

Kata kunci: *Gampông* Demokrasi; Solusi Alternatif Penyelesaian; Money Politic

INTRODUCTION

Since the fall of the New Order regime, Indonesia has been governed by democracy. Even though openness is beginning to emerge, democracy's maturation has yet to reach its full potential (Mahpudin, 2020). Democracy, which is synonymous with general elections such as presidential elections, general elections, and legislative elections, is always characterized by systemic money politics (Bayo & Santoso, 2019; Noor, Siregar, Hanafi, & Sepriwasa, 2021; Utami, Herinanto, Gumanti, & Purwanto, 2020). Money politics occurs because the public is uninterested in supporting fair elections, weak law enforcement, and political party ties (Gomez, 2012; Pye, 1997; Reuter, 2015) (Noor, 2021). Even though openness has begun to work in

Indonesia since the end of the New Order regime, the maturation of democracy has not yet reached its full potential. Money politics is thought to influence voter preferences, benefiting candidates who employ this strategy electorally through the practice of buying votes from voters (money politic) (Chandra & Ghafur, 2020; Hilman, 2018; Okhtariza, 2019; Saputra, 2018)

Money politics is a term that encompasses all forms of electoral corruption, such as vote-buying and electoral fraud (Sihidi, Khanifah, & Romadhan, 2019). According to Law No. 10/2016, candidates or campaign teams are prohibited from promising or giving money or other materials to influence the election process or the voting decisions of voters. The practice of money politics in general elections is a result of the close connection between the economy and power (Pugliese & Insisa, 2017).

Power is defined as the use of resources to gain the obedience of others, and economic resources are the most potent type of resource that can regulate and influence political decisions so that they favor the group's interests. These business owners ultimately participate in practical politics, such as general elections (Ekawati, 2019). The objective is to safeguard personal assets so that it is unaffected by the shifting policies of the government (Hutabarat, 2017).

Direct elections are frequently viewed as expensive because candidates must have substantial financial resources to win. A form of "political cost," as termed by politicians, is the purchase of voter votes (money politics) (Arianto, 2016; Sumadinata, 2016). The 2017 LSI survey revealed that 47.8% of voters were influenced by money politics, and the 2017 Indo Barometer survey revealed that 45.6% of respondents believed that money remained a significant factor in voters' political decisions. There were 537 instances of money politics during the campaign period of the 2009 legislative elections, 95 during the quiet period, and 57 during the voting period. In the 2014 legislative elections, the distribution of money and goods accounted for 313 instances of election violations, according to the Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW). According to *Bawaslu*, the number of money-politics case findings decreased in 2019, with only 36 cases decided by the court. This is because not everyone in the public reported money-related political problems, so the Election Supervisory Board (*Bawaslu*) missed a lot of money-related political problems.

Money politics is the cause of political capitalization, which causes political costs to be costly and filled with the political interests of specific groups (Campbell, 2012). Therefore, money politics is considered a shortcut by political actors to attain power (Nail, 2019; Thohir, 2017). Consequently, when an incumbent seeks re-election, the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD) is utilized for the benefit of the general election. Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) in 2015 discovered 504 cases involving the use of office and power facilities, 115 cases involving the establishment of populist programs to attract voters' sympathy, and 117 cases involving bureaucrats or officials engaging in practical politics during their tenure.

The formation of populist programs, such as the distribution of 3-kilogram gas cylinders as a form of the kerosene-to-gas conversion program, the distribution of basic necessities, the provision of hand tractors and fertilizers for farmers, and the provision of boat engines for fishermen, results in the formation of forms of money politics (Putra, 2019). Even though the regional government owns and the state budget funds these populist programs, incumbent

candidates use them privately for the benefit of their political campaigns (Fadli, Tobarasi, & Rusba, 2018; Yusra & Darmawan, 2017).

In essence, incumbent candidates' practice of money politics undermines the implementation of democracy because they have abused their authority and used state funds for personal gain (Ristian, 2016), and encouraging bureaucrats to take a side in political matters (Harahap, 2018). This practice is troubling and dangerous for the development of democracy (Pulungan, 2019), as capital has influenced Indonesian democracy in the form of general elections (Fajriyah & Sadaedema, 2019; Mayrudin, Husna, & Yuliaty, 2020).

Politics involving money is not limited to the national level. It also occurs in smaller communities, such as districts and villages (Alfian, 2019; Chandra & Ghafur, 2020). The widespread practice of money politics in Aceh Singkil prior to and during legislative elections is evident in the distribution of cash, food, and other goods to voters. Azwar Ramnur, the chairman of the Aceh Singkil Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslih), stated that when money politics were utilized, individuals tended to be pragmatic and accept "something" that was offered rather than focusing on the qualifications of the candidate. One community member in the Pulau Banyak District, who requested anonymity, stated that one vote in the 2019 election was worth between Rp. 300,000, - and Rp 500,000, -.

To combat the practice of money politics, Panwaslih employs the following strategies: (1) nighttime patrols; (2) increased community awareness and participation; (3) law enforcement advocacy of the dangers of money politics to democracy; and (4) the establishment of a "*Democratic Gampông*." The purpose of establishing the Democracy Gampông is to raise the level of political education among the populace so that they can produce ideal leaders. This study seeks to map the problem of money politics through the design of a democracy Gampông and to inquire how money politics can be resolved through the establishment of a democracy Gampông.

Elections are one of the characteristics of governmental democracy in Indonesia (Sulistiyo & Suwartiningsih, 2018). Democracy exists when elections are fair and honest, candidates can compete for votes, and the public can vote (Huntington, 1995). However, the Indonesian elections were colored by money politics that occurred at various levels, starting from presidential, legislative, and regional head elections to buying and selling votes from voters (money politics) (Qodir, 2014). One of the causes of money politics is the lack of public awareness that elections are the most effective vehicle for upholding people's sovereignty (Barattero, 2018). Rahmatunnisa (2017) adds to the

factors of rampant money politics in elections, namely: (1) Economic factors due to poverty (Ananingsih, 2016; Bataona & Bajari, 2017; Haliim, 2018; Pratiwi, 2018; Reuter, 2015); (2) Mental factors, because to gain power, all means are justified (Okhtariza, 2019; Paskarina, 2017); (3) Law Enforcement Factors, due to low supervision (Nawawi, Amir, & Muljan, 2019; Simatupang & Subekhan, 2018; Yeni, 2020); (4) Social interaction factors, because the behavior of political elites and society is very transactional (Darmawan, 2015; Erlita, 2015); (5) The religious factor, allegedly giving money in elections as a fortune that cannot be refused (Sidha & Witjaksono, 2018; Susanto, 2018; Umar, 2018) and: (6) The understanding factor of democracy, because elections in Indonesia are very transactional, where political parties or vehicles must be paid with money with a nominal value that is quite large (Muhtadi, 2013; Sulaeman, 2017).

Furthermore, to reduce the rise of money politics in elections, Bawaslu has made innovations or new breakthroughs, one of which is by establishing a Democracy Gampong. Democracy Gampong is a participatory monitoring program to oversee the democratic process. The purpose of its formation One of the objectives of forming the Democracy Gampong is to provide political education for the community and minimize the practice of money politics. In addition, BAWASLU or PANWASLIH in the context of Aceh, fighting the practice of money politics, Panwaslih uses the following strategies: (1) night patrols; (2) increasing public awareness and participation; (3) advocating for law enforcement regarding the dangers of money politics against democracy; and (4) the establishment of a “Democratic Gampong”. Democracy Village is designed with community involvement in mind. Of course, this is a significant capital in dealing with a very complex election process. The hope is that Gampong Democracy can improve the level of political education of the people so that they are able to produce ideal leaders., 2017)

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METHOD

In this study, the authors employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach (Sugiyono, 2009) to provide a summary of the events and generate descriptive data in the form of written text. Using a qualitative method, researcher collect data in the form of field observations regarding democracy advocates and alternative solutions to money-politics settlement on Banyak Islands, Singkil Regency. Focus group discussions (FGD), interviews, and documentation were used as sources of data from the field. Furthermore, researchers obtained primary research data through observations and interviews with various groups at district city levels. Meanwhile, secondary data is gathered from various literatures, such as journals and books, that are deemed appropriate and capable of enriching the researcher’s understanding of the problem under investigation. The data was analyzed using a reduction-display-conclusion pattern, which was then applied to the obtained data. The point is that if the data collected is not relevant to the problem being studied, it will be reduced or eliminated, and the selected data will be aligned or displayed so that the data pattern eventually forms a good conclusion when drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Phenomenon of Money Politics in the District of Pulau Banyak, Aceh Singkil Regency

Money politics can be seen as part of political corruption because the ‘wrong’ people can win elections after distributing money to voters. This situation will lead to the formation of an unrepresentative and accountable government. The elected government has no obligation to be responsible or prioritize the interests of the voters (the people) because the voters’ votes have been bought and can encourage corruption in other fields. Interviews with people who are voters in the 2019 legislative elections in Aceh Singkil District show that if money politics can be eliminated, it can provide benefits for strengthening democracy by producing leaders who have the capacity, integrity and capability of candidates for regents and legislative candidates both at the regional level and at the DPR RI level.

Money politics in elections demonstrates that the public believes that money politics can be reduced if voters in Aceh Singkil are adequately educated about its dangers. No longer can candidates and success teams who nominate themselves “play dirty” or commit fraud. Therefore, we need an institution that can supervise money politics and educate the public. One example of a report related to this violation is the practice of money politics in the implementation of the 2017 Aceh Singkil Regent Election. In Aceh Singkil Regency, the practice of money politics is pervasive; perpetrators engage in these practices both directly and indirectly through the promise of social grants to society.

The Aceh Singkil Regency Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslih) is attempting to prevent money politics. Until now, the Aceh Singkil Panwaslih has not recorded an exact number of money politics. However, Panwaslih suspects that the phenomenon of violations is like an iceberg and is thriving in Aceh Singkil District. Thus, the Panwaslih collaborated with a variety of parties, including first-time voters who are vulnerable to money politics, village officials, the mass media, women activists, and members of the religious community, to help provide understanding about money politics.

According to voters, the practice of money politics occurs for a variety of cash and non-cash motives through the distribution of groceries, which are not given directly by candidates or their campaign teams but by community leaders who are trusted by candidates and their success teams. However, there are still many community leaders who engage in “money politics,” claiming that the money or food given to the poor is part of almsgiving and not intended to buy voters’ votes. This is the reason why, despite the existence and prevalence of money politics in Aceh Singkil, it is difficult for election supervisory bodies such as *Panwaslih* to uncover and prove that money politics have occurred.

Data collection on the number of cases of money politics in Aceh Singkil may be difficult due to the practice of money politics being carried out clandestinely rather than openly. Although, according to the informant, in some cases, this practice was openly carried out by distributing envelopes containing cash to voters at polling stations (TPS). As a result, even though there were people who knew about and witnessed the practice of money politics, those who were aware of it did not report it to Panwaslih. Furthermore, the provision of goods such as food prior to election day makes this practice difficult to prove. Furthermore, the lack of public awareness about reporting on money politics has made it difficult for Panwaslih to find evidence.

The Gampông of Democracy was founded to eliminate money politics in the Pulau Banyak District.

To achieve the essence of democracy, it is not sufficient to examine the outcome of the general election, but rather the degree to which the elected leader feels accountable for the “political promises” made to his constituents. To bolster democracy in Aceh Singkil’s political contests, a democratic political process must produce leaders with capacity, integrity, and capability. The process aims to prevent electoral fraud, including black campaigns, intimidation, and money politics. Regional and DPR-RI-level candidates for regents and legislative candidates engaged in money politics.

There are several ways to overcome the aforementioned problem of money politics, including political socialization and the establishment of a sociopolitical institution known as The Gampông of Democracy. Therefore, election organizers in Aceh Singkil, including KIP (KPU), *Panwaslih (Bawaslu)*, and community leaders, came to an agreement to form a democracy Gampông. The formation of the Democracy Gampông is beneficial for facilitating and supporting the general election. This was consistent with the majority of informant responses during the Forum Group Discussions (FGD). The resource person, a resident of the Pulau Banyak District, explained, “Gampông Demokrasi is the formation of the regional KIP to assist in the success of the general election, local election, and legislative election in Aceh Singkil.”

The establishment of Democracy Gampông had a positive effect and became a crucial tactic for election organizers in Pulau Banyak District and Aceh Singkil District to combat the rise of money politics. With the emergence of the Democracy Gampông, people’s awareness of the need to participate in politics grew, including the need to guard and supervise the general election process so that it does not stray outside the direct, general, free, and secret, as well as honest and fair, corridors of democracy.

People became more aware of the dangers of money politics after the establishment of Democracy Gampông, and they began to exercise their right to vote more honestly. Furthermore, the public now understands how money politics violates democratic principles, and this phenomenon has the potential to reduce election violations in Pulau Banyak, Aceh Singkil District.

As a strategy to eradicate money politics, The Gampông of Democracy has taken the following steps: (1) instilling democratic values; (2) promoting political education; and (3) enforcing the law. The first step is inculcating democratic values, i.e., instilling democratic values in society so that they

can bring about changes in political behavior while simultaneously creating space for toleration of any political differences that may arise among supporters. In the past, the inhabitants of the Pulau Banyak District did not comprehend the importance of democracy, which resulted in frequent violations preceding general elections. The chairman of the Panwaslih stated that black campaigning via anonymous letters frequently occurred during general election periods, sparking social conflict and disturbing the peace. On the other hand, money politics is also the most common violation, which is bad for democratic values like honesty and fairness. Nonetheless, since the formation and implementation of Democracy Gampông, particularly in relation to the inculcation of democratic values, the people of Pulau Banyak have been able to practice democratic values when dealing with various problems and political dynamics during both legislative and regional head elections. One aspect of practicing democracy is not being easily provoked by emotions, especially when the tension surrounding the general election is rising.

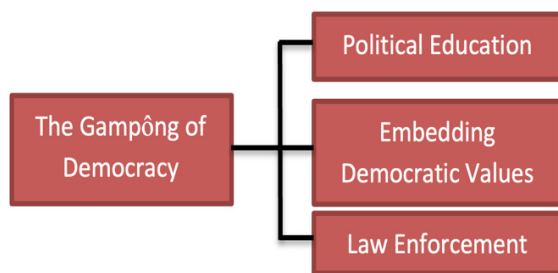


Figure 1. Democracy Gampông Scheme in Aceh Singkil.

The second step, political education, indicates that The Gampông of Democracy can become a place of education or political education for the people Aceh Singkil, because a great deal of political content and knowledge is provided to the community, such as how to increase political participation by understanding how to exercise the right to vote correctly. Previously, voters voted for candidates who made the most political promises or gave them the most money or goods (money politics). Finally, the elected leader is not trustworthy and does not run the government effectively. Not yet fulfilled are the promises made by the Regent of Aceh Singkil, Dulmusrid, regarding the settlement of ex-transmigration boundaries with the company PT Nafasindo, to resolve the flood problem, and to bring change to a smart, healthy, and prosperous Aceh Singkil. However, the majority of those interviewed stated that, now that The Gampông of Democracy has been established, they are more politically savvy and are no longer easily duped by the political interests of regional head candidates or legislative candidates seeking their votes.

The third step is enforcement of the law. Prior to the establishment of the Democracy Gampông, only the Aceh Singkil Regency Panwaslih, which had limited human resources, oversaw general election supervision. Consequently, there are numerous possibilities and indications of election fraud in the Aceh Singkil District, whether committed by candidates, Timses, or election organizers and not properly recorded. However, as a result of the establishment of the Democracy Gampông, the *Panwaslih* Aceh Singkil received assistance in the form of human resources in order to reduce general election fraud. One of the interviewees, Zazang, stated that law enforcement works effectively to prevent fraud, such as money politics, which is a violation of the law, in particular Law No. 7 of 2017, pertaining to elections.

The Democracy *Gampông* also engages in activities related to the suppression of election fraud, which can undermine democracy, such as vote bloat in the vote recapitulation process. The 2019 legislative elections in Aceh Singkil, in which the DPT received 192 votes in C1 but 302 votes in the sub-district recapitulation, are an example of vote-inflating that has been extensively discussed in online news articles. In addition, the number of votes cast for the DPR RI, DPRA, and DPRK differ. However, since the establishment of this Democracy Gampông, law enforcement has begun, although not optimally due to a lack of evidence suitable and acceptable to Panwaslih, as Democracy Gampông lacks the authority to take action against violations of the law during general elections. Irawan, one of the interviewed residents, stated:

“Democracy Gampông lacks the authority to take action and enforce the law, so when there is a violation of money-politics on the Banyak Islandss, there is insufficient evidence. Only the *Panwaslih* can perform this task”.

On the basis of the interview data, it can be concluded that, despite its limitations in terms of enforcement, the Democracy Gampông plays a significant role in the process of overseeing general elections, such as gathering evidence and preventing potential fraud due to money politics.

The Democracy Gampông consists of several components, such as (1) the village chief, (2) society, and (3) youth leaders. The village head is the highest-ranking leader in the village community, with significant responsibilities for village administration. Therefore, the village head has a significant impact on the village’s social, economic, and political life, including the democratic process. One of the processes of democratization in the village is ensuring that the general election process is conducted in a clean and

honest manner, free of fraud, such as the practice of money politics in Aceh Singkil. The establishment of the Democracy Gampông is supported by all village chiefs in Aceh Singkil; Darimi, one of the village chiefs, stated:

“We are confident in the existence of the Democracy Gampông. This is due to the fact that the Democracy Gampông Act enables village heads to combat money politics in general elections. Until recently, village leaders were commonly perceived as supporting particular candidates and groups”.

Secondly, community participation in a democracy is an important component in the formation of a democracy Gampông. Gampông is an important aspect of grassroots democracy implementation. According to interviews, 60% of the community strongly supports the formation of a democracy Gampông, 30% are enthusiastic, and 15% believe that there is no need for a democracy Gampông in Aceh Singkil because there is already a *Panwaslih* tasked with overseeing the general election. On the basis of these results, it can be concluded that the majority (90%) supports the existence of a Democracy Gampông to assist *Panwaslih* work and act as a volunteer to supervise the practice of money politics after receiving democracy education and training such as: (a) material on political and democratic education; (b) training on basic tasks and village democracy volunteers; (c) knowledge about the role of The Gampông of Democracy; and (d) comprehension of the function of democratic Gampông.

Thirdly, the involvement of youth leaders in the development and implementation of the Democracy Gampông in Aceh Singkil is essential for the successful implementation and prevention of money politics practices. Youth leaders have an extensive social network and are of a productive age to participate in monitoring the regional implementation of democracy. Suhardin, one of the residents of Aceh Singkil who resides in the Gosong Telaga Barat Village, stated:

“Youth is the future generation and an asset for the region; the involvement of youth in democratic Gampôngs certainly brings a better change to the political atmosphere on the Banyak Islands, which is more democratic without the practice of money politics in every regional head and legislative election.”

When the recruitment process was opened in Aceh Singkil, youth leaders demonstrated their involvement by registering to join the Democracy Gampông. This demonstrates that election organizations such

as *Panwaslih* are serious about recruiting *Gampông Demokrasi* volunteers to improve their human resource quality.

Since the establishment of the Democracy Gampông, democratic life has progressed smoothly despite the fact that it is largely dependent on the support of village chiefs, communities, and youth leaders in order to strengthen the oversight function of elections. This is evidenced by the decreasing frequency with which violations such as money politics in elections are discovered. However, Democracy Gampông faces challenges that must be addressed in the future, such as those pertaining to human resources, the budget for Democracy Gampông's operations, and the passage of time. The limited number of personnel working in the management of Democracy Gampông constitutes a challenge pertaining to human resources.

As a result, the The Gampông of Democracy is still overburdened by the numerous inputs and responses from the community. In addition, the lack of a budget has prevented socialization about the dangers of money politics, for example, from penetrating the social strata of every village. The community of Pulau Banyak District welcomes the existence of Democracy Gampông because it can promote an understanding of democratic values and their application in general elections, prevent the practice of money politics, and support law enforcement efforts during the general election process.

In addition, the duration of The Gampông of Democracy prior to the general election is relatively brief, so the process of instilling democratic values, political education, and law enforcement is not permanent (it is temporary). This short duration of working time prevents optimal absorption of knowledge derived from The Gampông of Democracy, including the dangers of money politics, so that it appears to have been formed based on momentum and is not sustainable.

CONCLUSION

Money politics in the form of buying and selling votes is one of the issues that must be resolved in general elections, according to the research. However, state election supervisors, such as the *Panwaslih* of Aceh Singkil, have limited manpower, time, and resources to oversee the practice of money politics during the general election. Consequently, the establishment of the *Gampông Politik* as a socio-political institution is a crucial strategy for eradicating money politics via measures such as instilling democratic values, providing political education, and enforcing the law. In addition, the *Gampông Politik* engages key members of society, such as village

chiefs, community members, and youth leaders, in supervising the democratization process in the village and preventing the practice of money politics in Aceh Singkil. During the time it was in place, the The Gampông of Democracy had the full support of the community and stopped “money politics” from happening during elections.

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