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Money Politics and Corruption Risks in Indonesian Village Elections: Examining Vote-Buying and Local Governance Integrity

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Abstract

Village elections provide an important mechanism for democratic participation at the grassroots level but may also create opportunities for vote-buying and informal political financing. The normalization of monetary exchanges during electoral processes can affect the legitimacy of village leadership and create expectations of reciprocal benefits after candidates assume office. This article examines the relationship between money politics in village elections and subsequent corruption risks in village governance. Using normative juridical and socio-legal analysis, the study evaluates village election regulation, campaign practices, community norms, and financial accountability. The article argues that vote-buying should be understood not merely as an electoral offense but also as a potential structural contributor to corruption because candidates may seek to recover campaign expenditures through control over village resources. The study proposes an integrated prevention framework combining electoral monitoring, transparent campaign financing, civic education, community reporting mechanisms, and stronger post-election financial oversight. The article concludes that combating village-level corruption requires addressing the political incentives that precede misuse of public resources. Strengthening democratic integrity at the village level can therefore serve as an important component of Indonesia's broader anti-corruption strategy.

[*Pemilihan desa menyediakan mekanisme penting untuk partisipasi demokratis di tingkat akar rumput, tetapi juga dapat menciptakan peluang untuk pembelian suara dan pembiayaan politik informal. Normalisasi pertukaran moneter selama proses pemilihan dapat memengaruhi legitimasi kepemimpinan desa dan menciptakan harapan akan manfaat timbal balik setelah kandidat menjabat. Artikel ini mengkaji hubungan antara politik uang dalam pemilihan desa dan risiko korupsi selanjutnya dalam tata kelola desa. Dengan menggunakan analisis yuridis normatif dan sosio-legal, studi ini mengevaluasi peraturan pemilihan desa, praktik kampanye, norma* *masyarakat, dan akuntabilitas keuangan. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa pembelian suara harus dipahami bukan hanya sebagai pelanggaran pemilu tetapi juga sebagai kontributor struktural potensial terhadap korupsi karena kandidat dapat berupaya untuk memulihkan pengeluaran kampanye melalui kendali atas sumber daya desa. Studi ini mengusulkan kerangka pencegahan terpadu yang menggabungkan pemantauan pemilu, pembiayaan kampanye yang transparan, pendidikan kewarganegaraan, mekanisme pelaporan masyarakat, dan pengawasan keuangan pasca-pemilu yang lebih kuat. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa memerangi korupsi tingkat desa membutuhkan penanganan insentif politik yang mendahului penyalahgunaan sumber daya publik. Oleh karena itu, penguatan integritas demokrasi di tingkat desa dapat menjadi komponen penting dari strategi anti-korupsi Indonesia yang lebih luas.*]

Keywords: Money politics, village elections, vote-buying, corruption prevention, Indonesia

Introduction

Village government occupies a distinctive position within Indonesia's post-Reform political architecture. The enactment of Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages substantially strengthened village autonomy by recognizing villages as self-governing communities with authority to administer local affairs and manage significant public resources. Subsequent amendments, including Law No. 3 of 2024, further adjusted the institutional framework of village governance. The reform was motivated partly by the expectation that decisions made closer to citizens would become more responsive, participatory, and socially accountable. Yet decentralization also changes the location of political and economic opportunities. When authority and fiscal resources move downward, opportunities for political competition and rent extraction may move downward as well. Antluv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan (2016) observe that the Village Law created important possibilities for more responsive village government while also leaving substantial governance risks. The central analytical problem is therefore not whether village autonomy is desirable, but whether democratic institutions at the village level possess sufficient safeguards to prevent electoral competition from becoming a gateway to clientelistic control over public resources.

Village head elections, or *pemilihan kepala desa* (Pilkades), provide an especially important setting for examining this problem because the political relationship between candidates and voters is unusually personal. Unlike larger elections in which political parties, ideological platforms, and national issues may mediate political competition, village elections occur within relatively dense social environments where candidates and voters frequently know one another personally. Family relationships, neighborhood networks, religious affiliations, economic dependencies, and social obligations can therefore influence electoral behavior. Aspinall and Rohman (2017), examining village head elections in Central Java, found that vote-buying was widespread and that wealthy candidates possessed important competitive advantages. Their analysis suggests that money politics is not merely an isolated electoral transaction but part of a broader brokerage system connecting candidates, villagers, local elites, and government resources. This is significant because the village head subsequently controls institutions and resources that may be used to maintain the political relationships developed during the campaign.

The concept of money politics requires analytical precision. Vote-buying generally refers to the provision of money, goods, services, or other material benefits intended to influence electoral behavior. However, not every electoral gift has identical political meaning. Nichter (2008) distinguishes vote-buying from turnout-buying, emphasizing that material incentives may be directed toward mobilizing supporters rather than monitoring actual vote choices. Nichter (2014) subsequently argues that vote-buying should be conceptualized carefully because electoral transactions vary in timing, targeting, expectations, and mechanisms of enforcement. In Indonesia, the distinction is particularly relevant because village candidates may distribute cash or goods through intermediaries without being able to observe individual ballots. The political value of such transactions may therefore derive from expectations of loyalty, social obligation, turnout, or reciprocal assistance rather than from literal verification of a voter’s ballot. This broader understanding helps explain why money politics can survive despite the secrecy of voting.

The Indonesian context also demonstrates that vote-buying is embedded in wider structures of patronage and clientelism. Allen (2015) finds that state resources and patterns of public expenditure can influence the development of clientelistic political relationships in Indonesia. Berenschot (2018) similarly demonstrates that Indonesian patronage democracy depends on networks of brokers and intermediaries who connect political candidates with voters and resources. Aspinall (2014) emphasizes the importance of brokers in translating political resources into electoral support. These findings suggest that money politics cannot be adequately understood as a simple bilateral exchange between candidate and voter. The transaction is frequently organized through social networks that determine who receives benefits, how benefits are distributed, and how political expectations are communicated. At the village level, such brokerage may involve neighborhood leaders, campaign teams, influential families, religious figures, community organizations, or local intermediaries.

The potential corruption implications emerge when electoral transactions create expectations of repayment. A candidate who spends substantial resources to secure office may subsequently face pressure to recover those expenditures. Such recovery does not necessarily take the form of criminal corruption; political expenditures may be absorbed as legitimate campaign costs. The risk becomes more serious when officeholders use public authority to generate private or political returns. Village budgets, procurement projects, development programs, employment opportunities, licensing decisions, and other administrative resources can become instruments through which political debts are repaid. This possibility creates an important temporal relationship: corruption risk after an election may be partially shaped by political financing before the election. In this sense, vote-buying should be analyzed as an upstream governance risk rather than simply as a discrete electoral offense. Widyawati (2018) similarly identifies village head elections as potential sites of corruption because electoral money politics can interact with subsequent village administration and financial authority.

The legal framework provides several relevant but fragmented safeguards. Law No. 6 of 2014 regulates village government and village head elections, while Minister of Home Affairs Regulation No. 112 of 2014 establishes detailed provisions concerning village head elections. The regulation remains part of the national framework governing Pilkades. Anti-corruption law is principally contained in Law No. 31 of 1999 as amended by Law No. 20 of 2001. Law No. 28 of 1999 establishes principles concerning clean state administration and the elimination of corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Law No. 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure creates an important transparency basis, while Law No. 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration provides principles relevant to the lawful exercise of public authority. The problem is that these legal instruments do not always address the complete chain connecting electoral financing, informal obligations, administrative discretion, and later financial misconduct.

This article therefore adopts a normative juridical and socio-legal approach that is incorporated into the analytical design of the introduction rather than separated into a standalone methodology section. The normative analysis examines Indonesian legislation and regulatory instruments governing villages, elections, public finance, transparency, administrative authority, and corruption. The socio-legal analysis engages empirical and theoretical scholarship concerning vote-buying, clientelism, patronage, rural political brokerage, village governance, financial accountability, and corruption prevention. The analysis is descriptive in mapping the relationship between electoral transactions and village governance, analytical in identifying institutional mechanisms through which vote-buying may generate corruption risks, and argumentative in proposing reforms that address electoral incentives rather than only post-election financial violations.

Previous Studies and Research Gap

The first body of literature establishes that vote-buying is a broader phenomenon of electoral clientelism rather than merely an exchange of cash for votes. Stokes (2005) demonstrates how machine politics may generate a form of "perverse accountability" in which politicians become responsive to brokers and targeted voters rather than to the broader public. Nichter (2008) complicates the conventional vote-buying model by showing that electoral payments may purchase turnout rather than actual vote choices. Hicken (2011) conceptualizes clientelism through contingent exchanges involving targeted benefits and political support. These studies provide a theoretical foundation for understanding Indonesian money politics, where the secrecy of the ballot does not necessarily eliminate the political value of material inducements. The relevant question is therefore not simply whether voters receive money, but what social and political expectations are produced by the transaction and how those expectations influence subsequent governance.

A second body of research focuses specifically on Indonesian electoral politics. Aspinall (2014) demonstrates the importance of electoral brokers, while Allen (2015) connects clientelistic politics with state resources and personal voting. Berenschot (2018) explains how patronage networks operate through brokers and political machines, while Fossati et al. (2020) show that clientelism forms part of the broader structure of Indonesian political representation. Djani and Vermonte (2023) further document the diverse motives, mechanisms, and patterns associated with vote-buying across several Indonesian provinces. These studies establish that money politics is deeply embedded within political networks rather than being reducible to individual voter greed or candidate misconduct. Nevertheless, most of this scholarship focuses on national, legislative, or regional elections, leaving the relationship between electoral transactions and subsequent village-level financial governance comparatively underdeveloped.

A third literature addresses village governance and corruption. Antlฺuv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan (2016) emphasize the transformative potential of the Village Law while recognizing institutional constraints. Ash-shidiqqi and Wibisono (2018) identify weak accountability and supervision as important factors in village fund corruption. Dwimawanti, Rahman, and Rahman (2019) emphasize managerial accountability in village financial administration. Sugiharti, Muttaqin, and Ramadhani (2021) find that supervision of village funds may remain weak because institutional relationships between village governments and village consultative bodies can be affected by political interests. More recent research demonstrates that transparency, participation, internal control, and accountability remain central to village corruption prevention. Putri (2024), for example, identifies internal control, accountability, transparency, and participation as critical dimensions of good village governance. Permatasari et al. (2024) use data from Indonesian villages to identify anomalies in village fund management and reporting systems.

The fourth body of literature directly connects village elections with patronage. Aspinall and Rohman (2017) show that money politics in village head elections can reinforce rural brokerage and provide competitive advantages to wealthy candidates. Agustino, Hikmawan, and Silas (2023) demonstrate that village heads may become political intermediaries whose control over public assistance and local networks creates reciprocal relationships with citizens and higher-level political actors. Hasan et al. (2023) examine money politics in village head elections and demonstrate its implications for voter participation, while Muksin and Ladin (2023) document community perceptions that material exchanges have become normalized in village elections. More recent research by Siliwangi et al. (2025) and Atthahara et al. (2025) shows that vote-buying, individual gifts, services, and project-based patronage continue to operate through village-level clientelistic networks.

Despite this substantial literature, a conceptual gap remains. Previous studies generally examine either money politics as an electoral phenomenon or corruption as a financial-governance phenomenon. Less attention is given to the causal and institutional bridge between the two. This article addresses that gap by conceptualizing vote-buying as an electoral investment that may alter the incentives of elected village heads after assuming office. The novelty lies in identifying a "political repayment pathway": campaign expenditure may generate informal obligations, which can increase pressure to control public resources, weaken impartial decision-making, and undermine community oversight. The contribution is consequently threefold. First, the article links electoral clientelism with village financial corruption prevention. Second, it proposes an integrated framework connecting pre-election transparency with post-election financial accountability. Third, it argues that anti-corruption institutions should monitor the political conditions preceding financial misconduct rather than treating corruption as an event beginning only when public money is misappropriated.

The Electoral Economy of Village Elections

Money politics in village elections should be interpreted within the economic structure of local political competition. A candidate does not distribute money randomly; material resources are allocated strategically to maximize political returns. The candidate may target influential families, neighborhood networks, community leaders, or voters considered electorally important. The objective may involve persuading undecided voters, mobilizing supporters, compensating brokers, or creating expectations of future assistance. This strategic character differentiates electoral money politics from ordinary charitable giving. Although the material benefit may appear small at the individual level, its aggregate cost can become substantial for candidates competing in densely populated villages. Aspinall and Rohman (2017) demonstrate that extensive vote-buying can make village head elections financially demanding and thereby privilege candidates possessing substantial wealth or access to broader political and business networks.

The economic consequences extend beyond the candidate. When electoral competition becomes financially intensive, village leadership may increasingly resemble an investment whose returns are expected after victory. This does not mean that every candidate who spends money intends to steal public funds. Political expenditures can arise from legitimate campaign activities, social expectations, and the high costs of local mobilization. Nevertheless, the economic logic becomes problematic when the expected return is understood as access to public resources. A candidate who enters office with substantial political debts may become vulnerable to pressure from campaign financiers, brokers, influential families, or business supporters. The office then becomes a mechanism through which private political investment can be converted into administrative influence. The distinction between legitimate political support and corrupt repayment consequently becomes institutionally important.

The role of brokers further complicates the relationship between money politics and governance. Brokers reduce the distance between candidates and voters by organizing distribution, identifying target groups, communicating political expectations, and mobilizing support. Aspinall (2014) demonstrates that brokers are not simply passive messengers; they possess their own interests and social networks. Berenschot (2018) similarly argues that brokerage is central to Indonesia's patronage democracy because political resources must be converted into reliable political support through intermediary structures. At village level, brokers may remain socially embedded after the election. This creates the possibility that campaign networks transform into governance networks. Individuals who helped mobilize voters may later expect privileged access to village programs, employment, contracts, or administrative assistance.

The secret ballot does not eliminate this process because clientelistic exchanges do not necessarily require perfect monitoring of individual voting behavior. Nichter (2008) shows theoretically that payments may function as turnout incentives rather than direct purchases of particular votes. In village elections, the social density of communities may additionally create reputational mechanisms that compensate for the inability to observe ballots. Voters may feel obligated to support a candidate because they received assistance, while brokers may assess political loyalty through participation in campaign activities or public expressions of support. The transaction therefore operates through social expectations as much as through formal monitoring. The analytical consequence is important: electoral money politics should be evaluated not only in terms of whether a candidate can prove that a voter actually voted for them, but also in terms of whether material inducements create a network of political obligations.

Money politics may also influence who is willing to become a candidate. Where electoral expenditures are high, poorer but potentially competent citizens may be discouraged from competing. This produces an indirect democratic cost because political office becomes more accessible to individuals with substantial financial resources. Aspinall and Rohman (2017) found precisely this pattern in the villages they studied, where wealthy villagers were particularly capable of sustaining competitive electoral campaigns. The resulting political inequality can then affect governance quality because officeholders may be disproportionately drawn from economic elites or individuals connected to wider political networks.

Thus, vote-buying can influence not only who wins an election but also the socioeconomic composition of village leadership.

From Electoral Investment to Governance Risk

The central argument of this article is that vote-buying can generate corruption risks through a political repayment mechanism. The mechanism consists of several stages. First, candidates incur campaign costs through money, goods, services, broker payments, and social mobilization. Second, electoral victory creates expectations that political supporters will receive continued access or benefits. Third, village office provides control over resources capable of satisfying some of these expectations. Fourth, where institutional supervision is weak, political obligations can influence administrative decisions. Finally, public resources may be diverted, preferentially allocated, or manipulated to sustain political networks. This sequence should not be treated as an inevitable causal chain. Rather, it identifies a set of institutional conditions under which electoral clientelism can increase corruption vulnerability.

The first post-election risk concerns village budgeting. Village governments participate in development planning and budget formulation, including the preparation and implementation of village development priorities. If elected leaders perceive particular communities or political supporters as important to their political survival, development priorities may become selectively allocated. Such allocation is not automatically corrupt because governments legitimately prioritize programs according to public needs. The problem emerges when budget decisions are systematically distorted by private political obligations rather than objective public criteria. A village road, community facility, employment program, or social assistance initiative may be legally defensible in isolation while collectively reflecting a pattern of political favoritism. Detecting such patterns therefore requires oversight mechanisms capable of examining not only individual expenditures but also the political context surrounding allocation decisions.

The second risk involves procurement. Village procurement can create opportunities for contractors, suppliers, intermediaries, and local businesses connected to political networks. A village head who owes political obligations to particular supporters may be tempted to favor associated suppliers or contractors. The manipulation may occur before formal procurement begins through project selection, budget design, technical specifications, estimated costs, or informal information sharing. Consequently, reviewing only final procurement documents may not reveal the political origin of the transaction. This problem parallels broader findings in public procurement research that corruption can occur during agenda-setting and specification design rather than only at the tender stage. Village procurement oversight should therefore examine relationships among decision-makers, suppliers, campaign supporters, and beneficial owners.

The third risk concerns employment and access to village resources. Village governments possess influence over various administrative and service arrangements, and local political leaders may be tempted to reward campaign supporters through appointments, informal employment opportunities, or preferential access to public programs. Such practices can produce a form of political clientelism in which public employment becomes an instrument for maintaining electoral loyalty. Agustino, Hikmawan, and Silas (2023) show how village heads may operate simultaneously as providers of benefits and electoral intermediaries. Their findings suggest that village-level public assistance can become politically valuable because it allows officeholders to maintain relationships with citizens over time.

The fourth risk involves the relationship between the village head and the Village Consultative Body (*Badan Permusyawaratan Desa* or BPD). In institutional terms, the BPD provides an important accountability function. Yet formal institutional design does not automatically produce effective oversight. Sugiharti, Muttaqin, and Ramadhani (2021) identify political interests as a factor weakening supervision of village fund management. Where BPD members are socially or politically dependent on the village executive, they may be reluctant to challenge budgetary decisions. This is especially problematic after an election in which local political networks have become highly visible. Individuals associated with competing candidates may fear exclusion, while supporters of the winning candidate may have incentives to protect the new administration. Thus, electoral polarization can affect the independence of post-election oversight.

The fifth risk concerns the normalization of reciprocal political expectations. Once voters become accustomed to receiving money or goods during elections, they may begin to perceive electoral politics as a transactional relationship. Candidates who refuse to distribute benefits may be viewed as less generous or less capable of providing assistance. Muksin and Ladin (2023) demonstrate that communities may perceive money politics as a recurring and normalized practice. This normalization is particularly dangerous because corruption prevention depends partly on social norms. If citizens understand public office primarily through reciprocal exchange, demands for patronage may coexist with weak resistance to favoritism. Anti-corruption reform must therefore change expectations on both sides of the political relationship.

Legal and Institutional Accountability in *Pilkades*

The legal regulation of village elections presents a distinctive challenge because *Pilkades* does not operate under exactly the same institutional structure as national elections. Law No. 6 of 2014 establishes the village head election within the village governance framework, while Minister of Home Affairs Regulation No. 112 of 2014 provides specific administrative rules. The legal framework has subsequently been affected by amendments and implementing regulations. The significance of this arrangement is that enforcement capacity may depend heavily on local government structures and regional regulations. Consequently, the effectiveness of anti-money-politics measures can vary between regions. A national legal principle may exist, while practical monitoring depends upon local election committees, district government supervision, community participation, and available enforcement resources.

This decentralized enforcement structure creates both advantages and vulnerabilities. Local authorities understand village social structures and can identify unusual electoral behavior more quickly than distant institutions. However, local authorities may also be socially connected to candidates and village elites. In closely interconnected communities, electoral violations can be difficult to report because complainants may fear social retaliation, exclusion, or deterioration of family relationships. The problem becomes more serious when the suspected actor is an influential local figure. Electoral integrity therefore requires reporting mechanisms that are accessible but sufficiently independent from the immediate political environment. Without such mechanisms, formal prohibitions against money politics may remain difficult to enforce.

The relationship between Pilkades regulation and general electoral law also requires careful doctrinal treatment. Provisions governing vote-buying in national or regional elections should not automatically be transferred to village elections without considering the specific statutory framework applicable to Pilkades. Law No. 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections and Law No. 10 of 2016 concerning Regional Head Elections establish criminal provisions for electoral misconduct within their respective electoral regimes. Village elections, however, are primarily governed by the Village Law and its implementing regulations. This distinction matters because legal certainty requires that sanctions be grounded in applicable statutory provisions. An effective anti-corruption framework should therefore avoid relying on general political condemnation of money politics and instead clarify the precise administrative, electoral, civil, and criminal consequences applicable to misconduct in village elections.

Anti-corruption legislation becomes relevant when electoral relationships subsequently intersect with public office. Law No. 31 of 1999, as amended by Law No. 20 of 2001, provides the primary legal basis for addressing corruption involving public resources. If a village head subsequently misuses public funds, manipulates procurement, accepts illegal benefits, or commits another legally defined offense, the conduct may fall within the corruption framework irrespective of how the official originally obtained office. This distinction is important. Vote-buying and corruption should not be collapsed into one legal category. Rather, they should be understood as potentially connected stages of a broader governance risk. Electoral misconduct can create incentives or relationships that increase corruption vulnerability, but criminal liability for corruption still requires fulfillment of the elements of the relevant offense.

The principle of public information provides another institutional safeguard. Law No. 14 of 2008 establishes transparency rights that can support community monitoring of public administration. In village governance, transparency should extend beyond the publication of financial reports after expenditure occurs. Citizens should have access to information concerning village budgets, development priorities, procurement plans, contractors, implementation progress, and accountability reports in forms they can understand. Transparency can be particularly valuable after elections because it allows communities to compare campaign promises, political commitments, and subsequent government decisions. If the winning candidate disproportionately directs public resources toward areas or groups associated with electoral support, publicly accessible information can provide the evidence necessary for civic scrutiny.

Yet transparency alone is insufficient. Lindstedt and Naurin (2010) caution that transparency does not automatically reduce corruption because information must be usable by actors capable of applying accountability pressure. The village context reinforces this point. Publishing a budget document in highly technical language does little for villagers who lack accounting expertise. Effective transparency therefore requires intelligibility, accessibility, timeliness, and opportunities for response. Village information boards, public meetings, simplified budget summaries, digital platforms, and community monitoring can complement formal financial reporting. The objective should be to transform transparency from an administrative obligation into a practical accountability resource.

Reconstructing Accountability after the Election

A major weakness in conventional anti-money-politics policy is its concentration on election day or the campaign period. Once the village head is declared elected, attention often shifts toward ordinary administrative governance. This institutional separation overlooks the possibility that electoral networks remain active after the election. A campaign broker may become a contractor; a political supporter may seek preferential employment; a family network may become involved in procurement; or voters may expect targeted benefits. Post-election monitoring should therefore be designed as a continuation of electoral integrity rather than as an entirely separate governance process.

The first element of this approach should be campaign-finance disclosure. Even if village elections involve relatively modest financial transactions compared with national elections, candidates should be required to disclose significant campaign expenditures and sources of financial support. The purpose is not merely to determine whether candidates exceeded a formal spending limit. It is to identify relationships that could create conflicts after election. If a candidate receives substantial assistance from a local business owner, for example, that relationship may become relevant when the village subsequently awards contracts or makes decisions affecting that business. Disclosure therefore creates an institutional record against which later decisions can be evaluated.

The second element should be broker accountability. Conventional campaign-finance regulation often focuses on candidates, while vote-buying is frequently implemented through intermediaries. Aspinall (2014) demonstrates that brokers occupy a central position in Indonesian clientelistic networks. If brokers are invisible to regulatory systems, electoral transactions can simply be displaced from candidates to intermediaries. Village election monitoring should therefore recognize campaign teams, community mobilizers, and other intermediaries where they perform material political functions. Reporting mechanisms should permit citizens to identify patterns of distribution without requiring them to prove the complete chain of command themselves.

The third element should be a conflict-of-interest declaration immediately after election. Newly elected village heads and relevant officials should disclose business interests, close financial relationships, and relevant connections with contractors or organizations likely to interact with the village government. The declaration should not be interpreted as evidence of wrongdoing. Its purpose is preventive. Where a public official has a relevant private interest, recusal or enhanced review can be applied. Such a mechanism would shift accountability from retrospective punishment toward prospective risk management.

The fourth element should be community-based financial monitoring. Village citizens are often the actors best positioned to observe whether development projects are completed, whether infrastructure matches budget specifications, and whether beneficiaries actually receive promised programs. Community monitoring can therefore identify discrepancies before formal audits occur. Antluv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan (2016) emphasize the potential of empowered citizens to improve village responsiveness, while recent research on village governance similarly highlights participation as an important dimension of corruption prevention. Effective community monitoring should nevertheless be supported by accessible information and protection from retaliation.

The fifth element should be stronger integration between financial information systems and oversight. Research on village financial management indicates that accountability can be improved through financial information systems, although technological tools are not substitutes for institutional supervision. Permatasari et al. (2024) demonstrate the value of analyzing village fund data systematically to identify anomalies, while research on SISKEUDES emphasizes the importance of competence, supervision, and leadership alongside technology. Digital records can make unusual expenditures easier to identify, but they cannot independently determine whether a suspicious transaction resulted from political favoritism. Human oversight and contextual investigation remain essential.

The sixth element should be a secure complaint mechanism. Villagers who suspect political favoritism, procurement manipulation, or financial abuse may hesitate to report because the suspected officials are socially powerful. A whistleblowing system should therefore provide confidentiality, clear procedures, independent review, and protection against retaliation. The system should not be limited to financial corruption after it occurs. Reports concerning political pressure, conflicts of interest, unexplained procurement relationships, or selective distribution of public programs may provide early-warning signals. Prevention becomes more effective when institutions can investigate risk indicators before they develop into completed corruption offenses.

Toward an Integrated Anti-Corruption Framework

The first pillar of an integrated framework is electoral financial transparency. Village election candidates should disclose meaningful categories of campaign income and expenditure, including contributions from individuals, businesses, political networks, and campaign intermediaries. The disclosure system should be proportionate to village capacity and should not create excessive administrative burdens. Its principal purpose is to reveal relationships that may produce post-election conflicts. Where significant financial support comes from individuals or businesses that subsequently seek village contracts or administrative benefits, oversight institutions should be alerted to the potential conflict.

The second pillar is community-centered electoral monitoring. Monitoring should not depend entirely on formal government officials because village elections are socially embedded and geographically dispersed. Community observers, civil society organizations, universities, and local media can supplement official supervision. Their role should include documenting suspected material inducements, monitoring campaign practices, and educating voters concerning the long-term consequences of vote-buying. The purpose is not to transform citizens into prosecutors but to strengthen collective capacity to resist normalized transactional politics. Hasan et al. (2023) show that money politics can affect political participation among younger voters, suggesting that electoral education can influence the formation of political expectations.

The third pillar is post-election political-debt monitoring. This is the principal conceptual innovation proposed by the article. Oversight should identify whether major political supporters or campaign intermediaries subsequently receive unusual access to public contracts, employment, development projects, or administrative decisions. Such monitoring does not presume corruption. Instead, it identifies patterns requiring explanation. If a business that heavily supported a candidate subsequently becomes a repeated village contractor, for example, the relationship should be subject to conflict-of-interest review. This approach connects electoral transparency with public-finance monitoring and recognizes that corruption risks may develop gradually.

The fourth pillar is participatory budgeting and social accountability. Citizens should have meaningful opportunities to influence development priorities and monitor implementation. Participation reduces the ability of a village head to treat the budget as a private political resource because expenditure decisions become more visible and contestable. Nevertheless, participation should not be romanticized. Village meetings may themselves be dominated by local elites or politically connected participants. The recent literature on deliberative village governance indicates that formal participation does not necessarily produce genuine accountability. Therefore, participation should be combined with information disclosure, inclusive representation, and mechanisms through which community objections receive institutional responses.

The fifth pillar is independent financial oversight. Village financial supervision should involve multiple institutional actors rather than relying exclusively on the village executive. The BPD, district-level supervisory bodies, auditors, and community organizations should perform complementary functions. Political independence is crucial because oversight institutions may otherwise be captured by the same networks that dominate the village executive. Sugiharti, Muttaqin, and Ramadhani (2021) demonstrate the relevance of political interests to the effectiveness of village fund supervision. Strengthening the formal authority of oversight bodies without addressing their political dependence may therefore produce limited practical improvement.

The sixth pillar is digital accountability linked with human investigation. Siskeudes and other digital systems can provide structured financial records and facilitate anomaly detection. However, digitalization should be regarded as an enabling instrument rather than a complete anti-corruption mechanism. A suspicious payment may be perfectly documented yet still reflect political favoritism. Conversely, a legitimate transaction may appear unusual because of local circumstances. Digital data therefore require contextual interpretation. The most effective system would combine financial data, procurement information, beneficial ownership records where available, conflict-of-interest declarations, and community complaints.

The seventh pillar is civic normalization against vote-buying. Legal sanctions alone are unlikely to eliminate money politics if citizens continue to regard electoral gifts as normal or morally acceptable. Electoral education should therefore emphasize the relationship between accepting short-term benefits and the long-term quality of village governance. The message should not be framed as blaming poor voters. Rather, it should explain that the structural costs of transactional elections can be borne collectively through reduced service quality, distorted development priorities, favoritism, and weaker accountability. Such education should begin before the campaign period and continue through regular village governance programs.

Reconsidering Vote-Buying as a Corruption-Prevention Problem

The analytical framework developed here suggests that the conventional distinction between electoral corruption and administrative corruption is too rigid. Vote-buying occurs before office is obtained, whereas public-sector corruption generally occurs after authority has been acquired. Yet the two may be institutionally connected through political incentives. A candidate who purchases electoral support does not automatically become corrupt, but the financial and social obligations generated by electoral transactions may change the incentives surrounding public office. This insight is consistent with the broader literature on clientelism, which emphasizes reciprocal relationships between political actors and citizens rather than isolated acts of exchange (Hicken 2011; Stokes 2005). The significance of the village context is that the same individuals who participate in the election remain within the political community governed by the winning candidate.

The framework also challenges an overly individualistic understanding of corruption. Traditional anti-corruption enforcement often asks who stole public money, which document was falsified, or which official accepted an illegal payment. These questions are essential for criminal investigation, but they may arise too late for effective prevention. A structural approach instead asks why particular officials possess strong incentives to favor certain actors and whether the institutional environment permits such favoritism to occur without detection. Political financing is therefore part of the corruption-prevention architecture because it shapes the expectations and dependencies surrounding officeholders. The relevant unit of analysis is not merely the corrupt official but the network of political, social, and economic relationships surrounding public authority.

This argument does not imply that every election characterized by money politics will produce corruption. Several intervening variables may prevent the transformation of electoral obligations into administrative misconduct. Strong village councils, active citizens, independent auditors, transparent procurement, professional bureaucracies, competitive local media, and effective law enforcement can increase the cost of corrupt behavior. Conversely, even elections without obvious vote-buying may produce corruption when institutional oversight is extremely weak. The relationship is therefore probabilistic rather than deterministic. Political money should be understood as a risk factor that interacts with institutional capacity, not as proof of subsequent criminal conduct.

The framework also explains why anti-corruption interventions that focus exclusively on village fund management may produce incomplete results. Financial controls operate primarily after resources enter the administrative system. Yet the political demand for those resources may have been created before the budget was prepared. If an official has accumulated electoral obligations, conventional accounting controls may detect unusual spending but cannot explain why those expenditures became politically attractive. Integrating electoral information with financial oversight can provide a more complete picture. This means that village corruption prevention should become longitudinal: monitoring should begin during candidate competition, continue through the election, and remain active during the official's administration.

The findings also have implications for the design of democratic participation. It would be mistaken to conclude that village elections are inherently corrupt or that electoral competition should be restricted. On the contrary, village elections remain important mechanisms of political representation and local autonomy. The objective is to ensure that competition does not become a mechanism through which private resources purchase public authority. Democratic legitimacy requires not merely that citizens vote but that their political choices occur under conditions of fair competition and that elected officials remain accountable after election. Electoral integrity and administrative integrity should therefore be treated as interconnected dimensions of democratic governance.

Conclusion

Money politics in Indonesian village elections should be understood as more than a discrete electoral violation. It may function as part of a wider clientelistic structure in which candidates, brokers, voters, businesses, and local elites exchange material benefits for political support and future access. The central risk arises when electoral expenditures create political obligations that continue after the election and interact with the village head's authority over budgets, procurement, development projects, employment, and public services. Existing research on village elections demonstrates the persistence of vote-buying and brokerage, while research on village governance demonstrates that financial accountability and institutional supervision remain uneven.

The article therefore argues for a preventive model connecting electoral and administrative accountability. Campaign-finance transparency, broker monitoring, conflict-of-interest declarations, community reporting, participatory budgeting, digital financial monitoring, independent supervision, and whistleblower protection should operate as interconnected mechanisms rather than isolated reforms. The objective is not to assume that every recipient of electoral assistance or every politically connected contractor is corrupt. Instead, institutions should identify relationships that create heightened risks and subject them to proportionate scrutiny. Ultimately, village-level anti-corruption policy should move upstream. Preventing corruption requires understanding the political incentives that precede the misuse of public resources. The Village Law's commitment to local autonomy and democratic participation can be strengthened rather than weakened by this approach. Village elections should remain spaces for meaningful political choice, but electoral competition must be accompanied by mechanisms that prevent private campaign investments from becoming claims over public resources. Strengthening democratic integrity at the village level is therefore not separate from Indonesia's broader anti-corruption agenda; it is one of its foundations.

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