

STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING VOTE BUYING AND ENFORCING VILLAGE APPARATUS NEUTRALITY IN THE 2024 ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze strategies for preventing vote buying and enforcing the neutrality of village officials in the 2024 General Election in East Lampung Regency within the context of the open list proportional electoral system. The study focuses on the persistence of vote buying practices and indications of non-neutral behavior among village officials that potentially undermine electoral integrity at the local level. This research applies Arend Lijphart's (1994) electoral system theory, which argues that electoral system design influences political competition and the behavior of electoral actors. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews and documentation techniques involving election organizers, election supervisory bodies, and village officials. The findings indicate that the open list proportional system intensifies personalized competition among candidates, including within the same political party, thereby encouraging transactional practices such as vote buying to secure electoral support. The study also identified indications of violations of village officials' neutrality, although many cases were not formally reported. Therefore, strengthening political education for voters, neutrality training for village officials, participatory monitoring mechanisms, and accessible public reporting systems is necessary to improve electoral integrity and transparency.

INTRODUCTION

General Elections (Pemilu) constitute a fundamental pillar of Indonesia's democratic system, functioning as a mechanism for channeling public aspirations and selecting leaders capable of realizing the values of Pancasila, particularly the fourth principle concerning deliberative democracy and social justice (Nahudin, 2018). In the perspective of modern democracy, elections are not merely understood as formal political procedures, but also as substantive instruments for creating representative, accountable, and publicly legitimate governments (Dahl, 1989; Maravall & Przeworski, 2003). Therefore, political parties and electoral systems hold a strategic role in determining the quality of democracy within a country (Aulia, 2020).

The implementation of elections in Indonesia continues to face several serious challenges that may weaken the quality of electoral democracy. Two of the most dominant issues are money politics and violations of bureaucratic neutrality, particularly among



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village officials (Bawaslu Republik Indonesia., 2024; Hadiz & Robison, 2017). Money politics has increasingly developed into a systematic form of political transaction, while violations of neutrality indicate the persistence of political intervention within local bureaucratic structures. These phenomena demonstrate that local democracy is still influenced by informal political networks and short-term electoral interests that undermine the principles of fairness and electoral integrity (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2019b).

One of the regions that reflects these dynamics is East Lampung Regency. Although political participation in elections remains relatively high, it is not always accompanied by substantive democratic quality. Transactional political practices continue to play a significant role in local electoral competition. This condition is influenced by close social relations between candidates, local elites, and village officials, as well as the strong influence of informal community networks. In such circumstances, political support is often built through material assistance, social proximity, and personal influence rather than policy based political engagement.

One factor that reinforces these practices is the implementation of the open-list proportional electoral system. This system allows voters to directly select legislative candidates, but at the same time intensifies competition among candidates, including those within the same political party (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016; Muhtadi, 2019). In an electoral system centered on individual vote acquisition, candidates tend to rely more heavily on personal popularity, social networks, and financial resources rather than party platforms or policy programs. Consequently, money politics is frequently perceived as an effective strategy for mobilizing voter support, particularly in regions where economic vulnerability remains relatively high.

According to Arend Lijphart's theory of electoral systems (1994), the design of an electoral system significantly influences political competition, candidate behavior, and the relationship between political parties and voters (Lijphart, 1994). Open list proportional systems tend to create intense personal competition because candidates compete not only against rival parties but also against fellow candidates within their own parties. In developing democracies such as Indonesia, this condition often encourages pragmatic and transactional electoral behavior. Therefore, Lijphart's electoral system theory serves as the primary analytical framework in this study to explain the relationship between the open list proportional system, the rise of money politics, and the weakening neutrality of village officials.

In addition to money politics, the issue of village officials' neutrality has also become an important concern in election administration. Law Number 6 of 2014, Article 51, explicitly states that village officials must remain neutral and refrain from engaging in practical political activities. Nevertheless, empirical evidence indicates that violations of neutrality continue to occur, both openly and implicitly (Fitriyani, 2021). Village officials are frequently placed in difficult positions between their professional responsibilities as public servants and their social or political proximity to certain candidates. The Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) of Lampung Province recorded numerous cases of neutrality violations during the 2020 Regional Election and the 2024 General Election that were recommended for further legal and administrative review (Bawaslu Lampung, 2024)

Election monitoring data also demonstrate that money politics and violations of bureaucratic neutrality remain serious issues in the 2024 General Election. Bawaslu Republik Indonesia (2024) reported various violations involving the distribution of money, goods, and political mobilization by government officials. In Lampung Province,



Bawaslu documented at least ten alleged cases of bureaucratic neutrality violations during the 2024 General Election and thirty two cases during the 2020 Regional Election that were recommended for further investigation (Bawaslu Republik Indonesia., 2024). Moreover, several previous studies have indicated that the open-list proportional system strongly correlates with rising political costs and vote buying practices at the local level (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016; Muhtadi, 2019).

Previous research generally discusses money politics and bureaucratic neutrality separately. Studies by Aspinall and Sukmajati (2019), for example, primarily focus on vote-buying practices in national elections, while research concerning village officials' neutrality tends to emphasize bureaucratic regulations and administrative supervision. There remains limited research examining simultaneously how the open list proportional system contributes to both money politics and the weakening neutrality of village officials within local electoral contexts (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2019a) . Furthermore, field based studies focusing on collaborative prevention strategies involving election management bodies, civil society, and public reporting mechanisms are still relatively limited. Therefore, this research offers a new contribution by integrating these three aspects within a comprehensive analytical framework.

Previous studies have shown that money politics in Indonesia frequently operates through local social networks and informal political interactions that possess strong influence within society (Aspinall et al., 2022; Muhtadi, 2020). In East Lampung Regency, which is characterized by close social relations and community based interactions, these informal dynamics increase the likelihood of transactional political practices. Communities that maintain strong social ties with local elites or political actors are often more susceptible to electoral mobilization based on material incentives and personal influence.

This study aims to analyze money politics practices during the 2024 General Election in East Lampung Regency, examine the enforcement of village officials' neutrality in election administration, and analyze the influence of the open list proportional electoral system on increasing electoral competition and transactional political practices. In addition, this study seeks to formulate strategies for preventing money politics and strengthening the neutrality of village officials in order to improve electoral integrity at the local level. Through these objectives, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of local political dynamics, the challenges of democratic election administration, and the factors influencing the quality of democracy at the grassroots level.

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of governance and local politics, particularly regarding the relationship between electoral systems, money politics, and bureaucratic neutrality within the context of local democracy in Indonesia. This study also aims to expand the application of Arend Lijphart's electoral system theory (1994) in understanding political competition and electoral behavior under Indonesia's open list proportional system. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to provide recommendations for the General Election Commission (KPU) in designing political education and election monitoring strategies, for the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) in strengthening participatory oversight mechanisms, and for local governments in improving guidance and supervision related to village officials' neutrality. Furthermore, this research is expected to contribute to civil society efforts in promoting a cleaner, more transparent, and more accountable democratic process.



METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of strategies for preventing money politics and enforcing the neutrality of village officials during the implementation of the 2024 General Election in East Lampung Regency. This approach was chosen because it is capable of revealing complex socio-political dynamics that cannot be measured solely through quantitative methods. Qualitative research enables researchers to understand social processes, meanings, and contexts that influence the behavior of political actors at the local level (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the qualitative approach was used to analyze how formal electoral regulations interact with informal practices such as money politics and violations of village officials' neutrality.

Paradigmatically, this research is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, which emphasizes understanding the experiences, perceptions, and subjective meanings of actors involved in the electoral process. This paradigm is considered relevant because practices of money politics and violations of neutrality often occur informally, covertly, and are embedded within broader social relations, making them difficult to fully understand through formal indicators alone (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

The research was conducted in April 2025, with field data collection carried out from 16–19 April 2025 in several areas of East Lampung Regency, particularly in Bumi Agung District and Way Jepara District. The object of this research is the practice of money politics and the enforcement of village officials' neutrality during the 2024 General Election in East Lampung Regency, particularly within the context of the open list proportional electoral system. The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through semi structured in depth interviews with key informants who were directly involved in election administration and supervision at the local level. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide flexibility for researchers to explore informants' perspectives in depth while maintaining the focus of the research analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, namely the selection of participants based on specific considerations such as institutional position, knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the electoral process (Patton, 2015). The informants in this study included:

1. Yudhi Wijaya, Chairperson of the District Election Committee (PPK) of Bumi Agung District, interviewed on 16 April 2025;
2. Iswandi, Chairperson of the District Election Committee (PPK) of Way Jepara District, interviewed on 16 April 2025;
3. Kamaludin, member of the Subdistrict Election Supervisory Committee (Panwascam) of Way Jepara District, interviewed on 18 April 2025;
4. A village official from Way Jepara District, interviewed on 19 April 2025.

These informants were selected because they were considered to possess empirical knowledge regarding the implementation, supervision, and sociopolitical dynamics of the 2024 General Election. In addition, involving informants from election management bodies, election supervisory institutions, and village administration enabled the research to obtain more comprehensive perspectives on money politics practices and the neutrality of village bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from official election documents, laws and regulations, election monitoring reports, academic publications, mass media sources, and relevant scholarly literature. Secondary data were used to strengthen empirical findings and provide broader theoretical context (Bowen, 2009).



Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, which included data reduction, coding, categorization, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This technique enabled the researcher to systematically identify patterns, themes, and relationships among phenomena within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis focused on several major themes, namely:

1. Patterns of money politics practices;
2. Forms of violations of village officials' neutrality;
3. Factors influencing the occurrence of such violations;
4. Prevention strategies implemented by election management and supervisory institutions.

This study employed source and method triangulation techniques to ensure the validity and credibility of the data. Triangulation was conducted by comparing information from various informants and cross-checking it with documentation and relevant literature (Denzin, 2012). In addition, analytical validation was strengthened through academic discussions with researchers and experts in local politics and electoral governance in order to minimize researcher subjectivity. This research also paid close attention to research ethics. Prior to conducting interviews, all informants were informed about the objectives of the study and asked for their consent to participate. The confidentiality of certain informants was protected, particularly regarding sensitive information related to money politics and the involvement of village officials in practical political activities. Research ethics are essential not only for maintaining the integrity of the study but also for protecting the safety and privacy of informants (Orb et al., 2001).

Through this methodological design, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies involved in maintaining electoral integrity at the local level, while also connecting empirical findings with broader theoretical discussions concerning electoral systems and local democratic governance in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that money politics remains a serious issue in the implementation of the 2024 General Election at the local level (Wijaya, 2025). This phenomenon is not merely incidental but tends to intensify approaching election day, when voter mobilization reaches its peak. The practice is carried out systematically and discreetly, taking advantage of the period before voting day to minimize the possibility of detection and enforcement by election supervisory bodies.

Based on the objectives of this study, the findings reveal that money politics and violations of village apparatus neutrality in the 2024 General Election in East Lampung Regency were influenced by the intense competition created by the open list proportional electoral system. Candidates tended to focus more on securing individual votes rather than strengthening party programs, which encouraged pragmatic strategies such as distributing money, providing social assistance, and mobilizing informal networks at the village level. In addition, the study found that village officials faced socio-political pressures that made bureaucratic neutrality difficult to maintain effectively in local contexts.

This research employs Arend Lijphart's (1994) theory of electoral systems, which emphasizes that the design of an electoral system influences patterns of political competition and the behavior of electoral actors (Lijphart, 1994). In the context of the open-list proportional system, several key indicators are relevant to the findings of this study:



1. Increasing personal competition among candidates

The open list proportional system causes candidates to compete not only with other political parties but also with candidates from the same party. Consequently, candidates tend to focus on building personal support through direct approaches to voters.

2. Orientation toward individual vote seeking

Candidates rely heavily on personal resources and social networks to gain votes, including through money politics and informal local networks.

3. Weak control of political parties over candidates

Political parties often lack strong control over candidates' campaign strategies, allowing transactional practices to develop more easily at the local level.

4. Mobilization of social networks and local bureaucracy

Candidates utilize the influence of community leaders, village officials, volunteers, and other informal actors to gain political support.

The indicator of personal competition among candidates can be seen in the statement of Yudhi Wijaya, Chairperson of the District Election Committee (PPK) of Bumi Agung:

“Many people in our communities are still tempted. Sometimes the amount is not large, only around Rp50,000 or food packages, but economic conditions are also a factor, so they accept it.” (Interview, April 16, 2025)

This statement demonstrates that candidates used material incentives as instruments to secure individual votes amid intense political competition.

The indicator of individual vote orientation is also reinforced by the statement of Iswandi, Chairperson of the PPK of Way Jepara:

“Now it is more hidden, but it still exists. Cultural approaches through religious leaders and youth figures are important in building public awareness.” (Interview, April 16, 2025)

This statement illustrates that money politics has evolved through social approaches and informal networks to mobilize voter support on a personal basis. Meanwhile, the indicator concerning the mobilization of social networks and local bureaucracy is reflected in an interview with Kamaludin, a member of the Subdistrict Election Supervisory Committee (Panwascam) of Way Jepara:

“There were village officials who attended campaign activities or showed support, even though there were no official reports.”
(Interview, April 18, 2025)

These findings indicate that village officials became part of broader socio-political networks utilized during electoral competition. This condition was further reinforced by the statement of one village official:

“If we do not participate, we are afraid of being considered disloyal.”
(interview, April 19, 2025)

The field data demonstrate that political pressure on village officials often occurs informally through social relationships and local political dynamics. Therefore, Lijphart's electoral system theory is relevant in explaining how the open list proportional system encourages personal competition, transactional political practices, and the mobilization of socio-political networks at the local level.



Interestingly, money politics was rarely conducted directly by candidates themselves. Instead, the dominant pattern involved intermediaries such as volunteers, campaign teams, or informal community figures who possessed extensive networks at the village and hamlet levels. These intermediaries functioned as strategic connectors between candidates and voters while simultaneously shielding candidates from legal and ethical risks. This pattern indicates the existence of a structured organization in transactional political practices, including task distribution, territorial segmentation, and systematic mechanisms of resource distribution.

These findings are consistent with theories of clientelism, which argue that relationships between candidates and voters are often built through material exchanges or promises rather than open, programmatic campaigns based on policy issues (Muhtadi, 2019). In this framework, intermediaries play a crucial role as brokers who identify, persuade, and secure support from specific voter segments, usually by utilizing kinship ties, social proximity, or moral authority within communities (Stokes et al., 2013).

This condition confirms that efforts to eradicate money politics cannot rely solely on formal legal instruments but must also involve attempts to break the chain of distribution at the intermediary level through political education, strengthening the integrity of local actors, and building social norms that reject transactional practices. Without comprehensive intervention, money politics is likely to remain a dominant strategy in electoral competition, even amid increasing democratic awareness among citizens.

The findings also indicate that money politics has evolved from individual and openly conducted transactions into more covert and collective forms. This evolution complicates monitoring and enforcement by election supervisory institutions. Furthermore, these conditions demonstrate that although regulations prohibiting money politics exist, their effectiveness remains limited without strong social control from society. The field findings strengthen the argument that money politics is latent and adaptive, continuously adjusting to changes in monitoring and law enforcement mechanisms. Therefore, new strategies for election oversight are needed that are not only formal and institutional but also participatory and community-based.

In East Lampung, money politics ahead of the 2024 election was reportedly carried out systematically by campaign teams through the distribution of money to voters (Wijaya, 2025). This situation highlights the importance of public education and collaboration among election organizers, community leaders, and security institutions in preventing such practices. The practice was not only conducted secretly but also became increasingly organized. Several actors used volunteers or campaign teams to distribute money or goods to voters in exchange for support for certain candidates (Wijaya, 2025). Yudhi Wijaya, Chairperson of the PPK of Bumi Agung, explained that the economic conditions of the community contributed to the persistence of money politics.

“Many people in our communities are still tempted. Sometimes the amount is not large, only Rp50,000 or food packages, but economic conditions are also a factor, so they accept it.” (Interview, April 16, 2025)

He also emphasized the importance of election organizers, including PPK and Panwas, in conducting public education and strengthening supervision. Collaboration with community leaders and youth organizations at the village level was considered important in reducing money politics (Wijaya, 2025).



According to Iswandi (2025), money politics still occurred despite increasing public awareness:

“Now it is more hidden, but it still exists. Cultural approaches through religious leaders and youth figures are important in building public awareness.” (Interview, April 16, 2025)

This statement aligns with the views of other informants who regarded money politics as a major challenge to creating clean and democratic elections. Approaching voting day, the practice tended to intensify and become more concealed. Money politics commonly occurred during campaign periods and on voting day itself (Iswandi, 2025; Wijaya, 2025). Although concrete evidence that could be formally prosecuted was often unavailable, indications of cash distribution to voters were still identified in several areas. This finding is consistent with reports from the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) of Lampung, which recorded allegations of money politics during the 2024 election, although not specifically in East Lampung Regency. One common form of money politics identified in the field was the distribution of cash under the pretext of “transportation money” or “tokens of appreciation.” These terms were intentionally used to disguise the actual purpose, namely securing political support for certain candidates (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2019b; bawaslu provinsi Lampung, 2024). Such practices were generally carried out personally or through trusted intermediaries, creating the impression of voluntary assistance rather than political transactions. These practices usually occurred secretly on the eve of voting day and were extremely difficult to prove legally due to the lack of documentation and the reliance on close social relationships between the giver and recipient.

In many cases, there were strong indications of electoral bribery, yet these cases could not be formally categorized as violations because of the lack of physical evidence and the reluctance of witnesses to provide official testimony (Kamaludin, 2025). This difficulty was worsened by a culture of silence among recipients, who were often unwilling to report such practices because of social pressure, feelings of reluctance, or fear of social consequences within their communities (Muhtadi, 2019). The “transportation money” and “token of appreciation” schemes reflect a covert form of clientelistic exchange in which relationships between candidates and voters are mediated through symbols of assistance and gratitude rather than explicit political agreements (Stokes et al., 2013). Such strategies are particularly effective in areas characterized by close social relations because they exploit norms of reciprocity to secure voter commitment (Scott, 1972). Normatively, these practices clearly violate the principles of fairness and integrity in elections, yet legally they remain difficult to prosecute without strong evidence and courageous witnesses (Norris, 2014).

The implications for electoral integrity are significant. First, these practices weaken political accountability because voter preferences are influenced by short-term incentives rather than evaluations of candidates’ programs and performance (Dahl, 1989). Second, they undermine public trust in the effectiveness of election oversight institutions, given that many widely known violations never lead to legal sanctions (Maravall & Przeworski, 2003). Third, they reinforce transactional political structures at the local level, which are difficult to eliminate without comprehensive policy interventions, including stronger political literacy, empowerment of civil society, and regulatory reforms that broaden the definition and evidentiary standards of money politics violations (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2023; Hicken, 2011). A legally prosecuted case of



money politics in East Lampung involved Sukardi, a legislative candidate from the National Mandate Party (PAN). According to reports from Bawaslu and national media outlets, Sukardi was proven to have distributed envelopes containing Rp50,000 to campaign participants at Tegal Asri Field in Jojog Village, Pekalongan District, on December 2, 2023. The action was intended to gain electoral support ahead of the 2024 legislative election (Detikcom, 2024; Kompas.com, 2024; Medcom.id, 2024). This case reflects weak social control over electoral integrity and demonstrates the need to strengthen the role of civil society and election supervisory institutions.

The neutrality of village officials also remained a major issue in local election implementation. Efforts to maintain bureaucratic neutrality were continuously pursued through socialization and supervision programs. However, in practice, several challenges persisted (Kamaludin, 2025). Although no official reports of neutrality violations were formally submitted, field observations indicated passive involvement by village officials, especially village apparatuses, in supporting certain candidates.

“During my time as a Panwascam member, we did not receive direct reports, but from field observations, there were village officials attending campaign activities or showing symbolic support, such as wearing certain attributes.”
(Interview, April 18, 2025)

According to Kamaludin, this passive involvement was difficult to prove legally but still had the potential to influence public perceptions regarding the neutrality of state institutions. Therefore, he emphasized the importance of strengthening political literacy among village officials and intensifying field supervision. A village official interviewed in this study admitted receiving informal invitations to support certain candidates, even though they did not directly participate in campaign activities. Such invitations were generally conveyed personally or through informal gatherings, making them difficult to classify as formal campaign violations. These findings support the argument that the neutrality of village apparatuses is often weakened by hierarchical bureaucratic culture and local political influence (Dwipayana, 2019a; Permana, 2021). Moreover, village heads and village officials play highly influential roles in shaping public political opinions and preferences. As central figures in local governance, village heads possess strong social legitimacy and direct access to village resources that can potentially be mobilized politically. Village officials such as village secretaries, hamlet heads, or neighborhood leaders often act as intermediaries between candidates and citizens, either consciously or unconsciously, through information dissemination, facilitation of activities, or personal recommendations (Mietzner, 2020; Suryadinata, 2022)

In many regions, the political loyalty of village officials is shaped by historical and relational factors. Some village heads and officials maintain personal or familial relationships with particular candidates or have histories of political support in previous elections. These patterns are reinforced by the dependence of village bureaucracy on political support from regional elites to maintain positions or gain access to development programs (Dwipayana, 2019b). Consequently, although Indonesian laws explicitly require village officials to remain neutral, implementation in practice continues to face serious obstacles (Fitriyani, 2021).

The implications for electoral integrity are substantial. First, even indirect involvement of village officials in supporting candidates can create unequal competition because of their strong influence over local communities. Second, violations that are difficult to prove formally reveal significant weaknesses in election supervision and law



enforcement mechanisms. Third, these practices may reduce public trust in free and fair elections and reinforce perceptions that village bureaucracy functions as an extension of local political power rather than as a neutral public institution (Maravall & Przeworski, 2003; Norris, 2014). In general, village officials interviewed in this study stated that they attempted to maintain neutrality during all stages of the election process. They understood that, as public officials, they were required to remain neutral and avoid involvement in practical politics.

“We realize that our position requires neutrality. According to the rules, we are not allowed to support any particular candidate.” (Personal interview, April 19, 2025)

However, they also acknowledged the existence of political pressure from local political actors, both directly and indirectly, to provide hidden support for certain candidates.

“There is pressure, usually not in the form of direct orders, but through subtle invitations or expectations to attend activities that are politically oriented. If we do not participate, we are afraid of being considered disloyal.” (Personal interview, April 19, 2025)

This statement indicates that although village officials possess a normative understanding of neutrality, in practice they still face structural and psychological pressures that may influence their political attitudes. Such conditions create dilemmas for village apparatuses. On one hand, they are expected to maintain professionalism and neutrality; on the other hand, they must navigate local political dynamics and power relations within their communities. Another village official stated:

“It is difficult. Sometimes we feel compelled to attend certain events so we are not considered oppositional. But we try as much as possible not to show open support.” (Personal interview, April 19, 2025)

These findings reinforce indications that passive involvement of village officials in practical politics still occurs, even though it is not formally recorded as a violation. Such pressures, although often subtle and indirect, can influence the political attitudes of village officials and blur the boundaries between bureaucratic professionalism and political alignment. This phenomenon aligns with Dwipayana’s (2019) argument that village bureaucracy often remains subordinate to local political elites, making it vulnerable to electoral mobilization (Dwipayana, 2019b).

In addition, the absence of strong internal supervisory mechanisms within village governments, combined with limited legal protection for officials who resist political pressure, further exacerbates the problem. In some cases, village officials who attempted to maintain neutrality experienced marginalization within village administrative structures or lost access to certain resources (Suryadinata, 2022). These conditions demonstrate that violations of village apparatus neutrality are not merely individual problems but structural issues requiring comprehensive policy intervention. These findings demonstrate that neutrality violations among village apparatus are not merely individual acts but structural issues requiring comprehensive reforms, stronger oversight, and protection mechanisms it can be seen in Table 1.



Table 1. Summary of Field Findings on Vote Buying and Village Apparatus Neutrality in the 2024 General Election in East Lampung

Aspect	Field Findings	Source of Information
Vote Buying	Indications of monetary distribution during the campaign period; difficult to prove legally due to the absence of witnesses or sufficient physical evidence.	Interviews with the Chairpersons of PPK Bumi Agung and Way Jepara, 2024 Election
Neutrality of Village Apparatus	Village officials were not directly involved, but received informal invitations to support certain candidates; no official reports have been processed.	Interviews with village apparatus and Panwascam of Way Jepara, 2024 Election
Role of Village Heads	Commitment to maintaining neutrality; acknowledging the existence of pressure from certain parties, yet not engaging in explicit violations.	Interview with Village Apparatus

Source: Primary data processed by author, (2025)

Based on the interview findings presented in Table 1: Field Research Findings, several crucial issues related to the implementation of the 2024 General Election in East Lampung Regency were identified. First, regarding money politics, informants from the District Election Committee (PPK), the Subdistrict Election Supervisory Committee (Panwascam), and the 2024 Bawaslu monitoring reports indicated that the distribution of money to voters still occurred during the campaign period. The methods used were generally covert and carried out privately, making legal proof difficult to obtain. The absence of witnesses and strong physical evidence became the primary obstacle in formally processing these alleged violations. This condition demonstrates that election supervision has not yet been fully capable of reaching hidden practices occurring at the grassroots level.

Furthermore, this phenomenon is consistent with findings from the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), which stated that money politics at the local level often utilizes existing social networks, such as kinship relations, local communities, and village government structures, to distribute assistance or “tokens of appreciation” in the form of cash, basic necessities, or promises of public facilities (KPK, 2022). These transactions do not only occur shortly before election day, but may also take place long before the official campaign period begins, thereby expanding the influence of money politics. In addition, money politics is frequently combined with identity politics or emotional ties through socio religious gatherings, community meetings, or local social events, where political messages and material incentives are subtly inserted. This situation makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish between ordinary social activities and covert political campaigns. Limited legal awareness among voters, along with the persistence of transactional political culture, further contributes to the continuation of these practices, as some members of society perceive such gifts as normal or even as a form of “fortune” during the election period (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2019a).



Second, concerning the neutrality of state apparatuses, interviews with several civil servants and members of the Panwascam in Way Jepara revealed that although government officials were not formally involved in campaign activities, there were informal invitations from certain actors encouraging support for specific candidates. However, because this form of support was passive and never formally documented, legal enforcement could not be carried out. This finding reflects the existence of a “gray area” in the practice of bureaucratic neutrality that is difficult to regulate through formal legal mechanisms (Fitriyani, 2021; Permana, 2021). Third, regarding the role of village heads, interviews with village officials in the Way Jepara District demonstrated a relatively strong awareness of the importance of maintaining neutrality during the election process. Although they acknowledged receiving pressure from certain political actors, they stated that they were not involved in explicit violations. This finding indicates the existence of a normative commitment within village governance structures, despite ongoing challenges in the form of informal political pressure (Dwipayana, 2019b; Suryadinata, 2022).

Overall, these three findings confirm that money politics and the lack of bureaucratic neutrality do not always appear in forms that can be legally prosecuted, yet they clearly exist in practice at the local level. Therefore, more comprehensive preventive strategies and participatory monitoring systems involving the wider community are needed to strengthen electoral integrity, particularly within the context of an open-list proportional electoral system that intensifies competition among individual candidates within the same political party (Lijphart, 1994; Norris, 2014).

Money politics remains a serious challenge in elections in East Lampung Regency. Although sufficient evidence for legal prosecution was often unavailable, indications of these practices highlight the need for stricter supervision by Bawaslu and law enforcement agencies. As an example, Bawaslu Lampung has implemented various preventive measures from the early stages of the electoral process in an effort to prevent similar violations from recurring in the 2024 General Election (Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, 2024; Trangana, 2023).



Table 2. Strategies for Preventing Vote Buying and Enforcing the Neutrality of Village Apparatus

Strategy	Description of Objective Actions	Source/Basis
Education and Public Outreach	Conducting public campaigns, seminars, and training sessions on the dangers of vote buying and the importance of bureaucratic neutrality.	To increase public and governmental awareness of electoral ethics and bureaucratic integrity. Bawaslu Lampung, 2024
Participatory Monitoring	Involving civil society, youth groups, and traditional/religious leaders in monitoring electoral stages.	To prevent and detect vote buying practices and neutrality violations at an early stage. Adapted from Bawaslu monitoring model
Strict Law Enforcement	Imposing criminal, administrative, or ethical sanctions on individuals engaged in vote buying or non-neutral bureaucratic behavior.	To create a deterrent effect and strengthen public trust in the electoral legal system. Law No. 7 of 2017
Inter-agency Coordination	Establishing synergy between Bawaslu, the military (TNI), the police (Polri), and local governments in monitoring and handling violations.	To strengthen cross-sector collaboration in safeguarding electoral integrity. Bawaslu Lampung, 2024

Source: Primary data processed by author, (2025)

Based on Table 2, Strategies for Preventing Money Politics and Enforcing the Neutrality of Village Apparatus, strengthening an independent, accountable, and professional proportional electoral system in East Lampung Regency requires a series of systematic strategies aimed at preventing money politics and ensuring the neutrality of village officials. The first strategy is political education and public socialization, which aims to improve political literacy among citizens and government officials regarding the dangers of money politics and the importance of bureaucratic neutrality. These efforts can be implemented through public campaigns, civic education seminars, and periodic governmental ethics training programs. This step is essential considering that many electoral violations occur due to limited public understanding of electoral regulations and bureaucratic integrity (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, 2022; Norris, 2014).

The second strategy is participatory oversight, which emphasizes the active involvement of citizens, youth groups, religious leaders, traditional leaders, and civil society organizations (CSOs) in monitoring every stage of the electoral process. From the perspective of deliberative democracy, public participation should not merely be interpreted as voting in elections, but also



as active engagement in safeguarding the integrity of democratic processes (Habermas, 1996b). Participatory oversight positions society as a co-guardian of democracy rather than merely an object of political policy. This mechanism can be implemented through public reporting of alleged violations, participation in monitoring forums, community-based political education, and the utilization of digital technology for rapid documentation and reporting of electoral violations ((Bawaslu Republik Indonesia., 2024; Perludem, 2024)

This approach has proven effective in several regions through initiatives such as Citizen Observer programs facilitated by Bawaslu and independent monitoring networks such as Perludem, which utilize social media and reporting applications to increase responsiveness toward electoral violations. Through collective community involvement, violations such as money politics and abuse of authority can be detected earlier, enabling preventive measures before the impacts become more widespread. In addition, the involvement of religious and traditional leaders can strengthen the social legitimacy of monitoring efforts, considering their role as influential opinion leaders within local communities (Bawaslu Republik Indonesia., 2024; Perludem, 2019).

The third strategy is strict law enforcement against perpetrators of money politics and village officials who violate the principle of neutrality. Within the framework of the rule of law, consistent and impartial law enforcement is a prerequisite for creating a deterrence effect while maintaining public trust in electoral integrity (Maravall & Przeworski, 2003). This enforcement includes criminal, administrative, and ethical sanctions in accordance with existing legal frameworks, such as Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections and Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, both of which explicitly prohibit village officials from engaging in practical politics (Fitriyani, 2021).

The law enforcement process must be conducted transparently, accountably, and based on sufficient evidence. This includes effective coordination among Bawaslu, the Police, the Prosecutor's Office, and judicial institutions, as well as support from independent monitoring organizations. Strengthening the capacity of law enforcement personnel to understand the evolving patterns of money politics and neutrality violations is also important, considering that perpetrators often employ covert methods or exploit regulatory loopholes (Muhtadi, 2020; Stokes et al., 2013). Furthermore, transparent publication of law enforcement outcomes would send a strong signal that violations will not be tolerated while simultaneously reinforcing a culture of legal compliance among electoral participants and state officials (Norris, 2014).

Through the combination of participatory oversight and strict law enforcement, it is expected that a cleaner, fairer, and more inclusive electoral ecosystem can be established. Synergy among society, election management bodies, and law enforcement institutions is essential to break the cycle of money politics and ensure the neutrality of village apparatus as a fundamental pillar of a healthy democracy (Bjornlund, 2004; Diamond, 2008). Finally, the fourth strategy is inter-institutional coordination, namely building strong synergy among Bawaslu, local governments, and law enforcement institutions such as the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the Indonesian National Police (Polri). This coordination is important to ensure that supervision and handling of violations are conducted in an integrated and complementary manner rather than separately. Institutional synergy is a key factor in creating clean and credible elections at the local level (Bawaslu Lampung, 2024; Bawaslu Republik Indonesia., 2024)

Based on the findings, strategies for preventing money politics and enforcing the neutrality of village officials continue to face both structural and cultural challenges. Structurally, the open-list proportional electoral system creates competition not only between candidates from different political parties but also among candidates within the same party. This competitive pattern potentially strengthens transactional political practices because



candidates are encouraged to build electoral support through personal resources, including the direct distribution of material incentives to voters (Buehler, 2016; Lijphart, 1994).

On the other hand, cultural factors rooted in personal relationships, reciprocal norms, and informal community networks make violations of village apparatus neutrality difficult to prevent. The limited effectiveness of supervision and sanctions against officials who violate neutrality, whether due to limited institutional capacity or weak law enforcement commitment, further aggravates the situation. The lack of transparent publication of enforcement outcomes also reduces the deterrence effect and weakens public trust in the integrity of the electoral process (Norris, 2014; Permana, 2021).

Therefore, strategies to prevent money politics and enforce village apparatus neutrality should not be limited to intensive supervision during campaign periods alone. A more sustainable approach is required, including community-based political education to improve democratic literacy, strengthening electoral institutions at the regional level, and providing regular training for village officials regarding neutrality principles, governmental ethics, and the legal consequences of electoral violations. In this context, the active involvement of civil society organizations, religious institutions, and local community leaders plays a strategic role in shaping new social norms that reject money politics and support bureaucratic neutrality (Diamond, 2008; Habermas, 1996a; Perludem, 2019). Overall, the four identified strategies participatory oversight, strict law enforcement, sustainable political education, and institutional strengthening cannot operate independently. They must be integrated into a comprehensive, synergistic, and long-term electoral governance framework. Such integration is crucial in addressing the increasingly complex challenges of money politics arising from the open-list proportional electoral system and local political dynamics. If implemented consistently and supported by strong political commitment from all stakeholders, these strategies are expected to create electoral processes that are honest, fair, and credible, while also producing leaders with strong legitimacy and the capacity to advance regional development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that money politics and violations of village apparatus neutrality remain serious challenges in the implementation of the 2024 General Election in East Lampung Regency. Local political dynamics are influenced not only by competition among candidates, but also by the persistence of informal power relations and social networks within society. The open list proportional electoral system encourages intense personalized competition among candidates, which subsequently creates incentives for transactional political practices carried out through informal and often concealed mechanisms that are difficult to legally verify. This study demonstrates that money politics continues to operate systematically through networks involving campaign teams, volunteers, and local intermediary actors. In addition, the neutrality of village officials has not been fully implemented due to political pressure, personal loyalties, and the persistence of hierarchical bureaucratic culture. Therefore, the objectives of this study concerning the analysis of money politics, village apparatus neutrality, and the influence of the open-list proportional electoral system on electoral integrity have been achieved. The findings further indicate that preventive efforts against money politics and the enforcement of bureaucratic neutrality have not yet been fully effective. Money politics is often practiced through informal mechanisms such as the distribution of “transport money” or “tokens of appreciation,” while violations of village apparatus neutrality tend to occur in indirect and passive forms, making them difficult to identify and formally verify. Weak supervisory mechanisms, limited legal evidence, and strong social relationships within local communities are among the primary factors contributing to the persistence of these practices. Furthermore, the findings reinforce Arend Lijphart’s (1994) electoral system theory, which argues that electoral system design influences the political



behavior of electoral actors. In the context of an open-list proportional system, increasingly personalized political competition creates incentives for candidates to adopt transactional strategies and mobilize local networks in order to secure political support. This condition demonstrates that institutional arrangements within electoral systems may generate behavioral consequences that affect the quality and integrity of democratic processes. Based on these findings, this study recommends strengthening targeted political education programs directed toward voters, particularly at the village level, to increase public awareness regarding the negative consequences of money politics and the importance of maintaining electoral integrity. In addition, village officials should receive continuous training and institutional guidance related to bureaucratic neutrality, ethical standards, and their responsibilities in maintaining democratic values during electoral processes. Strengthening the supervisory capacity of Bawaslu and sub-district election supervisory bodies (*Panwascam*) through participatory monitoring mechanisms is also necessary to improve the prevention and detection of electoral violations. Furthermore, the utilization of digital technology should be enhanced through the development of secure, accessible, and confidential reporting systems that encourage public participation in reporting electoral violations. This study also suggests the need for evaluating the implementation of the open list proportional electoral system within the context of local political dynamics in Indonesia to assess its broader implications for electoral integrity.

This study also has several limitations. First, the research was conducted only in East Lampung Regency; therefore, the findings cannot yet be generalized to broader contexts. Second, the limited availability of direct evidence resulted in several findings relying substantially on interview data and field observations. Third, the research participants were limited to selected key informants and therefore may not fully represent the broader perspectives of communities and political elites. Accordingly, future studies are recommended to cover wider geographical areas and integrate both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to produce more comprehensive and generalizable findings.

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