

## Leadership and the Money Politics Trap in Islamic Legal Thought: A Case Study of Indonesia as a Muslim-Majority Country

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to evaluate the attitudes of leaders shaped after being trapped in the practice of money politics by voters in general elections based on Islamic law. This context tends to be overlooked by previous studies discussing the issue of money politics in elections. In addition to responding to the shortcomings of previous studies, this study also focuses on evaluating the characteristics and implications of money politics in shaping leaders' attitudes post-election based on Islamic law. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach based on Islamic law to explore the characteristics, factors, and implications of money politics on leaders' attitudes post-election. The findings of this study reveal three important contexts regarding the characteristics of money politics in elections in Indonesia that contradict Islamic law. First, the practice of money politics in elections often appears in the form of cash payments, digital money, and the provision of projects with political aims. Second, money politics practiced in elections is frequently influenced by structural, cultural, and infrastructural factors oriented towards transactional politics. Third, the money politics conducted by actors in the elections has shaped opportunistic, pragmatic, and even corrupt attitudes among leaders post-election.*

## Introduction

Money politics by voters, in addition to having complex characteristics and factors, has also shaped counterproductive attitudes in leaders post-election. Sitompul & Sitompul (2019) state that money politics is often considered normal in a political contest, and therefore can only be evaluated using approaches based on Islamic law. In other words, money politics predominantly has the potential to shape leaders' attitudes to become more anti-social and even corrupt, making this practice highly contradictory to Islamic law (Galuh Larasati et al., 2023). This context can be reflected through the reports of Rochmanuddin (2014) and Maliana (2021), which show that leaders involved in money politics in elections become anti-social, and not infrequently, these leaders become involved in corruption cases post-election with the motive of recovering campaign funds. Nyberg (2021) notes that money politics, aside from bringing negative political implications, is also a crucial issue to be explained in order to evaluate the implications of money politics conducted by voters on the attitudes of leaders formed post-election based on Islamic law.

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Money politics has become a crucial issue frequently discussed by the public during every election process. The characteristics of money politics, as studied by Al Yakin & Latief (2022), do not only manifest in the form of cash transactions but also through the distribution of goods and facilities promised by candidates in the elections. According to Weiss (2016), the purpose of money politics conducted by candidates is to gain voters' sympathy, thereby influencing the public's preferences in their decision-making during elections. Similarly, Holcombe (2021) states that money politics by candidates during election periods aims not only to increase the candidates' electability but also to maintain the existence and legitimacy of incumbent candidates. In other words, the practice of money politics by candidates during elections is not only aimed at gaining power but also at retaining it (Kirshner, 2003).

So far, studies discussing the issue of money politics in election processes have only focused on three dominant contexts. First, studies that discuss how money politics is normatively defined in elections (Hanan, 2023; Davies, 2021; Leight et al., 2020). Second, studies that discuss how money politics is practiced by actors in elections (González Uriel, 2021; Alfiantoro et al., 2021; Saha & Sen, 2021). Third, studies that discuss the political implications of money politics in elections (Halida et al., 2022; Kao et al., 2022; Igiebor, 2019). In general, the studies that have addressed money politics in elections only focus on these three contexts: the definition of money politics, its practice, and its implications. In other words, studies addressing money politics in elections have not been conducted comprehensively, particularly those that explain and evaluate the attitudes of leaders shaped after being trapped in the practice of money politics by voters in elections based on Islamic law.

Islamic law in predominantly Muslim countries such as Indonesia plays a crucial role in evaluating political, social, and economic developments based on the principle of public welfare. Ahmed & Abozaid (2022) state that Islamic law not only regulates aspects of Muslims' lives in the context of religion but can also serve as a moral foundation for evaluating the patterns and procedures of community governance. This context is further emphasized by Hisam Ahyani et al. (2021), who assert that the ideal concept of human values within Islamic law can serve as a reference for citizens' attitudes and behaviors, even for those outside the Muslim community. In other words, Islamic law is not only a standard of behavior for the Muslim community but can also be used to evaluate attitudes and actions related to money politics, which are often considered normal in elections. In the context of Islamic law, money politics is categorized as a form of dishonesty and deceit because it contradicts the principles of justice and honesty inherent in Islamic law (Marwing, 2021).

In the context of general elections, money politics is a practice frequently encountered in countries that adhere to democratic systems. Besides undermining the system and values of democracy, money politics also contradicts Islamic law as it can threaten the economic and political well-being of a country post-election. According to Fernando et al. (2023), this occurs because systemic money politics has shaped leaders' attitudes to become more anti-social and even corrupt, thereby influencing a country's welfare through

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political decisions that are not accommodating to the fundamental interests and needs of its citizens. Consequently, money politics not only tarnishes the image of a democratic electoral system in a country but also determines the behavior of leaders post-election, making it essential to explain and analyze. This study not only addresses the shortcomings of previous studies discussing money politics issues in elections but also analyzes the forms, factors, and implications of money politics conducted by voters on the attitudes of leaders post-election in Indonesia based on Islamic law.

Islamic law serves as a regulation that can evaluate political behaviors such as money politics, which is often considered normal by politicians in political contests. Yani & Barthos (2020) also state that Islamic law is an effective moral control, as it encompasses noble values capable of evaluating injustices in political contests. In other words, Islamic law, which is derived from religious values and morality, can act as a control mechanism and shape the behavior and integrity of society to prevent fraud in upholding the principles of governance. According to Amal (2021), Islamic law is codified as a set of rules, guidelines, and principles, allowing these regulations to be implemented in evaluating fraudulent activities such as money politics conducted by politicians. In the context of Islamic law, money politics is not only a fraudulent act but also has the potential to create inequality in a contest, making such actions strictly prohibited in both private and public spheres (Mubarok, 2021).

Money politics in general elections in Indonesia is a phenomenon with highly complex and contextual characteristics, making it very interesting to analyze and evaluate within the context of Islamic law. This study focuses on three questions in analyzing this phenomenon. First, what forms of money politics frequently appear in general elections in Indonesia? Second, what factors influence the massive emergence of money politics practices in general elections in Indonesia? Third, what are the implications of money politics in shaping the attitudes of leaders post-election in Indonesia? In line with this, the study is also based on the argument that the practice of money politics by voters in Indonesian general elections, besides undermining the democratic political system, has also shaped leaders' attitudes to be counterproductive, potentially affecting the nation's welfare through non-accommodative political decisions. In other words, the attitudes of leaders formed post-election are greatly influenced by the behaviors and actions of voters during the election processes, which is in stark contrast to Islamic law in predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia.

### **Method**

This study is conducted amidst the proliferation of issues surrounding money politics that are likely to occur ahead of the 2024 general elections in Indonesia, as disseminated through online media reports. However, this study specifically aims to explain and evaluate the characteristics and attitudes of leaders formed after being entangled in the practice of money politics in past elections in Indonesia, based on Islamic law. This study is founded on three considerations. First, money politics in Indonesian elections is a central issue that has not been comprehensively addressed in previous studies. Second,

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money politics has highly complex and contextual characteristics, making it crucial to analyze in order to understand the factors influencing the widespread practice of money politics in Indonesian elections. Third, money politics in Indonesian elections has also shaped counterproductive attitudes in leaders post-election, making it essential to reflect upon. These three considerations form the basis for this study to focus on the issue of money politics based on Islamic law in Indonesian elections.

This study is a qualitative descriptive study based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data for this study was obtained through intensive reading of 1,000 online news articles using the search keyword "Democracy and money politics in elections in Indonesia" through the Google search engine. The search and reading process of these online news articles took place from December 1 to December 26, 2023. The selection and reading of the online news articles were conducted quickly, focusing on the headlines. From this reading process, three dominant themes emerged regarding democracy and money politics in elections in Indonesia: 360 online news articles discussing the characteristics of money politics in Indonesian elections, 325 online news articles discussing the factors contributing to the emergence of money politics in Indonesian elections, and 315 online news articles discussing the implications of money politics on the attitudes of leaders post-election in Indonesia. In addition to primary data, secondary data used in this study was obtained through reading relevant books, websites, and journal articles related to the questions posed in this study.

The data analysis in this study follows the stages outlined by Miles & Huberman (2014), which are focused on three stages. First, data reduction involves organizing data into a more systematic form based on the tendencies represented by the data according to its form, factors, and data implications. Second, data display involves summarizing thematically reduced data. Third, conclusion drawing involves displaying thematically reduced data and then presenting it in table form containing citations from online news texts that have been verified according to the relevance of the research questions posed in this study. From these three stages, further inductive data analysis is conducted as a basis for interpreting the classified data. Data interpretation involves restating and reflecting data according to the ideas, patterns, and social contexts represented in online news texts. These stages and analytical processes enable the conclusion to be drawn regarding the phenomenon under study.

### **Result and Discussion**

The practice of vote-buying by voters not only exhibits highly complex characteristics and factors but has also fostered a counterproductive attitude towards Islamic law from a post-election leader in a predominantly Muslim country like Indonesia. This context can be observed and reflected upon through three key findings below.

#### **Characteristics of vote-buying in general elections**

The characteristics of vote-buying in general elections in Indonesia manifest in forms that contradict Islamic law. Ferguson et al., (2022) also state that vote-buying in general elections does not always appear in the form of cash

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transactions but can also take the form of giving goods or facilities to obtain votes from voters. These characteristics of vote-buying can be observed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Forms of vote-buying in general elections

<b>Form</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Case</b>
Cash	Party cadres	Presidential elections	As many as 400,000 envelopes are evidence of vote-buying out of 600,000 envelopes containing cash. The money will be distributed by party cadres to support one of the candidates in the general elections across Java and Kalimantan (CNN, 2019).
Digital money	Campaign team	Mayoral elections	The incident occurred during the campaign of candidate number 4 in the Rangku District. The campaign team of the candidate distributed digital money in the form of electricity credits directly to the community (Wahyono, 2018).
Basic necessities	Campaign team	Governor elections	Three trucks carrying basic necessities are suspected to be used by campaign teams for vote-buying to support a gubernatorial candidate in the upcoming elections in Jakarta. The case is currently being handled by the Election Supervisory Agency (Ikhsanudin, 2017).
Facilities	Campaign team	Legislative elections	One campaign team improved facilities by paving roads in the community. This provision aimed to persuade the public to vote for the legislative candidate they supported in the general elections (Bale Bandung, 2019).
Concert tickets	Political party cadres	Presidential elections	Political party cadres are distributing concert tickets as prizes online. To obtain these tickets, members of the public must upload a photo with one of the candidate pairs participating in the election contest (CNN Indonesia, 2023).
Souvenirs	Campaign team	Presidential elections	The campaign team of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates distributed various souvenirs to the public, including 5,000 posters, 5,000 T-shirts, tabloids, and stickers. This distribution aimed to encourage the public to vote for the candidates they endorse in the general elections (Detik News, 2004).

Source: Online news disseminated via Google.

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Table 1 illustrates cases of vote-buying practices that not only appear in cash transactions but also in non-cash transactions in general elections in Indonesia. The table also presents three important contexts regarding the characteristics of vote-buying, which frequently occur in Indonesian elections. Firstly, vote-buying practices in Indonesian elections are not limited to cash transactions but also include giving facilities and basic necessities to the public. Secondly, besides being carried out by campaign teams, vote-buying in Indonesian elections is also practiced extensively by party cadres to support their endorsed candidates. Thirdly, vote-buying practices in Indonesian elections occur not only in legislative candidate selection but also in executive candidate selection at both regional and national levels. From these three contexts, it can be observed and reflected upon that vote-buying practices in Indonesian elections exhibit highly complex and contextual characteristics.

**Factors contributing to the emergence of vote-buying practices in general elections**

The practice of vote-buying in general elections in Indonesia does not just occur naturally but is influenced by various fundamental spiritual factors. Sari et al. (2023) also state that vote-buying in general elections is not only influenced by political situations but also rooted in the social conditions of the voters. The factors contributing to the emergence of vote-buying can be observed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Factors contributing to the emergence of money politics in general elections.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>Motive</b>	<b>Narrative</b>
Structural	Political party officials	Gaining legitimacy	One legislative candidate admitted to failing to participate in regional elections because they couldn't afford the political dowry requested by the political party officials, purportedly to prepare campaign logistics funds (Utama, 2018).
Structural	Political party	Gaining legitimacy	Political dowry is common in Indonesia, where a candidate must provide money to a political party to gain legitimacy. Political dowries are also given to fund political party activities during campaigns (Center for Anti-Corruption Education, 2023).
Cultural	Political party officials	Buying votes	Political party officials in North Sumatra are involved in a vote-buying case. These officials requested legislative candidates they endorsed to prepare a certain amount of cash for bribery purposes in the election campaign (CNN Indonesia, 2019b).
Cultural	Political party cadres	Gaining support	One legislative candidate admitted to needing to prepare cash and valuable goods to gain public support in the

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			election. This is because many voters choose their leaders based on the money they receive (Suchahyo, 2023).
Infrastructural	Election organizers	Gaining legitimacy	Two election organizers received cars and money related to their authority to pass the requirements for one of the regional head candidates in Garut District in 2018 (Perludem, 2018).
Infrastructural	Election organizers	Gaining facilities	One legislative candidate admitted to being asked for money by election organizers. If the legislative candidate refused to give money, the election organizers threatened not to provide information and facilities related to the election process and stages (Arief, 2021).

Source: Online news disseminated via Google.

Table 2 illustrates that the practice of vote-buying in Indonesian elections does not occur naturally but is influenced by various complex factors. The table also highlights three important contexts regarding the factors influencing the emergence of vote-buying practices in Indonesian elections. Firstly, vote-buying practices in Indonesian elections are influenced by structural, cultural, and pragmatic electoral infrastructure factors. Secondly, vote-buying practices in Indonesian elections are also influenced by the attitudes of political party officials, election organizers, and opportunistic voters. Thirdly, vote-buying practices in Indonesian elections aim to gain political party legitimacy, obtain election facilities, and even gain economic advantages from election contestants. From these three contexts, it can be observed and reflected upon that the practice of vote-buying in Indonesian elections is influenced by fundamental factors.

**The implications of vote-buying on the attitudes of leaders**

The attitudes of leaders shaped after being involved in vote-buying practices during elections in Indonesia, which contradict religious values and morality, can be seen through counterproductive leadership behaviors they exhibit. Apaydin & Çoban (2023) also state that vote-buying in general elections not only undermines the democratic system but also has the potential to foster anti-social and even corrupt attitudes among leaders. The implications of vote-buying can be observed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Implications of money politics in shaping the attitudes of leaders.

Attitude	Status	Motive	Narrative
Pragmatic	Elected executive	Rewarding the campaign team	Bupati Kebumen Mohammad Yahya Fuad has been named a suspect in a case involving alleged bribery and gratification. This case is suspected to be a form of reciprocation from Yahya towards his campaign team who helped him

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			become Bupati (Rahadian et al., 2018).
Opportunist	Elected executive	Returning campaign funds	Adriatma is suspected of receiving a bribe worth Rp 2.8 billion from the CEO of PT Sarana Bangun Nusantara. The money was allegedly used not only to cover political expenses but also as capital for his candidacy in the next regional elections (Robertus Belarminus, 2018).
Corruption	Elected executive	Disappointed with a low salary	The Corruption Eradication Commission officially designated the Regent of Banjarnegara as a corruption suspect. Apart from high political costs, the Regent also complained about having a relatively low salary as a Regent, which led to engaging in corruption (Maliana, 2021).
Corruption	Elected executive	Funding political activities	The Corruption Eradication Commission arrested the Regent of Kapuas and his wife for budget embezzlement they conducted. The corruption was carried out to fund their political activities (Masyukrilla, 2023).
Anti-social	Legislative candidate	Disappointed with the election results	A legislative candidate from the Gerindra Party in West Java withdrew assistance previously given to residents. This action was reportedly taken because the candidate was dissatisfied with the election results (Michael Hangga Wismabrata, 2019).
Anti-social	Legislative candidate	Disappointed with the voters	A legislative candidate in Cikampek retrieved a water pump donated to the Al-Amin mosque after the voting. His campaign team withdrew the assistance due to dissatisfaction with the votes received from the voters (Sidik, 2009).

Source: Online news disseminated via Google.

Table 3 illustrates the implications of money politics in Indonesian elections, which have shaped post-election leadership attitudes in a counterproductive manner with regard to post-election leadership values. The table also highlights three important contexts regarding the implications of money politics on post-election leadership attitudes in Indonesia. Firstly, money politics conducted by election contestants represents a logical implication of voters' transactional political attitudes and behaviors. Secondly,



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the implications of money politics in elections not only counterproductively shape attitudes against democratic values but also influence post-election social behaviors of leaders towards antisocial tendencies. Thirdly, the implications of money politics in elections have led to pragmatic and opportunistic attitudes among leaders, with some involved in post-election corruption cases aimed at recovering campaign funds. Reflecting on these three contexts reveals that the practice of money politics in elections has brought about negative implications for leadership attitudes and democratic political systems.

**Making sense of money politics trap in Islamic legal thought**

The widespread occurrence of money politics in Indonesian elections demonstrates the low commitment of the majority-Muslim citizens to manifest Islamic law in political contests (Fernando et al., 2024). Characteristics of money politics in Indonesian elections include cash handouts, distribution of souvenirs, and gratuities related to projects, often employed by contestants to garner sympathy from citizens. In addition to being influenced by structural factors within corrupt political parties and the cultural pragmatism of citizens, money politics is also influenced by opportunistic infrastructural factors in election implementation. As a result, money politics has not only influenced but also shaped post-election leadership attitudes towards greater pragmatism and opportunism, with many involved in corruption cases post-election. In other words, post-election leadership attitudes are significantly influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of their voters, which often conflict with Islamic law in electoral processes.

Politik uang is a practice that contradicts the values and morality upheld by Islam. According to Islamic law, money politics is categorized as bribery (*risywah*), which is prohibited by Allah SWT, whether one gives (*rasyi*), receives (*murtasyi*), or acts as an intermediary (*raisy*) (Ashar et al., 2020; Mubarak, 2021). This view is supported by Quranic verse Al-Baqarah 2:188, which explicitly states that bribery is the act of taking wealth from others unlawfully, and if that wealth is used for specific purposes, it is considered forbidden (Khoirin & Junaedi, 2022; Sambo & Sule, 2021). In line with this, the Indonesian Ulama Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) and Nahdlatul Ulama also affirm that giving and receiving rewards, whether in the form of money or goods, during the candidacy process constitutes bribery (*risywah*) and falls under the category of major sin (Wardhana, 2020). Therefore, money politics is considered unjustifiable and classified as a major sin because it promotes principles of dishonesty that contradict Islamic law.

This study reflects that the prevalence of money politics in general elections in predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia is influenced not only by low political literacy but also by the weak commitment of citizens to adhere to religious values and norms. Koburtay et al. (2023) also assert that the commitment of citizens, especially Muslims, to manifest principles of Islamic law has predominantly influenced community preferences in choosing leaders based more on transactional interests than national interests. Therefore, many contestants or aspiring leaders resort to money politics to gain sympathy and support from citizens in every election. In addition to low

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political literacy and weak commitment to religious rules, the unstable economic conditions of citizens have also normalized the practice of money politics in every election. Ertac and Gurdal (2019) argue that the rights and sovereignty of citizens in democratically selecting leaders are often exploited for economic gain by candidates participating in electoral contests, even if it contradicts the religious rules they believe in.

Money politics not only fundamentally impacts the quality of democracy but also reflects that Islamic law in predominantly Muslim countries may not always manifest in the political lives of Muslims. In other words, money politics not only has negative implications for political systems and religious values but can also trap leaders involved in post-election money politics practices. This trap of money politics, as noted by Pratiwi (2018), can be seen through corruption cases often involving leaders seeking to recover campaign funds. Besides potentially fostering corrupt leadership attitudes, citizens' preference for choosing leaders based on transactional methods can degrade the religious values and morals of citizens, as they may no longer base their choices on religious rules and guidance. Consequently, leaders selected through transactional political processes may lack the ideal policy concepts and developmental strategies needed to accommodate future citizen welfare. Therefore, Gkartzonikas and Gkritza (2019) argue that future citizen welfare depends significantly on the morality and consistency of citizens in practicing religious values and morals when participating in elections.

The findings of this study differ from previous research, which generally focused on the normative characteristics and situational implications of money politics in elections. This study reveals that besides negatively impacting democratic political systems, money politics also has long-term implications for the quality and attitudes of leaders in a country, no longer based on religious values and norms. According to Galuh Larasati et al. (2023), this context arises because leaders elected through transactional processes in elections tend to lack the capacity and capability to effectively govern state institutions. As a result, political decisions and policies may neglect future citizen welfare and even contradict Islamic law. Similarly, Fernando et al. (2023) argue that the consequences of money politics are not merely situational but also affect a country's conditions and welfare in the future through leaders who are incapable of manifesting interests and religious laws such as Islam in an ideal manner. These perspectives highlight that money politics not only undermines democratic principles but also poses significant challenges to governance and the adherence to religious values in leadership, impacting long-term national development and welfare.

Money politics in Indonesian elections has exhibited complex characteristics and implications for the political system, leadership attitudes, and the future of a country no longer grounded in religious values and morality. Therefore, increasing awareness among citizens, aspiring leaders, political parties, and state institutions regarding more morally and religiously oriented rules and guidance is crucial to preemptively prevent the potential for widespread money politics in every electoral process. In alignment with this, Berenschot (2018) emphasizes the need for a systemic evaluation across all sectors to manifest principles and values of religious morality, thereby

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fostering electoral processes oriented towards public welfare and minimizing the potential for extensive money politics. Alongside systemic evaluation, ideological reflection is also crucial to shape citizen attitudes towards selecting leaders who are no longer economically oriented. By doing so comprehensively, the practice of money politics can be prevented, leading to the election of ideal leaders through processes that are grounded in religious values and morality. In essence, these efforts aim to prevent the widespread occurrence of money politics and foster the election of exemplary leaders through electoral processes rooted in religious values and morality.

### **Conclusion**

Money politics practiced by voters in Indonesian elections exhibits fundamental characteristics and implications for the values and morality of elected leaders. This context can be reflected through three key findings in this study. Firstly, the practice of money politics in Indonesian elections often involves cash handouts, digital payments, and project grants for political purposes that contradict Islamic law. Secondly, money politics in elections is frequently influenced by structural, cultural, and infrastructural factors oriented towards transactional politics. Thirdly, the money politics conducted by actors in elections has shaped opportunistic, pragmatic, and even corrupt attitudes among leaders after the elections. From these three findings, it is evident that the practice of money politics by voters in Indonesian elections not only undermines democratic political systems but also shapes leaders' attitudes in a counterproductive manner, potentially affecting a country's welfare through non-accommodative political decisions. In other words, post-election leadership attitudes are significantly influenced by the behaviors and attitudes of their voters during electoral processes, which often contradict Islamic law in predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia.

The findings of this study differ from previous research which has typically focused on normative characteristics and situational implications of money politics in elections. This study demonstrates that money politics not only negatively impacts democratic political systems but also has long-term implications for the quality and attitudes of leaders in a country no longer grounded in religious values and norms. These findings are intended to serve as a basis for dialogues in social and political sciences, and to influence reflections and evaluations of electoral systems in accommodating principles and commitments to democracy consistently, while manifesting religious values and morality within political systems.

This study also has limitations in its data collection process, which relied solely on searching and reading online media reports disseminated through Google. Therefore, the data described and presented in this study are primarily archives of online news texts. However, these limitations are expected to serve as a foundation or reference for future studies, especially those seeking to explain the perceptions and motivations of actors and voters involved in the practice of money politics in elections through in-depth interviews. Through such processes, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of the practice of money politics by actors and voters in electoral

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processes can be obtained, which can be evaluated using an Islamic legal approach.

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