Distribution of Benefits and Burdens of the Sanitation Service Fee Policy from the Perspective of Local Populism in Makassar City

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Abstract *: This study aims to analyze the distribution of benefits and burdens associated with the waste service fee exemption policy in Makassar City from the perspective of local populism. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field observations involving local government officials, policy implementers, members of the local legislative council, and residents who either benefit from or remain subject to waste service fees. The analysis focuses on the distribution of benefits and burdens, policy responsiveness, political interests, and the construction of local populism. The findings demonstrate that the fee exemption policy constitutes a distributive policy shaped through a political process involving electoral promises, government agenda setting, policy institutionalization, and the targeting of beneficiary groups. The exemption provides economic benefits to targeted households, particularly those with limited economic capacity, while simultaneously shifting part of the financial and operational burden of waste management to the local government and sanitation workers. The local populist dimension is reflected in the political construction of beneficiary groups, the fulfillment of electoral commitments, and the representation of the local government as responsive to citizens' needs. Household waste segregation serves as a reciprocal mechanism that can reduce residual waste, collection requirements, operational costs, and sanitation workers' workloads. The policy therefore indicates that political legitimacy depends not only on the provision of immediate economic benefits but also on fiscal sustainability, service quality, operational effectiveness, and citizen participation.*

Keywords *: Local Populism; Waste Service Fee Exemption; Distributive Policy; Policy Responsiveness.*

Abstrak : Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis distribusi manfaat dan beban dalam kebijakan pembebasan retribusi pelayanan kebersihan di Kota Makassar dengan menggunakan perspektif populisme lokal. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus melalui wawancara semiterstruktur, analisis dokumen, dan observasi lapangan yang melibatkan aktor pemerintah daerah, pelaksana kebijakan, anggota DPRD, serta masyarakat penerima dan pembayar retribusi. Analisis dilakukan melalui pengorganisasian tema yang berfokus pada distribusi manfaat dan beban, responsivitas kebijakan, kepentingan politik, serta konstruksi populisme lokal. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan pembebasan retribusi merupakan kebijakan distributif yang terbentuk melalui proses politik dari janji elektoral, penetapan agenda pemerintah, pelembagaan kebijakan, hingga penentuan kelompok penerima manfaat. Pembebasan retribusi memberikan manfaat ekonomi kepada rumah tangga sasaran, terutama kelompok dengan kapasitas ekonomi terbatas, tetapi secara bersamaan mengalihkan sebagian beban pembiayaan dan operasional pengelolaan sampah kepada pemerintah daerah dan pekerja kebersihan. Dimensi populisme lokal terlihat melalui konstruksi kelompok penerima manfaat, pemenuhan komitmen elektoral, dan representasi pemerintah sebagai aktor yang responsif

terhadap kebutuhan masyarakat. Pemilahan sampah dari sumber menjadi mekanisme timbal balik yang dapat mengurangi volume sampah residu, kebutuhan pengangkutan, biaya operasional, dan beban kerja petugas. Kebijakan tersebut pada akhirnya menunjukkan bahwa legitimasi politik tidak hanya bergantung pada pemberian manfaat ekonomi, tetapi juga pada keberlanjutan fiskal, kualitas pelayanan, efektivitas operasional, dan partisipasi masyarakat.

Kata Kunci : Populisme Lokal; Pembebasan Biaya Layanan Pengelolaan Sampah; Kebijakan Distributif; Responsivitas Kebijakan.

INTRODUCTION

Waste management is an essential component of urban public service provision and has direct implications for the quality of life of local communities (Abubakar et al., 2022; Dekanić & Ježić, 2025; Rodić & Wilson, 2017)s. Population growth, expanding economic activities, and changing consumption patterns have increased the volume and complexity of municipal waste, thereby placing greater pressure on local governments to ensure sustainable and effective waste management. Within the context of decentralization, local governments are required not only to provide adequate waste services but also to establish financing mechanisms capable of sustaining service delivery without imposing disproportionate financial burdens on citizens. Waste service charges therefore constitute an important policy instrument through which local governments reconcile fiscal considerations with the economic capacity of the population. Consequently, waste service charges should not be understood merely as a mechanism for generating local government revenue but also as a public policy instrument that determines how the benefits of public services and the financial burdens of service provision are distributed across social groups.

The distributive dimension of waste service policies becomes particularly significant when local governments revise the structure and level of service charges. Changes in tariff structures inevitably generate different consequences for different categories of service users. Some groups may receive exemptions or reductions, whereas others may remain subject to full payment according to categories established by the local government.

Waste service charge policies therefore have an inherently distributive character because governments determine who receives benefits, who bears the financial burden, and what considerations are used to classify particular groups as beneficiaries (Ezeudu & Bristow, 2025; Turaga et al., 2019). This perspective shifts analytical attention beyond the effectiveness of revenue collection toward broader questions of policy distributive justice, particularly when policies provide direct benefits to specific segments of society. Examining the distribution of benefits and burdens is therefore essential for understanding how local governments translate principles of equity, ability to pay, social protection, and fiscal sustainability into concrete public policies.

The distributive dimension of such policies becomes explicitly political when decisions concerning beneficiaries and burden bearers are made within local governments established through electoral competition. Local political leaders possess substantial influence over policy agendas, while policies that provide tangible benefits to citizens may serve as instruments for demonstrating governmental responsiveness to constituents. In this context, the relationship between electoral politics and public policy does not end with the election of local leaders but continues through the process of translating political commitments into governmental decisions.

Policies that provide exemptions, reductions, or preferential treatment to particular social groups may therefore represent not only distributive policy choices but also politically consequential decisions. The central issue is consequently not merely whether a policy provides benefits to citizens, but how beneficiary groups are constructed, how benefits are allocated, and

how such distribution shapes the political relationship between local governments and their communities.

The perspective of local populism provides a useful analytical framework for understanding this relationship. Populism generally constructs politics around a relationship between political leaders and the people, emphasizing the representation and protection of ordinary citizens against elites or groups perceived as benefiting disproportionately from existing arrangements (Caravantes & Lombardo, 2023; Cohen, 2019). In local government contexts, such characteristics may emerge through policies that symbolically and materially emphasize governmental responsiveness to citizens, particularly economically vulnerable groups.

However, the provision of public benefits alone does not necessarily constitute populism. Populist characteristics must instead be examined through the policy-making process, the construction of beneficiary groups, the political narratives used to justify governmental interventions, and the relationship between policy decisions and political legitimacy. Accordingly, local populism in this study is employed as an analytical perspective for examining how the distribution of policy benefits and burdens shapes the relationship between local government and citizens (Paxton, 2020, 2022).

This issue is particularly relevant to the reform of waste service charges in Makassar City. The Makassar City Government enacted Mayor Regulation of Makassar Number 13 of 2025 concerning the Review of Waste Service Charge Tariffs on June 26, 2025. The regulation revised the tariff structure according to categories of service users, including households, businesses, and industries, while electricity capacity was incorporated as one of the criteria for classification.

The regulation also stipulates that tariff adjustments should consider price indices and economic developments, as well as the principles of fairness, utility, and citizens' rights to a healthy environment. This regulatory framework demonstrates that waste service charges are not merely fiscal instruments but are also embedded within broader considerations of social equity and public service rights.

The distributive character of this policy became particularly evident through the implementation of free waste service charges for specific groups of residents (Jiang, 2022). The Makassar City Government launched the free waste service charge program in June 2025 and began implementing it in July 2025, particularly for households with electricity capacities of 450 VA and 900 VA. The local government presented the policy as one of the priority programs of Mayor Munafri Arifuddin and Deputy Mayor Aliyah Mustika Ilham, with the stated objective of reducing the financial burden on economically disadvantaged households. At the implementation level, the local government reported that 11,487 households with 450 VA electricity capacity and 37,722 households with 900 VA electricity capacity had benefited from the exemption, resulting in a reported total of 49,209 beneficiary households in 2025. These figures demonstrate that the policy generates a differentiated distribution of benefits across social groups based on predetermined eligibility criteria.

The policy is significant in the context of local electoral politics because the Makassar City Government has positioned the free waste service charge program as part of Mayor Munafri Arifuddin's political commitments, prioritizing extremely poor households while adjusting charges for commercial properties to maintain local revenue and create fiscal space for lower-income groups. This arrangement connects the reduction of financial burdens for selected groups with the redistribution of charges among other service users, making waste service charges both an administrative-fiscal instrument and a political process for determining who receives protection, financial relief, and payment obligations. The policy was institutionalized through Makassar Mayor

Regulation No. 25 of 2025, which regulates data collection, tariff determination, payment, collection, reductions, relief, exemptions, monitoring, and reporting, demonstrating that the distribution of benefits and burdens depends not only on tariff decisions but also on administrative mechanisms that translate political decisions into the allocation of citizens' rights, benefits, and financial responsibilities.

This study builds upon three prior studies conducted over the last five years, which highlight the distinct nature of research into waste management fees, distributive politics, and local populism. First, research by Suryawan & Lee (2023) on residents' willingness to pay for urban waste management services in Jakarta demonstrates that the public's willingness to pay fees is linked to the characteristics and quality of the waste services; consequently, these fees are best understood through the lens of user preferences and the willingness to pay for public services. In their study Mediating distributive politics: political alignment and electoral business cycle effects on municipality financing in Kitsos & Proestakis (2021) demonstrate that the distribution of local government funding is not determined solely by socio-economic needs but is also influenced by political alignment and electoral cycles, underscoring the importance of the political dimension in understanding the allocation of local government resources. The research reveals a gap in the literature: studies on waste management fees predominantly focus on ability to pay, financial sustainability, and service quality; research on distributive politics largely addresses budget allocations or intergovernmental transfers; and studies on local populism center on political character and local relations without specifically linking them to the distribution of benefits and burdens associated with fee policies. This gap is particularly significant in the context of Makassar City, where the policy of exempting certain groups from waste management fees involves not only public service design but also determines who receives the benefit of the exemption and who continues to bear the payment burden. Thus, this study offers a novel contribution by integrating distributive politics and local populism to explain how the distribution of benefits and burdens within sanitation service fee policies is shaped, which groups are prioritized, and how such policies can serve as instruments for both local government responsiveness and political legitimacy.

This study therefore aims to analyze the distribution of benefits and burdens in waste service charge policy in Makassar City through the perspective of local populism. Rather than assuming that the exemption policy is inherently populist, the study seeks to identify how beneficiary groups are constructed, how policy burdens are distributed among other groups, how electoral commitments are translated into policy design, and how political narratives of responsiveness and representation are articulated throughout the process. This approach enables the study to connect electoral politics, distributive policy, and government–citizen relations within a unified analytical framework. By doing so, the study contributes to the literature on local politics and public policy by demonstrating that waste service charge policies involve more than questions of service financing. They also constitute arenas in which political relationships, the distribution of policy benefits and burdens, and the legitimacy of local government are constructed and negotiated.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design (Alam, 2020; Viera, 2023) to examine the distribution of benefits and burdens associated with waste service retribution policy from the perspective of local populism in Makassar City, Indonesia. This approach was selected because the study seeks not only to understand the substantive dimensions of the policy but also to explore the political processes, actor interests, construction of beneficiary groups, and relationship between retribution policy and the fulfillment of electoral commitments by local political leaders. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and

field observations, involving local government officials, policy implementers, members of the Regional House of Representatives, and residents who either benefit from or remain subject to waste service retribution payments. Secondary data included local regulations, policy documents, planning and budgeting documents, official government publications, and relevant media reports concerning the formulation and implementation of the policy. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in and knowledge of waste service retribution policy. The data were analyzed thematically through the stages of data condensation, thematic organization, interpretation of patterns in the distribution of benefits and burdens, and conclusion drawing. The analytical framework focuses on three main dimensions: the distribution of policy benefits and burdens, political interests and responsiveness, and the characteristics of local populism. These dimensions were examined by comparing policy narratives, mechanisms for determining beneficiaries, and residents' experiences of receiving retribution exemptions or continuing to bear payment obligations. Data validity was strengthened through source and methodological triangulation to ensure the consistency of information and develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between distributive policy, electoral commitments, and local political practices in Makassar City.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Construction of Waste Retribution Policy

The political construction of waste service retribution policy in Makassar City initially emerged from the intersection between the need to finance public services and citizens' demands for affordable service costs. Waste retribution was not merely positioned as an instrument for generating local government revenue, but also as part of the mechanism through which the government finances the provision of waste management services. This position gives retribution significant political implications because decisions concerning tariff levels, groups subject to payment, and forms of exemption directly determine the distribution of financial burdens across society (Mangini, 2023). As the issue of retribution became increasingly associated with citizens' economic conditions, the policy gradually moved beyond an administrative concern and became a public issue characterized by substantial social and political sensitivity.

The political construction became more pronounced when the issue of waste service retribution entered the arena of local political competition through the articulation of citizens' demands and electoral commitments made by mayoral candidates. Within this context, the cost of waste services acquired political significance because it was directly connected to citizens' everyday experiences (Alene, 2018; Marello & Helwege, 2018; Martins Felix et al., 2024). The promise to exempt citizens from waste retribution could therefore be understood as an attempt to demonstrate political responsiveness to an issue experienced by the community. The commitment did not remain merely an electoral statement but acquired policy implications following the change in local political leadership. The Makassar City Government subsequently translated the political commitment into a governmental agenda, transforming an electoral promise into a policy commitment that required regulatory and administrative institutionalization.

The transformation of an electoral promise into policy demonstrates that the construction of retribution policy takes place through a process of institutionalizing political interests within local government structures. Makassar Mayor Regulation No. 13 of 2025 on the Review of Waste Service Retribution Tariffs represents an important instrument in this process because it provides a legal basis for adjusting waste service retribution tariffs. The regulation does not merely establish changes in payment amounts but also creates classifications of service users based on specific

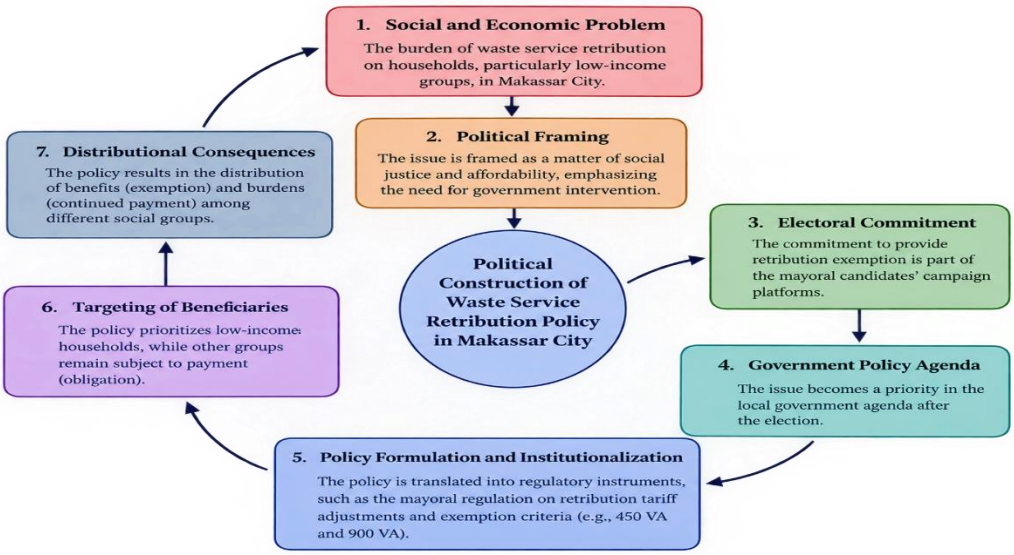
characteristics, including electricity capacity as one of the determining indicators. Consequently, administrative decisions concerning tariff structures embody political choices regarding how the government differentiates social groups according to characteristics considered relevant for determining payment obligations.

The political dimension of this construction becomes increasingly visible in the determination of groups eligible for retribution exemptions. The Makassar City Government has directed the exemption program primarily toward lower-income residents, particularly households using electricity connections with capacities of 450 VA and 900 VA. Residents who do not fall within the exemption criteria are subject to retribution payments through a non-cash payment mechanism. This arrangement demonstrates that policy construction is not politically neutral, as the government must determine which groups are considered deserving of protection from payment burdens. The translation of socioeconomic categories into administrative indicators produces a particular distributive configuration that determines who is positioned as a policy beneficiary and who remains responsible for paying waste service retribution.

The political construction of the policy can also be observed through the government's narrative concerning the relationship between retribution exemptions, public welfare, and governmental responsiveness. The policy has been presented as a form of governmental attention toward economically disadvantaged groups, while households with greater capacity to contribute continue to participate in financing waste management services. The Makassar City Government has explicitly associated the retribution exemption program with the political commitment of the local leadership and positioned it as a measure intended to benefit citizens in need. This narrative is particularly significant from the perspective of local populism because it constructs a political representation in which the government is positioned as responsive to citizens' needs while seeking to reduce the financial burden borne by groups perceived as socially vulnerable.

The initial political construction of waste service retribution policy therefore cannot be separated from the process through which public service financing is connected with citizens' demands and local political interests (Liarte et al., 2024). The retribution exemption policy demonstrates a shift from an approach primarily oriented toward revenue generation toward one that also considers the distribution of policy benefits and burdens. This process produces a policy with two simultaneous characteristics: an administrative instrument for organizing waste management services and a political instrument through which the local government demonstrates its responsiveness to particular social groups. The perspective of local populism provides an analytical lens for understanding this process by examining how the government constructs the category of "the people," responds to their demands, and translates political commitments into distributive policies that gain legitimacy through local government institutions.

Figure 1 Political Construction of Waste Service Retribution Policy in Makassar City



Source: Author's construction based on empirical findings.

Figure 1 illustrates the political construction of waste service retribution policy in Makassar City, beginning with a social and economic problem, namely the burden of retribution payments experienced by certain segments of the population, particularly households with limited economic capacity. This problem was subsequently subjected to political framing, as the burden of waste retribution was no longer understood solely as an administrative issue concerning local revenue collection, but was reframed as an issue of service affordability and social protection. At this stage, the interests of the local government, citizens as service recipients, and local political actors converged in the process of defining and interpreting the problem. The issue subsequently acquired greater political significance when it became associated with an electoral commitment, particularly the commitment of local political leaders to provide waste retribution exemptions for specific groups of citizens. Thus, problem construction became an entry point through which a public service issue was transformed into a political agenda.

This process subsequently moved from electoral commitment to the government policy agenda, as the political commitment previously articulated during the electoral process was translated into a governmental priority after the local leadership received its mandate. At this stage, political interests began to interact with administrative and fiscal considerations because implementing retribution exemptions required mechanisms that could be operationalized by local government agencies. The process was subsequently institutionalized through policy formulation and institutionalization, including Makassar Mayor Regulation No. 13 of 2025 concerning the Review of Waste Service Retribution Tariffs, which provides a regulatory basis for tariff adjustments and the classification of service users. This policy formulation demonstrates that political commitments did not remain normative statements but were translated into administrative criteria, categories, and mechanisms (Acosta et al., 2019). At this stage, the political interest of the local leadership in fulfilling its commitments intersected with the local government's administrative requirements and the need to maintain the feasibility and sustainability of waste management services.

The subsequent stages in Figure 1 demonstrate how these political decisions produced targeting of beneficiaries and distributional consequences. The government prioritized waste retribution exemptions for lower-income groups, particularly households with electricity

capacities of 450 VA and 900 VA, while groups that did not meet the exemption criteria remained subject to payment obligations. This arrangement generated a distributive configuration that differentiated between groups receiving benefits through the elimination or reduction of retribution burdens and groups that continued to bear payment obligations. This configuration also demonstrates that the policy carries political consequences because the benefits received by targeted groups may serve as a tangible expression of governmental responsiveness, whereas groups that continue to pay may evaluate the policy in terms of fairness and the proportionality of distribution. The retribution policy therefore produces not only fiscal consequences but also shapes perceptions of governmental responsiveness, political alignment, and the relationship between the local government and citizens.

The specific finding emerging from this sequence is that political interests in the construction of waste service retribution policy in Makassar City operate through four interconnected mechanisms: responsiveness to citizens' economic concerns, fulfillment of electoral commitments, selective targeting of beneficiary groups, and the construction of political legitimacy. The finding demonstrates that political interests do not primarily reside in the decision to exempt citizens from retribution, but rather in the process through which citizens' economic burdens are constructed as a public problem, framed as an issue requiring governmental intervention and protection, transformed into an electoral commitment, and ultimately translated into a distributive policy that selectively allocates benefits. From the perspective of local populism, this mechanism is significant because the government does not distribute benefits universally but constructs particular categories of citizens as groups deserving priority and protection. Political construction in this policy can therefore be understood as a process through which a socioeconomic problem is transformed into a distributive policy instrument that simultaneously strengthens perceptions of governmental responsiveness and political legitimacy at the local level.

Distribution of Benefits and Burdens of the Sanitation Fee Waiver Program in Makassar City

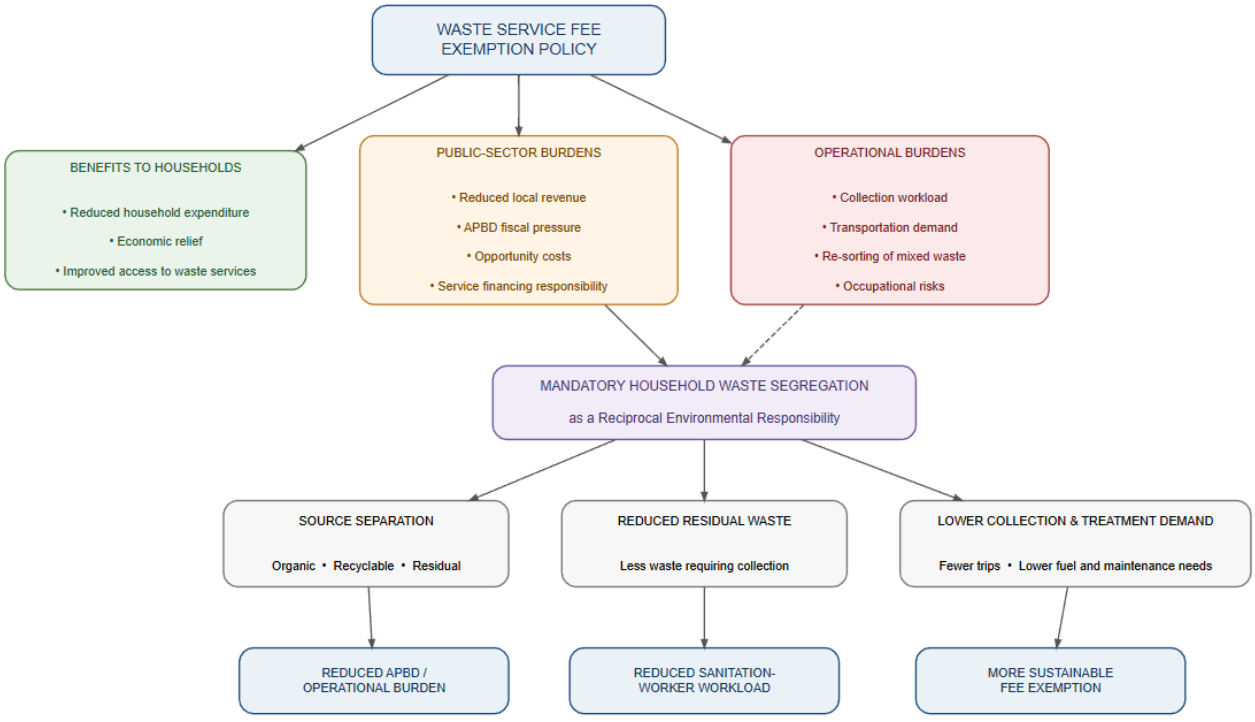
The waste service fee exemption policy in Makassar City reflects a shift in the distribution of benefits and burdens associated with the provision of waste management services (Akramila et al., 2025; Rianawati et al., 2026). Households receiving the exemption obtain direct economic benefits through reduced household expenditures on waste service fees, particularly those with limited economic capacity. However, reducing the financial burden on residents does not eliminate the costs of service provision, as waste collection, transportation, treatment, and management continue to require funding. These costs are consequently borne to a greater extent by the local government through its fiscal capacity and municipal budget. This situation also creates an opportunity cost, as budgetary resources allocated to maintaining waste management services may reduce the fiscal space available for other priorities, including improvements to waste management infrastructure, fleet procurement, waste treatment facilities, and other environmental programs. At the same time, sanitation workers continue to face service demands at a similar level if the volume of waste generated by households does not decline.

This condition highlights the importance of making household-level waste segregation a requirement for receiving the waste service fee exemption. The exemption should not be limited to reducing residents' financial burden but should also be accompanied by a responsibility to contribute to waste management. Source segregation enables organic waste, recyclable materials with economic value, and residual waste to be separated before entering the government's waste management system. Materials that can still be utilized can be directed toward composting, reuse, recycling, or waste bank programs, thereby reducing the volume of residual waste that must be collected and transported by the government. Such a reduction has the potential to decrease fuel

consumption, the frequency of collection trips, vehicle maintenance requirements, and the need for further treatment at waste management and disposal facilities. At the operational level, source segregation also reduces the need for sanitation workers to re-sort mixed waste, thereby lowering the time, labor, and occupational risks associated with waste handling. Household waste segregation can therefore serve as a form of non-financial reciprocity that helps offset the burdens arising from the exemption policy (Dankyi et al., 2017).

The implementation of this requirement should be supported by adequate facilities, public education, separate collection mechanisms, and effective monitoring to ensure that the obligation does not create an additional burden for residents. Households receiving the exemption should be provided with information and facilities that enable them to practice waste segregation consistently, while compliance can be monitored through neighborhood-level structures and sanitation workers. Such an arrangement creates a more balanced relationship between benefits and burdens, whereby residents receive reduced household expenditures through the fee exemption while contributing to waste management through source segregation. When implemented effectively, waste segregation can reduce the volume of waste entering the government-managed system, lower operational costs, reduce the workload of sanitation workers, and support the sustainability of waste management financing. The fee exemption can therefore extend beyond providing economic benefits to residents and serve as a mechanism for promoting environmental responsibility among households while improving the efficiency of waste management in Makassar City.

Figure 2 Distribution of Benefits and Burdens in the Waste Service Fee Exemption Policy in Makassar City



Source: Author's construction based on the analytical framework and empirical findings.

Figure 2 illustrates the distributional mechanism underlying the waste service fee exemption policy in Makassar City. The policy generates differentiated consequences for households, the local government, and sanitation workers. Beneficiary households receive direct economic benefits

through reduced or eliminated waste service payments, which can provide financial relief, particularly for households with limited economic capacity. The exemption, however, does not eliminate the costs of waste collection, transportation, treatment, and disposal. Financial responsibility is therefore partially shifted from households to the local government, while sanitation workers continue to face operational demands when waste is not properly managed at the household level.

The public-sector burden is reflected in reduced local revenue, increased pressure on the municipal budget, and opportunity costs associated with maintaining waste management services (Ahrens & Ferry, 2025; Marganingrum & Estiaty, 2020). The government remains responsible for ensuring the continuity of waste collection and treatment despite the reduction in household contributions. Sanitation workers may also experience additional workload when mixed waste requires greater collection, transportation, and handling effort. Manual re-sorting of mixed waste can further increase operational demands and occupational risks. The distribution of benefits and burdens consequently extends beyond household financial relief to encompass fiscal and labor dimensions within the municipal waste management system.

Mandatory household waste segregation is positioned in the model as a reciprocal environmental responsibility for households receiving the exemption. Source separation of organic, recyclable, and residual waste allows households to contribute to waste management through environmentally responsible behavior rather than through direct financial payment. Organic materials can be directed toward composting, recyclable materials toward recycling or waste-bank mechanisms, while residual waste can be managed through conventional collection systems. This arrangement creates a reciprocal relationship in which households receive economic benefits from the exemption while assuming responsibility for reducing the operational pressures generated by their waste (Gutberlet & Carenzo, 2020; Steuer, 2017).

Source separation can reduce the volume of residual waste requiring conventional collection and transportation. Lower residual waste volumes can decrease collection frequency, fuel consumption, vehicle use, and maintenance requirements. Reduced quantities of mixed waste can also minimize the need for sanitation workers to conduct additional handling or re-sorting activities. The mechanism therefore has the potential to reduce both fiscal and operational pressures while improving the efficiency of waste management activities.

The final outcomes presented in the model consist of reduced APBD and operational burdens, reduced sanitation-worker workload, and greater sustainability of the fee exemption policy. The sustainability of the exemption depends not only on the government's capacity to compensate for reduced waste-service revenue but also on the extent to which beneficiary households contribute to maintaining system efficiency. Household waste segregation provides a mechanism for balancing economic benefits with environmental responsibility. The policy can consequently be understood as an arrangement that combines economic relief for households with reciprocal environmental responsibility, thereby creating a more balanced distribution of benefits and burdens within the waste management system.

Local Populism, Policy Responsiveness, and Political Legitimacy in Waste Service Fee Exemption

The implementation of the waste service fee exemption policy in Makassar City reflects the interaction between local political dynamics, policy responsiveness, and the distribution of public benefits and burdens. The policy originated from an electoral commitment to provide economic relief and was subsequently institutionalized through governmental decision-making. This process illustrates how electoral promises can enter the policy agenda when they address citizens' everyday

economic concerns, transforming waste service fees from a municipal financing instrument into an issue of social protection and government responsiveness.

The policy's political significance is evident in its distributional consequences. Targeted households receive direct economic benefits through reduced or eliminated waste service obligations, while the costs of maintaining waste collection and management remain and are partly transferred to the local government. Sanitation workers also continue to carry operational responsibilities for waste collection, transportation, and management. The policy therefore creates differentiated benefits and burdens among households, government institutions, and sanitation workers, making distribution an important dimension of how government responsiveness is experienced and evaluated (Adams et al., 2020; Bhatkal et al., 2024; Diaz Torres & Warner, 2025).

The selective targeting of beneficiaries also provides an entry point for understanding local populism. Its populist dimension lies not simply in eliminating a public fee but in constructing a political relationship between the local government and citizens by prioritizing economically constrained households as groups requiring protection. The policy creates a visible connection between government responsiveness and tangible economic benefits. Its populist character should nevertheless be assessed through the political narratives surrounding the policy, the construction of beneficiary groups, its connection to electoral commitments, and the government's representation of itself as responsive to citizens' needs.

Policy responsiveness connects political commitments with the material distribution of benefits, but it also generates tension between immediate public relief and long-term fiscal and operational sustainability. Household waste segregation can address part of this tension by introducing reciprocal environmental responsibility. Separating organic, recyclable, and residual waste at source can reduce residual waste, collection and transportation requirements, fuel consumption, vehicle maintenance, and additional waste-handling activities by sanitation workers. Economic relief can therefore be accompanied by citizen responsibility, allowing beneficiaries to contribute to sustaining the waste management system.

The relationship between responsiveness and political legitimacy ultimately depends on the government's ability to manage the consequences of the exemption. Immediate economic benefits may strengthen perceptions of government attentiveness, but sustained legitimacy also requires fiscal responsibility, service quality, operational effectiveness, and equitable distribution of policy burdens. The policy thus represents more than a technical adjustment to waste service financing; it is a politically embedded arrangement in which electoral commitments are translated into institutional decisions, producing differentiated benefits and burdens that shape government–citizen relations. Its sustainability depends on integrating economic relief with responsible waste management and citizen participation, thereby positioning the exemption as both an instrument of social responsiveness and a potential mechanism of sustainable local governance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the waste service fee exemption policy in Makassar City constitutes a politically embedded distributive policy shaped by the interaction between electoral commitments, local government responsiveness, and the distribution of benefits and burdens. The policy provides tangible economic relief to targeted households, particularly those with limited economic capacity, while simultaneously shifting part of the financial and operational responsibility for waste management to the local government and sanitation workers. The findings further demonstrate that the policy's local populist dimension emerges through the political construction of beneficiary groups, the translation of electoral commitments into institutionalized policy, and the government's representation of itself as responsive to citizens' economic concerns,

although the exemption should not be regarded as inherently populist without examining these political processes. Household waste segregation is identified as an important reciprocal mechanism for balancing economic benefits with environmental responsibility because it can reduce residual waste, collection and transportation requirements, operational costs, and sanitation-worker workload. Political legitimacy consequently depends not only on the government's ability to provide immediate economic benefits but also on its capacity to maintain fiscal sustainability, service quality, operational effectiveness, and citizen participation, positioning the waste service fee exemption as both an instrument of social responsiveness and a potential mechanism for sustainable local governance.

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