

## Money Politics in Aceh: A Structuration Approach to Social Structure and Agency Interaction

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### ABSTRACT

Money politics undermines the integrity of the democratic process in Indonesia, particularly in regional head elections (*regional election*). This practice involves giving money or goods to voters to influence their choices, often through "*serangan fajar*" (dawn attacks) just before voting. This study focuses on the case of Aceh, the only region in Indonesia granted the authority to implement Islamic law, yet still grappling with money politics issues. This research aims to analyze money politics within the framework of Giddens' structuration theory (structure-agency). Using a holistic approach, the study seeks to understand how social structures, norms, and regulations influence the actions of agents. Conducted through library research, this study relies primarily on literature and archival data. The findings reveal that the prohibition of money politics is supported by legal and normative structures, but the socio-economic conditions of impoverished communities allow this practice to thrive. Individual agency exploits these conditions to achieve political goals, with rationalizations that justify their actions. These findings identify critical points for intervention to reduce money politics practices and highlight the importance of political empowerment strategies to eradicate this issue in Aceh.

**Keywords:** Agency; Regional Election; Money Politics; Social Structure; Structuration Theory.

## INTRODUCTION

Money politics is a recurring issue in every regional head election. Ideally, regional election aims to select qualified leaders in accordance with the will of the people. However, in reality, this democratic process is often tainted by fraudulent practices such as deceit and campaigns involving the distribution of money or goods to voters (Begovic & Cuan, 2021). This money politics practice often manifests through "serangan fajar" (dawn attacks), where candidates distribute money or goods to voters shortly before voting to influence their choices (Adryamarthanino, 2022; Kurniawan, 2019). Each candidate requires significant financial capital to implement this money politics strategy. The long-term impact of this practice is highly detrimental because once elected, candidates often prioritize recovering the expended funds. This is frequently done through policies that do not align with public interests (Hasan et al., 2023). This phenomenon highlights the fundamental danger of money politics, where corruption and abuse of power become logical consequences, undermining the integrity of the democratic process and governance.

Indonesia is one of the countries with a concerning prevalence of money politics. According to the Executive Director of Indikator Politik Indonesia, approximately 33 percent, or 62 million out of the total 187 million registered voters (DPT) in the 2014 election, were involved in money politics. This places Indonesia third in the world for vote-buying, behind Uganda and Benin (Hidayat, 2023). Unfortunately, this ranking is not matched by a significant number of academic studies addressing the issue of money politics in Indonesia, which often reference experiences in Europe and America. The voters most vulnerable to money politics are those with party identification (party ID). These loyal voters are targeted as part of the candidates' strategies to mobilize participation. However, instead of targeting partisan voters loyal to a party, money politics more frequently targets non-partisan voters (swing voters) (Ppim, 2018).

In Sumatra, money politics still occurs, such as during the 2019 elections in Tigabinanga District, Karo Regency, North Sumatra, where the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu) found cases involving a total of Rp 190 million (Farisa, 2019). In West Sumatra, there were 17 criminal cases during the 2019 election, with four cases in Solok City, two in Tanah Datar, and one case each in Bukittinggi City, Sawahlunto, Limapuluh Kota Regency, West Pasaman, Solok Regency, South Solok, and Tanah Datar Regency (Nasution, 2022). In Palembang, money politics was conducted digitally through e-wallets rather than cash,

according to the Division of Prevention, Public Participation, and Public Relations of Bawaslu Palembang City (Pahlevi, 2023).

In addition to these provinces, money politics is also prevalent in the Serambi Mekkah region, namely Aceh. Reflecting on the 2017 Regional election, at least 22 cases of alleged criminal violations were found in the election of the Regent/Deputy Regent of Bireun 2017-2022 in Bireun Regency, followed by Greater Aceh (3 cases), East Aceh (2 cases), and one case each in West Aceh, Langsa, Banda Aceh, Pidie Jaya, North Aceh, and Lhokseumawe (Januar, 2018). The issue of money politics in Aceh is particularly interesting to study because Aceh is the only region in Indonesia authorized to implement Islamic law, in accordance with Qanun Number 6 of 2016 concerning the Implementation of General Elections in Aceh. Islamic teachings strictly prohibit money politics, which can damage the social structure and order of society (Umar, 2015). However, in practice, money politics is often integrated into a religious context with terms such as shadaqah, hadiyah, hibah, and others, making it difficult to distinguish between risywah (bribery) and amal jariyah (Kelana et al., 2022).

Money politics in Aceh can be carried out door-to-door or through policy. Although structurally, the people of Indonesia, including Aceh, reject money politics and desire dignified democracy, various regulations and religious teachings have not been able to stop this practice. Existing structures have not succeeded in influencing agents' awareness to refrain from engaging in money politics. This study aims to analyze money politics through the lens of Giddens' structuration theory (structure-agency). With a holistic approach, this research seeks to understand how social structures, norms, and regulations influence agents' actions. Applying this theory helps identify critical points for intervention in reducing money politics practices. The urgency of this research lies in developing political empowerment strategies for the community and creating sustainable solutions to eradicate money politics in Aceh.

## **METHODS**

The research methodology used in this study is library research. This methodology relies heavily on written sources for research materials. Library data is utilized to address the research questions (Sugiyono, 2017). A wealth of empirical information and data collected by others, in the form of official reports and books stored in libraries, can greatly assist the researcher in completing this study (Abdussamad, 2021).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Money Politics within Anthony Giddens' Structuration Framework

In Giddens' perspective, social practices connect the duality of structure and agency, not dualism. Giddens criticizes orthodox social theories that separate the dimensions of structure and agency. In modern society, these dimensions cannot be separated (Van Langenhove, 2017). This duality concept gave rise to structuration theory, which integrates structure and agency in understanding social practices. Giddens' theory of structuration links structure (rules and resources) and agency (individuals). Giddens is regarded as a pioneer in connecting these, not as separate entities (dualism) but as two sides of the same coin (duality) (Van Langenhove, 2017). The relationship between structure and agency is dialectical, influencing each other mutually. As posited by Giddens:

“The constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality...the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize...the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day-to-day enactment of social life” (Ritzer, 2018).

Giddens emphasizes that agency can transcend structure and not always be subservient to it (Abidin, 2022). Agency can seek opportunities to maneuver within existing rules. In structuration theory, the focus is on "social practices," which involve the dialectical interplay between structure and agency (Ritzer, 2018). Agency is not seen as a puppet of social structure but as individuals who understand and navigate daily life. In this discussion, the author connects Giddens' structuration theory with the case of money politics in Aceh. The practice of money politics can be understood as the outcome of interactions between agents and social structures. Agents, such as politicians or candidates, engage in money politics to achieve goals such as voter support or power. The motivations of these agents are influenced by social structures, including norms, habits, and unwritten rules within the local political system.

#### **a. The Significance, Legitimacy, and Dominance of Structure on Money Politics Practices in Aceh**

According to Giddens, social structure is formed by three main concepts: significance, domination, and legitimation. Significance involves communication tools through language that facilitate others in interpreting situations and producing interpretative schemes.

Legitimation originates from values, norms, and social standards that reflect an individual's social order within an organization. Domination is the effort of individuals with power to allocate resources as a means of supporting the organization (Hariwibowo & Santana, 2020).

### **The Significance of the Formation of the Discourse on Banning Money Politics in Aceh**

This view is not only voiced by the Election Organizing Committee but also supported by religious figures who cite religious doctrines to affirm the prohibition of this practice. For instance, in Aceh Barat, the Regional Board of the Association of Ulama from Dayah Schools (PW-HUDA) held a council of scholars to encourage the community to choose leaders according to Islamic criteria. Tgk. Rahmat Saputra explained that money politics is already prohibited by state regulations and forbidden in religion, both for those giving and receiving it. Therefore, they urge all citizens, especially in Aceh adhering to Islamic teachings, to avoid money politics practices (Safria, 2024). In practice, the approach to eradicating money politics should not only be advocated by religious leaders but must also involve a collaborative governance approach. As stated by an academic from Syiah Kuala University:

“Collaborative governance is one of the solutions to eliminate such fraudulent practices. This means that all parties must be involved in eradicating money politics. This includes election organizers, election participants, political parties, voters, law enforcement agencies, NGOs, universities, community organizations, the military/police, and civil servants. All parties must have the same commitment to this unethical practice” (Interview with one of the Lecturers at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Syiah Kuala University, 20/09/2024).

This approach aligns with the views expressed by religious leaders in Aceh, such as Tgk. Rahmat Saputra, who emphasized that money politics is prohibited by both state regulations and religious laws, and Lem Faisal, who reminded that this practice can result in less qualified leaders. Through Collaborative Governance, with the active participation of all elements of Acehnese society based on religious principles, it is hoped that collective awareness to choose leaders according to Islamic criteria can be realized, thereby strengthening efforts to eliminate money politics in this region that implements Sharia law. The same opinion

was also expressed by a Master's student in Sociology at Malikussaleh University, who stated that:

“Collaborative Governance is indeed the right solution to tackle money politics, especially in Aceh, which implements Sharia law. It cannot rely on just one party. If all parties have the same awareness and participate in monitoring and enforcement, money politics can be significantly reduced. Students and the younger generation must also take part, for example, by spreading healthy political education and encouraging our peers to choose leaders based on Islamic values, not money. By doing so, we can create a cleaner democratic process and produce truly qualified leaders” (Interview with Isbahannur, Master's Student in Sociology at Malikussaleh University, 20/09/2024).

The importance of collaborative governance is becoming increasingly relevant in Aceh, where social structures and Islamic values strongly influence community life. This approach allows various parties to work together, integrating their strengths to prevent and address money politics. With active participation from all elements, such as the community, religious institutions, law enforcement, and educational institutions, the chances of creating a clean and transparent democratic process are greatly enhanced.

Collective awareness and shared commitment are key in combating practices that undermine moral and ethical political values. In Aceh Singkil, warnings have been issued that money politics could potentially lead to destruction (Basaria, 2024). Similarly, the Chairman of MPU Aceh, Tgk Faisal Ali or Lem Faisal, cautioned that money politics could result in leaders with less quality and fewer good ideas. These discourses reflect the significance of the social structure in Acehnese society, which is based on religious principles (Ramadhan, 2024), emphasizing the prohibition of money politics within the context of Islamic values.

### **Legal Legitimacy in Prohibiting Money Politics**

Legitimacy in Giddens' view refers to the social order stemming from the naturalization of norms, values, and social standards that are reflected in an individual's perspective on organizations (Hariwibowo & Santana, 2020). In the context of the prohibition of money politics in Aceh, legitimacy emerges when social norms and values opposing the practice of money politics are widely accepted by the society. This indicates that the prohibition of money

politics is not only a written legal rule but also regarded as a moral and ethical standard embraced by individuals within the community.

Money politics is not merely a discourse but to be significant, it requires legitimacy in the form of norms that prohibit this practice. Nationally, Law No. 7 of 2017 Article 523 paragraph (2) states that any organizer, participant, or campaign team of an election who intentionally promises or provides money or other materials as compensation to campaign participants, directly or indirectly, is prohibited (Kusmantoro, 2024).

Furthermore, Law No. 10 of 2016 concerning Regional Head Elections Article 73 prohibits candidates and/or campaign teams from promising or providing money or other materials to influence election organizers and/or voters. In Aceh, although there is no explicit prohibition regarding money politics, Aceh Qanun No. 6 of 2016 concerning the Implementation of Elections and Elections in Aceh stipulates that the Aceh Election Supervisory Board (Bawaslu) must promptly follow up on findings or reports of alleged election violations.

The law provides legitimacy to the prohibition of money politics during elections, supporting discourse aimed at creating fair and dignified democracy. However, in Aceh, alongside having regulations governing alleged election violations through Qanun, there exists a perception in society that the money given can be seen as a form of gratitude or obligatory gift. As stated by Sabilal Rosyad in (Kelana et al., 2022), the practice of money politics during the legislative elections in 2014 in Sabang City was packaged using terms such as charity (shadaqah), gift (hadiyah), grant (hibah), and similar terms.

### **Dominance of Panswaslih in Enforcing Electoral Violations**

Dominance in Giddens view refers to the efforts of individuals who wield power to allocate resources in support of an organization (Chatterjee et al., 2019). This aspect of dominance is relevant in the context of how individuals or groups with power or influence use their resources to facilitate or hinder the practice of vote-buying. After discussing the significance and legitimacy that prohibit vote-buying, dominant structures such as Bawaslu (Election Supervisory Agency) have emerged with authority to enforce violations of vote-buying.



Bawaslu not only acts as a watchdog but also engages in education and anti-vote-buying campaigns. For instance, the Provincial Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslih) in Aceh conducted the Participatory Supervision Education (P2P) activities at the provincial level in Takengon, Central Aceh, in 2023. This event involved 35 young Acehnese from 23 districts and municipalities across the province aimed at enhancing public participation in election monitoring and establishing sustainable election monitoring education centers (Rahayu, 2023).

Apart from conducting education, the Election Supervisory Board (Panwaslu) also has the authority to investigate election violations related to money politics. An example occurred in South Aceh's Panwaslu, which apprehended members of the PKB and PNA parties for allegedly distributing money to residents ahead of the election. The campaign team received money from two legislative candidates, totaling Rp 1.7 million each. The funds were used to influence DPRA voters, providing Rp 100,000 per person for 10 individuals, and Rp 50,000 per person for voters in the legislative election for South Aceh District. The perpetrators also received compensation amounting to Rp 200,000 (Setyadi, 2023). Regarding the work of Bawaslu and Panwaslu in minimizing money politics, an academic from Syiah Kuala University stated:

“Money politics undermines the integrity of the democratic process and violates the principles of fairness in elections. In this context, the existence of norms prohibiting such practices is crucial for maintaining a healthy democracy. At the national level, the regulations are quite clear with strict prohibitions against giving money or other goods as rewards to voters or election organizers. However, the challenge remains in the implementation on the ground, particularly in monitoring and enforcement by the relevant agencies” (Interview with one of the Lecturers at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Syiah Kuala University, (20/09/2024).

The interview above emphasizes the importance of the roles of Bawaslu and Panwaslu in enforcing the law and providing education related to money politics to maintain the integrity of elections, especially in Aceh. The academic praised initiatives such as Participatory Supervision Education (P2P), which involves the younger generation in election monitoring. He also stressed the importance of consistency in education and law enforcement to ensure clean and fair elections. The same opinion was expressed by a Master's student in Sociology at Syiah Kuala University, who stated: “Activities like P2P provide us with the opportunity to



gain a deeper understanding of the dangers of money politics and how we can contribute to maintaining a clean democratic process. Additionally, Bawaslu's firm actions in handling money politics cases, such as those in South Aceh, demonstrate that there are clear mechanisms to address violations. However, it is important for all parties to remain involved and collaborate to truly eradicate money politics" (Interview with Isbahannur, Master's Student in Sociology at Malikussaleh University, 20/09/2024).

The interview above states that activities like P2P provide students with a deep understanding of the dangers of money politics and how to contribute to maintaining democracy. Bawaslu's firm actions in handling money politics cases demonstrate the existence of effective mechanisms to address violations. However, emphasis is also placed on the importance of collaboration among all parties to truly eradicate money politics.

Chairman of Panwaslih Aceh, Agus Syahputra, reported an increasing trend of alleged money politics violations involving village heads in the 2024 elections, with an increase of 20 percent compared to the 2019 elections (Bogiarto, 2024). Panwaslih is considered a dominant component because it has the authority to determine election violations and is responsible for following up on cases of money politics violations committed by candidate contestants.

#### **b. The Agency Dynamics in Aceh Money Politics Practices**

After discussing government efforts in addressing money politics through significance, legitimacy, and domination, the concept of agency in Giddens' structuration theory becomes crucial. According to Giddens, individuals as agents possess the knowledge to understand their own actions (Nasir et al., 2021). They are not merely influenced by culture or norms but actively engage in understanding their social and physical environment. Despite efforts to legitimize violations of money politics through various means, the practice still has the potential to occur in Aceh due to the social conditions of its population being among the poorest in Sumatra (Setyadi, 2023). These social conditions make Acehnese society vulnerable to money politics practices, often carried out by political elites masquerading as caring for the community. This leads recipients to perceive the money received as direct assistance to meet daily needs such as living expenses, education, or healthcare.

Agus Syahputra, the chairman of Panwaslih Aceh, has stated that the practice of money politics and the lack of neutrality among village officials are serious issues in Aceh. Cases of

alleged impartiality were found in Bireuen Regency, where a village head and two legislative candidates were suspects for using social assistance (bansos) for political purposes (Zulkarnaini, 2024). The use of bansos as political money indicates the agents' efforts to exploit the poverty of Acehnese society as a political tool. This form of money politics is often portrayed as a gesture of concern from politicians towards economically challenged communities, justifying the practice as a competitive strategy. For less politically educated individuals, receiving money is often perceived as shadaqah (charity) rather than a bribe, with the belief that their fate will not change regardless of whom they vote for.

Despite the strong structural prohibitions (significance, legitimacy, domination) against money politics, Giddens emphasizes that agency can surpass structures, not always adhering to existing rules (Marsuki, 2019). This is reflected in the practice of money politics in Aceh, where despite structural efforts to eradicate it, the socio-economic conditions of the poorest communities in Sumatra allow money politics to be disguised as shadaqah, hadiyah (gifts), and hibah (Kelana et al., 2022). Giddens distinguishes three internal dimensions of actors: unconscious motive, practical consciousness, and discursive consciousness (Wardani).

#### **a. Unconscious Motive**

In the context of money politics in Aceh, unconscious motives arise from the economic and social conditions of the poorest communities in Sumatra. These conditions trigger an urgent need for financial assistance, which inadvertently drives people to accept money politics as a temporary solution to their daily problems. Money politics is often viewed as a legitimate and commendable action because it can address their urgent needs. People may perceive it as beneficial assistance without fully realizing its political implications. Therefore, political elites, such as electoral candidates, accept money politics as part of widely accepted social routines without deeper questioning. Regarding this matter, an academic from Syiah Kuala University also stated:

”Ideally, under any circumstances and for any reason, accepting money politics is not justified. However, it will be difficult to eliminate as long as poverty continues to grow in Indonesia and Aceh. For us, 100,000 rupiah might be a small amount, but for those without a regular income, it can be very useful, especially when given to all family members who have voting rights” (Interview with one of the Lecturers at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Syiah Kuala University, 20/09/2024)

The interview above states that, although accepting money politics should not be justified under any circumstances, this practice is difficult to eliminate as long as poverty persists. Especially when the money is given to all family members who have voting rights, it shows the urgency of their economic needs and how money politics can be seen as a temporary solution. The solution to this issue was conveyed by a Master's student in Sociology at Syiah Kuala University, who stated:

"I believe the solution to tackle money politics in Aceh and Indonesia requires a multidimensional approach, starting with enhancing political education among the community to help them understand their rights and the impact of money politics. Additionally, sustainable social assistance programs must be strengthened so that the poor do not feel compelled to accept money politics as a short-term solution. Finally, collaboration between the government, non-governmental organizations, and academics is crucial to create an environment that supports transparency and accountability in elections, thereby fostering a healthier political culture" (Interview with Isbahannur, Master's Student in Sociology at Malikussaleh University, 20/09/2024)

The interview above states that to address the issue of money politics in Aceh and Indonesia, a comprehensive approach is needed, including enhancing political education, strengthening social assistance programs, and collaboration among various parties. This way, the community can better understand their rights and reduce dependence on money politics, while creating a more transparent and accountable electoral environment. As expressed by Tgk Akmal Abzal of the Aceh Election Commission, general elections are seen as opportunities to gain material benefits with expressions like "meunyoek kon jinoe pajan lom?" (if not now, when else would you ask/accept?), "dijoeek cok, culok hom" (given, accepted, election issues later). Such expressions serve as justifications for accepting "political envelopes." (Mufti, 2024). The opinion expressed stems from public disappointment with the individuals they elected, leading to the belief that vote-buying is merely about money and not about democratic integrity. As articulated by an academic from Syiah Kuala University:

"In my view, this sentiment arises from voters' disappointment with the elected representatives who, once they become members of the council, no longer

maintain relationships or show concern for their constituents. As a result, this disappointment is responded to by accepting the money that is offered. However, many people also accept the money but still do not vote for the candidate” (Interview with one of the Lecturers at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Syiah Kuala University, 20/09/2024).

The interview above explains that voters’ disappointment with elected representatives who no longer show concern after being elected can lead to their acceptance of money in political transactions. Voters feel neglected by council members who should be representing and addressing the needs of the community. Even though some accept the money, many still do not vote, demonstrating that receiving money does not necessarily translate into political support but rather serves as a form of protest against their dissatisfaction.

#### **b. Practical Consciousness**

Practical Consciousness is a collection of knowledge that cannot be separated (Kristianto, 2022). This means that individuals always act according to the flow without constantly questioning or thinking about what needs to be done. In the context of money politics in Aceh, recipients of social assistance may perceive receiving money or aid from politicians as a normal part of the electoral or political campaign process. This action is taken without much consideration or ethical reflection. For example, in Lancok District, Bireuen, nearly all gubernatorial candidates distribute gifts such as sarongs, groceries, or other items to the community.

The community accepts these items without hesitation because the candidates mention that they are free to choose or not, making the distribution of groceries in the electoral context seem commonplace (Januar, 2018). The repeated practice of vote-buying not only undermines public trust in the electoral process but also encourages prospective leaders to continue using unethical methods to gain votes. Consequently, society becomes trapped in a cycle of dependency and pragmatism, where votes are traded for material rewards, ultimately jeopardizing the quality of leadership and the direction of regional development. As noted by an academic from Syiah Kuala University:

“The involvement of village officials in Bireuen illustrates that the network and practice of vote-buying have become deeply rooted in the community. This means that addressing this issue requires not only focusing on ordinary citizens

but also involving all parties, including government officials” (Interview with Iqbal Ahmadi, Lecturer in Political Science at Syiah Kuala University, 20/09/2024).

The interview above indicates that vote-buying practices in Bireuen have become an ingrained part of society, and efforts to resolve this issue must involve all stakeholders, including government officials. In other words, addressing this problem requires a comprehensive approach, not merely focusing on ordinary citizens but also engaging the entire network involved in such practices. As expressed by a Master’s student in sociology from Malikussaleh University regarding the vote-buying case in Bireuen:

” The involvement of village officials in vote-buying practices shows that this issue is not limited to the general public but also involves those who should uphold integrity and fairness in the electoral process. To address this issue, all elements of society, including the government, must work together and commit to creating an environment free of vote-buying. Education and awareness must be raised, not only among voters but also among government officials, so they understand the importance of fulfilling their roles transparently and responsibly. With solid collaboration, we can transform this deeply rooted political culture and promote a better democratic process” (Interview with Isbahannur, Master’s Student in Sociology at Malikussaleh University, 20/09/2024)

The interview above highlights that overcoming vote-buying practices involving both village officials and the public requires collaboration between all parties, including the government and voters. The student emphasized the importance of education and awareness at all levels of society to create an environment free of vote-buying. With a collective commitment, it is hoped that this negative political culture can be transformed and a better democratic process can be achieved.

### **c. Discursive Consciousness**

Discursive consciousness is the ability to explain actions through words, such as discussing, giving speeches, or delivering lectures (Puzairy, 2021). Through discursive consciousness, agents have the ability to verbally articulate the reasons why they do something. For example, in Banda Sakti District, Lhokseumawe City, prior to voting, several residents received grocery coupons that could be exchanged at grocery stores. These coupons were worth around one hundred thousand Indonesian Rupiah and were given to families in need (Januar, 2018). The distribution of grocery aid becomes a political strategy because economically disadvantaged communities are targeted, making it difficult for them to refuse assistance from candidates or their campaign teams, considering their own economic conditions.

The distribution of food voucher aid creates a situation in which people feel compelled to offer political support in exchange for the assistance they receive. This results in ambiguity in their choices, where the immediate need to meet daily necessities outweighs rational considerations about who they should choose based on a better vision and mission. Additionally, this practice blurs the line between social assistance and political incentives, thereby threatening the integrity of the democratic process and creating an unfair playing field in electoral competition. As articulated by an academic from Syiah Kuala University:

“The public's capacity to critically discuss aid, such as food vouchers, is influenced by factors such as education level, political understanding, and access to information. Communities in economically disadvantaged situations are often trapped in accepting aid without deep reflection due to urgent short-term needs. However, there is a segment of the population that has begun to realize that such aid is a short-term political strategy that could be harmful. With adequate political education and campaigns to improve political literacy, the public can become more critical, though economic pressures remain a significant barrier for many citizens” (Interview with Iqbal Ahmadi, Lecturer in Political Science at Syiah Kuala University, 20/09/2024).

The conclusion drawn from the interview is that the public's ability to critically assess aid, such as food vouchers, is influenced by factors like education, political awareness, and access to information. Economically disadvantaged communities often accept aid without reflection due to urgent needs, but there is a growing awareness in some segments that such aid may serve as a harmful short-term political strategy. Effective political education and

campaigns to increase political literacy are essential to improving the public's critical thinking capacity, although economic pressure remains a significant challenge for many.

## CONCLUSION

Political money in Aceh is not just a legal and moral issue but also reflects the complex dynamics between social structures that regulate norms and values, and individual agency making decisions and acting in a complex and ever-changing political context. Through Anthony Giddens' concept of structuration, it can be concluded that the practice of political money in this region occurs not only as a legal violation but also manifests through complex interactions between social structures and individual agency. Giddens emphasizes that structures (norms, values, rules) and agency (individual actions) are interconnected in shaping social practices such as political money.

In Aceh, the prohibition of political money is supported by legal and normative structures that forbid such practices. However, the social reality of the poorest communities allows political money to thrive, even under guises such as social assistance or charitable activities. This demonstrates that individual agency, while not always obedient to existing structures, still exploits socioeconomic conditions to achieve their political goals. Furthermore, Giddens' concepts of practical and discursive consciousness in structuration illustrate how political actors and recipients of political money can rationalize or justify their actions verbally. For instance, receiving grocery aid is seen as commonplace in the local political context, even though it actually falls under the practice of political money.

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