THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL VALUES ON MITIGATING MONEY POLITICS AMONG WOMEN IN ACEH

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Abstract

Money politics continues to pose a significant challenge in Aceh, notably among populations less acquainted with political processes and facing urgent economic needs. This study aims to explore the influence of religious and ethical values in countering money politics among Acehnese women. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research gathers primary data through interviews and supplements it with secondary data from existing literature. The findings reveal that although financial and material incentives are compelling, they do not invariably secure women's votes. Adherence to religious teachings, ethical considerations, and personal life philosophies significantly influence their decision-making processes. Although women in Aceh are highly susceptible to money politics, they are more likely to decline such offers compared to men, primarily due to their strong religious and moral convictions. To combat money politics effectively, strategies should emphasize political education and economic empowerment, reinforced by robust religious and ethical instruction, aiming to cultivate a more equitable and healthier democratic environment in Aceh.

Keywords: Money Politics, Women, Religion, Ethics, Aceh

Abstrak

Politik uang masih menjadi tantangan signifikan di Aceh, khususnya di kalangan masyarakat yang kurang memahami proses politik dan memiliki kebutuhan ekonomi yang mendesak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali peran agama dan nilai etis dalam menangkal pengaruh politik uang di kalangan perempuan Aceh. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi kualitatif, dengan pengumpulan data primer melalui wawancara dan data sekunder dari literatur yang ada. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun insentif uang dan barang sangat menggoda, hal tersebut tidak selalu menjamin dukungan suara dari perempuan. Kepatuhan terhadap ajaran agama, pertimbangan etis, dan filosofi hidup berperan penting dalam proses pengambilan keputusan mereka. Meskipun kerentanan perempuan terhadap politik uang tinggi, mereka cenderung lebih menolak tawaran tersebut dibandingkan laki-laki, terutama karena nilai-nilai agama dan moral yang kuat. Upaya untuk menghapus politik uang harus berfokus pada pendidikan politik dan pemberdayaan ekonomi, serta penguatan pengajaran agama dan etika untuk menciptakan sistem demokrasi yang lebih sehat dan adil di Aceh.

Kata Kunci: Politik Uang, Perempuan, Agama, Etika, Aceh

A. Introduction

Money politics is a reality that remains difficult to eradicate ahead of elections, whether presidential, gubernatorial, mayoral, or legislative (Mokodompis et al. 2018). The persistence of money politics in Aceh is suspected to be due to the low level of political education among the public, coupled with the economic conditions of the community, which are still on the poverty line. This makes it highly likely that the community will accept money when offered, considering their pressing needs (Rahmat & Hasan 2017). The community also perceives the money as a form of compensation for their efforts in voting, leading to public officials who earn significant amounts from their positions. Many in the community do not realize that the purpose of electing legislative and executive candidates is to help run the government and ensure equitable development policies for a just and prosperous society.

Not all community members understand that the goal of electing representatives and leaders is for their policies and work to impact the people. The community is often given the impression that elected officials work solely to enrich themselves. As a result, transactions occur during elections. If they are paid, they will vote; otherwise, they will not (Saputra & Rafni 2022). The community believes that the only opportunity to receive money is during elections because once elected, officials will leave and forget the voters.

This understanding is detrimental, yet it frequently occurs within the community and seems difficult to eradicate due to the economic interests of both candidates and voters. Democracy ideally provides freedom for people to choose their leaders without being influenced by money or other intrigues, but this is very difficult to implement. Such events will continue to recur, even if there are rules prohibiting money politics, as this practice still thrives in reality (Qodir 2016). Women's position as the largest voting group often makes them targets. However, not all women can be swayed by money; some steadfastly adhere to religious teachings, ethics, and life principles, and firmly reject accepting money as compensation for their votes.

One way to influence women voters, especially those active in religious gatherings, is through their leaders. Usually, if a religious leader supports a candidate, the women who are their followers will follow suit. In areas with many Islamic boarding schools and religious gatherings, women's understanding is closely linked to religion

(Nularna 2017). Even if they are inclined to violate religious rules, they will think twice unless someone justifies it as a form of charity from the rich to the poor.

B. Method

Essentially, this research falls under the category of field research with a qualitative approach (Noor 2010). The research methodology used is a phenomenological study on women's responses to political dynamics in Aceh. Primary data in this research were obtained using interview techniques with informants directly involved in the political realm. These informants include political actors, political cadres, and ordinary citizens. Additionally, supporting (secondary) data were obtained through a literature review, meaning the author referred to library sources such as scientific journals or published books.

During data processing, given the sensitive political situation in Aceh, the author did not use the informants' full names (using initials instead) to protect their safety and comfort, considering the political dynamics in Aceh are not very conducive. Furthermore, when narrating the research results, the author divided the perspectives into two main categories. First, informants who are insiders in politics, meaning those who propose religious, ethical, and life philosophy ideas (executive or legislative candidates). Second, informants who are outsiders in politics, meaning the political consumers, such as ordinary citizens. These two perspectives will certainly provide an interesting and dual perspective in politics (double movement).

C. Result and Discussion

1. Religious Understanding, Ethics, and Life Philosophy of Acehnese Society

According to the Indonesian Dictionary, religion is defined as a teaching system that regulates the faith and worship of Almighty God, as well as rules related to human relations and their environment. Bahrun Rangkuti defines religion as the way or path to attaining God's pleasure (Yuliana 2020). Sultan Taqdir Ali Syahbana states that religion is a system of behavior and relationships between humans and the Almighty, providing guidance and meaning to life. Religion is also a system of beliefs and practices regarding the sacred, binding its adherents in a moral community (Kohar 2020).

Islam is a monotheistic religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad based on revelations from Allah. The Quran is the holy book of Muslims, and the Prophet Muhammad conveyed and detailed its meanings and applications through his Sunnah. The Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet form the cornerstone of faith that Muslims uphold as the primary basis for practicing rituals and moral and ethical teachings they respect (Arake 2019). The Quran and the Sunnah also serve as a guide for Muslims in developing social and political relationships.

Religion is a life guide that becomes a reference for doing everything. The majority of Acehnese people adhere to Islam, meaning that all aspects of Acehnese life are heavily influenced by the Islam they practice. Aceh even has special authority recognized by regulations to implement Sharia law and apply Islamic law in resolving criminal cases such as khalwat (close proximity), gambling, and alcohol consumption (M. Yusuf 2019). Not only in legal matters, Islamic teachings must also be embedded in all aspects of Acehnese life, including politics and governance. Prohibitions against wrongdoing, such as corruption, cheating, lying, and using power for self-enrichment, are a few of the misdeeds forbidden in Islam.

Islamic education in Aceh starts early, and there is a common understanding that all Acehnese generations must have a strong grasp of Islam, although some may not fully understand Islamic law well (Huda et al. 2017). However, the demand to study Islam is very obligatory. In Aceh, Islamic education is taught in madrasahs and pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools), and now local content for children in public schools is specially provided through diniyah education, taught after general lessons in the afternoon and evening.

The understanding of religion among the Acehnese can be considered good because there are many educational facilities and human resources available. It is very feasible for people to learn religion in Aceh due to the numerous educational institutions teaching religious knowledge. In every village, there is a place to learn to read the Quran and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) for children, teenagers, and adults. Religious studies for mothers are also abundant and easy to find, with women being the most enthusiastic about learning religion. It is not surprising that women are highly present in religious study halls in Aceh (Jeumpa 2016). This reality greatly supports women's understanding of distinguishing between right and wrong according to religion.

Regarding the prohibition of money politics, almost all Acehnese people know that it is forbidden because it contradicts religious teachings. Unfortunately, such practices still occur. The Acehnese hold firmly to their religious teachings, and anything related to religious teachings will be followed. If there is a prohibition conveyed by religious leaders, it will be obeyed. Even if not practiced, they do not dare to violate it openly; violations are likely done secretly (Abda 2021).

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that discusses the values of right (moral) and wrong (immoral). Ethics determines whether an action is good or bad. Therefore, when someone performs an action, it will be known whether it is good or bad (Yanti et al. 2020). For someone who is already religious, ethical values have been taught in their religion, and they will be taught about what is good and bad.

In Acehnese society, ethics is an important part of manifesting themselves in practicing their religious teachings. Good and bad deeds in Islam have been established, and Muslims will choose good deeds because they align with religious commands, known as akhlak (morals). If they know what is good but still do bad things, they have bad akhlak (Nazaruddin 2014). The justification for continuing to do bad deeds, despite knowing they are wrong, is based on the concept that accepting money politics from a candidate is framed as a gift or charity from the rich to the poor, making the act legal and ethical when carried out.

Life philosophy is a viewpoint that guides someone to have principles about life that they hold firmly. Life philosophy is the foundation for someone to do what is right according to them and have the determination to carry out something they believe in as a life principle. Life philosophy can be interpreted as positive, good, and true values (Hi. Yusuf 2017). A person's life philosophy can shape their character, and Acehnese society also has its own life philosophy that characterizes them.

2. Money Politics and the Threat to Fair Democracy

Money politics involves candidates or their success teams giving money or goods to voters. Money politics is an illegal act, a criminal offense that carries a prison sentence of up to two years for both the giver and the receiver (Mokodompis et al. 2018). Money politics corrupts the democratic system, where society should have the freedom to choose without being influenced by money or goods as compensation for their vote. Money

politics leads voters to choose candidates not based on their competence but on the lure of money.

The head of the Panwaslih (Election Supervisory Board) in Banda Aceh said that money politics is like air; its presence is felt but not seen. It is very difficult to detect money politics because everyone remains silent when reports are made to the election supervisory authorities. There are always cases of money politics, but when investigated directly in the field, the community chooses not to reveal the truth (Rahmat & Hasan 2017). They fear being witnesses or being blamed for having accepted money from the candidates.

Communities that accept money usually do so out of necessity due to their poverty, which attracts candidates or their success teams to target these communities as fertile ground for votes (Pahlevi et al. 2020). The community, unaware of political issues, accepts the money, considering it a gift, without knowing the candidates' backgrounds and the impact on their future policies.

Healthy democracy should provide opportunities and enlightenment to make the community politically literate, not deceive them with misinformation about elections and regional head elections (Efriza 2017). The community needs to understand that electing council members and regional heads will impact policies that will positively affect them. When explanations about elections and their impact on society are given, the community becomes more aware and enthusiastic about participating in presidential and regional elections.

Ironically, political education that can enlighten the community is very minimally provided, leaving many people still shackled by their ignorance about this democratic process (Sanusi 2020). It's no wonder that some community members question the function of council members or believe they do not think about the people's welfare, even though they elected those council members. They do not realize that after being elected, council members and regional leaders will work for them.

3. The Phenomenon of Money Politics: Accept or Reject

The issue of money politics resembles a symbiotic mutualism theory where both candidates and voters' benefit. Like an economic system of supply and demand, where there is a need, a product will be presented (Pahlevi et al. 2020). It is not easy to eradicate money politics in a society that understands it as mutually beneficial. A DPRK member

from Bireun stated that the community still does not understand the functions of the executive and legislative branches; they think if they do not take the money now, they will never benefit. Typically, after being elected, candidates will not return, and they will seek support again only during the next election.

Candidates usually form success teams who work to approach voters, especially men and women. Men are more daring in deciding their choice with monetary compensation, while most women feel anxious and fearful when faced with money politics (Nularna 2017). Their moral foundation makes them think hard about accepting or rejecting the money. For instance, if several success teams visit their homes and offer money, the women may choose not to vote at all out of fear of sin.

Although many people still hope to be given money to vote, some individuals, such as a member of the Bireun council, choose candidates who become regular participants in dawn prayers with them. They do not ask for money or goods but expect the candidate to join them in dawn prayers and invite their team to participate as well (Abda 2021). Others request the candidate to provide assistance to orphans in their village rather than accept any personal gifts. Generally, people who ask for help for orphans have a good understanding of religion and do not want to accept money for voting, considering it sinful.

Communities asking for money as compensation usually approach the candidate or their success teams, stating that they will vote if given money, otherwise they will not. Eliminating money politics is challenging now, even though parties want it abolished, as people are not used to voting without being given money (Putri et al. 2020). Those who accept money politics think that candidates only come to offer what they need during elections and then forget about them afterward. Typically, people believe that if they do not accept money during elections, they will never receive it again.

Money politics persists in impoverished communities with low education levels. Their shallow thinking sees money as everything, without understanding that accepting it leads to no development in their areas. Candidates will incur debts due to money politics, which the community does not realize, making them opportunistically use elections to gain instant money (Nabila et al. 2020). The condition of poor and uneducated communities is worsened by candidates willing to spend and distribute money to gain votes.

This situation provokes other candidates to give money as well to avoid losing. "We don't want to lose, so we need to win this fight. If everyone agrees not to give money, we would follow, but many play dirty, so others do too," said a candidate (Nabila et al. 2020). Everyone knows that money politics is bad, disrupting the democratic system and fostering ignorance, leading to weak policy control and unfair development. However, money politics cannot be avoided now and may take a decade to eradicate as people's political understanding improves. Currently, voters and candidates still focus on short-term material benefits, where votes are exchanged for money.

An Aceh Utara Panwaslih member noted that detecting money politics is challenging, like a shadow that exists but cannot be grasped. There are many reports of people receiving money or gifts before elections, but when confirmed, no one admits to it (Yahya 2020). Those who accept money are afraid to report, especially when warned by success teams not to disclose their acceptance. If reported, both givers and receivers of money would be punished, making money politics a real yet legally unprosecuted issue due to lack of witnesses.

The Head of Domestic Politics (Poldagri) at Aceh's Kesbangpol stated that efforts to educate people to choose good and trustworthy leaders continue, although the tide of money politics remains strong, with some still seeing it as normal. Unfortunately, some people say that money given is compensation for their votes, and when the candidate wins, they will earn a lot from their position, while the voters get nothing. It's disheartening that people even set specific amounts for votes given to certain candidates (Arsy Interview 2023).

According to Poldagri, this attitude may result from poor understanding of the political system, especially legislative and executive elections. Another factor is the parties' negligence in lulling people into believing that voting for them means getting money, while other candidates may not provide money. Despite this, they continue to urge people to reject money politics so that elections and democracy can proceed properly.

A woman in a meeting discussing the prohibition of receiving money for voting said she chose to accept the money given by candidates' success teams. "If I don't take the money, they won't come back to help me after they are elected. Almost every election, I see this; they only come when they need votes, then forget about us," she explained.

This statement indicates the loss of trust in leaders. Leaders who should bring welfare and justice through their policies are only valued by the people in terms of money. Consequently, people do not care whether leaders will develop their areas or represent their interests. The community becomes apathetic, and leaders are not held accountable by their voters, having already given them money to vote.

An extreme view was also expressed by someone who said, "Take the money, but don't vote for them." This attitude shows that people see elections as a way to make money. They accept money from all candidates, regardless of who they vote for (Huda 2016). This leaves candidates and their teams anxious about whether the money spent will secure votes. This slogan has been heard several times in the field, though it's unclear if it's just talk or actual practice.

Candidates try to win voters' hearts with money, starting from significant events before being nominated. They visit during Islamic holidays to offer help, then do the same around election time, giving out money during the so-called "dawn attack" (Mokodompis et al. 2018).

Candidates mainly target women, as they are more easily approached through religious gatherings. They accept charity as donations for those over 45, active in religious studies, and well-versed in religion. However, this mindset does not apply to the younger generation, who are more influenced by their surroundings and fascinated by money (Shiddiq 2019). Rural communities with low understanding and knowledge view money as essential. When candidates visit empty-handed, they are viewed cynically, as people expect help or money, especially when asked to vote.

Mr. H convinced voters, including his relatives and villagers, to vote for him without giving money. They didn't accept his programs, preferring money. Mr. H noted the high political cost, saying, "If you don't have money, don't expect support, even from close relatives" (Hasan Interview 2023).

Similarly, Mr. S faced family members choosing different candidates due to money. This dilemma often leads to strained relationships. Mr. H stated that fighting money politics is hard, especially in areas with low education and poverty. Candidates and parties will consider it beneficial to give money for votes. If the community asks for programs, candidates will bring them; if they ask for money, it will be given to win (S Interview 2023).

First, the community must be enlightened; then parties and candidates will find new ways to gain votes. Expecting candidates to offer constructive programs during elections is unrealistic now, as others will play dirty with money. Candidates monitor each other's moves and will match or exceed money offers if they hear others are giving.

4. Position of Candidates and Women Voters in the Circle of Money Politics

Mrs. R, a trader from Bireun, said she dares not accept money from candidates because all candidates offer money and ask for votes. "I can't accept money from all and vote for all. I'll choose based on my heart and return the money. I'm afraid of sinning if I lie and accept money without voting for them," she said (Mrs. Rml Interview 2023).

Recently, people have come to her home, offering help with her toilet if she votes for a candidate in the 2024 election. She hasn't agreed, recalling past unfulfilled promises from candidates and their teams. "I prefer not to accept help and will decide later," she added. Mrs. R's explanation shows that women are approached with material promises to vote in executive and legislative elections. Her refusal indicates ethical considerations against accepting such promises. Despite her low education, she maintains religious principles from her religious teacher, avoiding deceit and manipulation.

Mrs. N, a housewife active in religious studies and the oldest student in her group, follows her teacher's guidance. "I never participate in elections because I'm unsure about the choices' accountability in the afterlife. I wait for my teacher's approval. If permitted, I ask who to vote for, and my teacher names someone. I trust my teacher's choice, and if questioned by God, I'll say it was my teacher's instruction" (Mrs. Nrh Interview 2023). Mrs. N's statement reflects a common practice among women in religious studies. They follow their teacher's voting guidance, with women trusting their teachers' choices. Mrs. N participated in the last presidential election, voting for the first time in years, following her teacher's request to support a presidential candidate and a legislative candidate who had helped the school.

A council member noted that parties and candidates follow community trends. If the community demands money for votes, candidates prepare money to be elected. If the community rejects money, candidates won't offer it. Candidates want to win and consider the community's expectations. Currently, people still want money as compensation for votes. If not given, they won't vote, while others give money and goods to win. "We don't want to lose, so we follow suit," he explained.

Discussions on women's role in accepting or rejecting money politics show success teams avoid economically strong women (Mahfud 2018). Mrs. Y said no one dares approach her with money offers during elections. "I wish candidates or teams would come with money or goods, but they don't, possibly because I'm a civil servant," she noted. Mrs. N, a teacher, never received money offers, possibly due to her good financial standing. However, she heard some residents were offered help if they voted for a certain candidate.

Mrs. L, a resident, received home renovation aid from a candidate after voting for them. Initially, the team approached her, promising help. Her son, a local government employee, permitted her to accept the aid and vote for the candidate. Mrs. L didn't feel deceived, as she received the aid. "I listen to my son, and if he thinks it's good, I'll vote. Aid is acceptable as it's given to voters," she explained (Mrs. Lns Interview 2023).

Religious understanding means success teams approach women through their religious teachers. Teachers with pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools) are strategic for gaining support. Women in religious studies are significant voters, often influencing their families. Mrs. C, a religious study member, trusts her teacher's candidate choice, who has helped the pesantren. "Our mosque was built by Mr. A from Banda Aceh, and Mr. R built some lodges and toilets," she observed. The pesantren's unfinished state relies on executive or legislative support for completion (Mrs. CN Interview 2023).

Teachers choose candidates who have helped and guide their students to vote accordingly (Zulkhairi 2022). Women follow their teacher's directions without directly receiving aid for specific candidates, as the teacher manages donor relations.

Mr. M, a success team member, noted that women are easily influenced to vote for specific candidates. Housewives are easily persuaded, keeping strong commitments to vote for the money-giving candidate. "We remind them not to betray their commitment, as it's sinful. Ensure they only accept money from our candidate and vote accordingly," he emphasized. Women are obedient and fear disobedience, making them easier to approach (Mr. M Interview 2023).

Women voters are more loyal than men, fulfilling their commitments to vote. A council member stated he would not run again without monetary compensation for votes. "It's hard to be elected without giving money," he admitted.

A female council member noted that she didn't give money, only visited close friends to announce her candidacy. "I had no money and didn't expect much, but by God's will, I was elected," she said. As a retired teacher known for good conduct and religiosity, she gained community support.

Her election shows that not all women vote based on money or goods. They consider candidates' character and religiosity. Educating women voters is crucial, as they are influenced by those who visit and guide them on political education. If candidates provide enlightening programs, women will follow. However, if given money, they will vote for candidates who may not benefit them (Mrs. H Interview 2023).

The Chairman of the Banda Aceh DPRK stated that he never offered money or goods. "I tell my constituents that I have no money or goods to give. If they expect policies like road repairs, I can approve budget allocations," he explained. He emphasizes educating people on the council's role in legislation, oversight, and budgeting.

Despite not giving money or goods, he was elected for three terms. The researcher observed his success due to his politeness and community care, being a regular mosque attendee. His religious approach helped him gain community trust, showing that religiosity and honesty are key to electoral success.

Religious approaches significantly influence women voters, who trust candidates with strong religious backgrounds. Money and goods are not tempting for women voters who prioritize accountability in both this world and the hereafter.

D. Conclusion

The persistence of money politics within Acehnese society remains a significant issue, particularly enticing for those unfamiliar with political processes and in economic need. Despite the allure of money and goods, these incentives do not always guarantee women's votes. Factors such as religious adherence, ethical considerations, and life philosophies play crucial roles in their decision-making. In Aceh, money is not the sole determinant of electoral choices. Women's susceptibility to money politics is indeed high, but they are less likely than men to accept such offers, influenced by their strong religious and moral values. Women often fear the legal and ethical repercussions of accepting money for votes, especially when reminded of the potential consequences. Therefore,

women require detailed assurances that accepting money will not lead to problems, often seeking religious justification for such actions.

The fight against money politics is complicated by economic conditions and educational gaps. Poor and uneducated communities are particularly vulnerable, viewing money as an immediate solution to their needs without considering the long-term implications on development and governance. Candidates exploit this vulnerability, perpetuating a cycle of corruption and undermining democratic principles. Efforts to eradicate money politics must focus on political education and economic empowerment. Enlightening the community about the importance of voting based on candidates' competencies and policies, rather than monetary compensation, is essential. Additionally, strengthening religious and ethical teachings can reinforce the community's resistance to money politics. In conclusion, while money politics poses a significant threat to fair and democratic processes in Aceh, a multi-faceted approach involving education, economic development, and reinforcement of religious and ethical values can mitigate its impact. By addressing these underlying issues, it is possible to foster a more informed and resilient electorate, ultimately leading to a healthier democratic system.

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