



Pork Barrel Politics: A Case Study of the Free Electricity Program in Aceh Jaya Local

Afrijal^{1*}, Herizal², Saddam Rasanjani³, Mukhrijal⁴

^{1,4} Department of Government Studies, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Aceh, Indonesia

² Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Erciyes University, Turkiye

³ Graduate School for Humanities & Social Sciences, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotlandia

* Corresponding author: afrijal@usk.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on analyzing the practice of Pork Barrel Politics in the Free Electricity Program implemented by the Aceh Jaya local Government in 2014-2017. Providing free electricity is a flagship program spearheaded by the Regent of Aceh Jaya who is also the elite of the Aceh Party (PA) for underprivileged communities. The free electricity program has become a campaign tool and strategy for the local legislative representative incumbents who want to regain control of the Local House of Representatives in the 2014 Legislative Election. We took a qualitative approach using the case study method. Data collection used was through interviews, observation and documentation. The results of the research show that the implementation of the free electricity program assistance in Aceh Jaya was characterized by pork barrel political practices, where recipients of free electricity program in 2014-2017 were prioritized to people who were the Aceh Party members and supporters, the winning party in the 2014 Legislative Election. Pigs are inseparable from the participation of the Aceh Party elite who sit in executive positions and are supported by the dominance of Aceh Jaya house of Representative (DPRK) members from the Aceh Party faction.

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INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on pork barrel politics in the context of the free electricity program in Aceh Jaya. According to Farejohn (1974) (as cited in (Saragintan & Hidayat, 2017)), pork barrel refers to efforts by incumbents to secure funding and distribute it to their constituents with the goal of providing incentives for those constituents to vote for them in subsequent elections (Hanretty, 2021; Lattmann, 2024; Maskin & Tirole, 2019; Spáč, 2021; Tomsa, 2018; Tóth et al., 2022). The free electricity program is one such social assistance initiative implemented by the Aceh Jaya Government, primarily targeting economically disadvantaged individuals who support the Aceh Party. This free electricity aid became a popular social assistance program, previously used as a

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strategic issue by incumbent Aceh Party members seeking re-election in the 2014 legislative elections.

Given the democratic electoral system where the public votes directly, incumbents can strategically employ pork barrel tactics. An incumbent's positive image can be bolstered through their influence in populist programs, such as social assistance, which can be leveraged to sustain and boost voter support in subsequent elections (H. N. Rachmawati, L. K. Alfirdaus, 2024). According to Saragintan & Hidayat (2017) as cited in (Firmansyah et al., 2021), the allocation of funds in social assistance programs can indirectly enhance the positive image of incumbents in the eyes of their constituents. This image is expected to garner public sympathy and encourage re-election, thus maintaining the incumbent's electoral appeal. As a tool for gaining public favor and boosting electoral prospects, social assistance becomes crucial for incumbents in enhancing their electoral performance.

The Aceh Jaya government is divided into two branches: executive and legislative. The executive implements numerous policies and programs designed to collaborate with the legislative. However, the executive is able to implement policies (programs) without legislative approval, namely through establishing regent regulations. Although the realization of many planned policies (programs) requires a budget authorized by the legislature (Labolo, 2015). The Aceh Jaya Government is claimed to execute numerous policies for local progress and the interests of the community in order to meet the government's goal of enhancing the welfare of the community (Suryono, 2018).

One of the policies implemented by the Aceh Jaya Government as an effort to meet public needs is the free electricity program/policy. The implementation of this free electricity program was first implemented in 2014 for the poor (underprivileged) using funds sourced from the local government budget (APBK) (Afrijal & Purwaningsih, 2020; Aceh Government, 2015). The Aceh Jaya Government together with the Local House of Representatives (DPRK) have a joint commitment to efforts to improve the welfare of the community (Aceh Government, 2016).

As a form of commitment and legalization of the implementation of this free electricity program, the Aceh Jaya Government, through the regent, who at that time was led by elites from the Aceh Party, issued a regulation, namely Aceh Jaya Regent Regulation No. 21 of 2014 concerning Guidelines for Implementing Assistance Activities for Installing Electricity Accounts for Poor Local Communities. Aceh Jaya so that this regent's regulation can be a reference for the regent to realize the free electricity policy (Isa et al., 2020; Redi, 2018). The policy of providing free electricity assistance in Aceh Jaya is a program that supports the community. All financing for the Free Electricity Program is borne by the Aceh Jaya APBK which was ratified together with the legislature (Afrijal & Purwaningsih, 2020).

The implementation of free electricity subsidy assistance is a solution for the community in fulfilling one of their life needs. Subsidies are believed to be a means of equalizing welfare for lower economic communities, apart from that, the existence of subsidies also allows the state to maintain economic stability (Soen et al., 2022). Based on the regent's regulations, this assistance is only intended for underprivileged communities, but in practice, there are still people who live in various sub-districts in the Aceh Jaya territory who have not received subsidies for free electricity assistance.

On the other hand, the problem is that there are people who do not meet the requirements for free electricity subsidy assistance but these people receive assistance. This problem is of course caused by several factors ranging from inaccurate data input by field officers, as well as political factors.

The implementation of the free electricity assistance policy is a manifestation of the seriousness of the Aceh Jaya Government and the legislature towards accelerating community welfare. Apart from that, the implementation of the electricity program was also a concrete manifestation of the implementation of the political promises of legislative candidates from the Aceh Party (PA) in the run-up to the 2014 legislative elections. In the 2014 legislative elections, the Aceh Party succeeded in controlling the legislature in Aceh Jaya. PA's dominance in the executive and the majority of legislative members from PA cadres are certainly capital to accelerate the realization of various policies that were promised during the campaign.

Table 1. Data on Aceh Jaya Local House of Representatives Seat Acquisition
Period 2014-2019

No	Political parties	Number of legislative seats	Persentase	Information
1	Aceh Party	10	50 %	Local Party
2	Golkar Party	4	20 %	National party
3	Demokrat Party	3	15 %	National party
4	PPP Party	2	10 %	National party
5	PDA Party	1	5 %	Local Party

Source: Processed by the Author from Various Sources, 2024

Based on the table above, it can be seen that members of the Aceh Jaya DPRK for the 2014-2019 period were dominated by the PA with 10 seats and 1 PDA member added as a party in coalition with the PA in the legislature. With the strength of 11 legislative seats, it certainly makes it easier for PA to realize various programs that will be proposed to the executive, including the policy of free electricity assistance for the community. Even though the legislature is an institution that connects people's aspirations, political factors dominate in implementing the free electricity program. This is because recipients of free electricity subsidy assistance are prioritized for people who are supporters and voted for PA during the 2014 Legislative Election, which was then proven by sticking stickers with the Government, National Electricity Company (PLN), and PA logos.

Placing stickers that only contain one party logo is certainly against the rules. The free electricity assistance policy is a program of the Aceh Jaya Local Government and people who meet the requirements as recipients of free electricity assistance should still be entitled to assistance even if they are not voters of that political party during the legislative elections. The policy of providing free electricity uses funds sourced from the APBK, the ratification of which involves the executive and legislative parties, so that the stickers affixed to the houses of people who receive free electricity assistance must contain all the logos of political parties whose cadres are in the legislature ([Serambi Indonesia, 2015a](#)).

The phenomenon of implementing government policies that only target a handful of people/groups using state resources is called the pork barrel, which is one of

the distributive political practices carried out by elites who have positions/power. [Drazen & Eslava \(2006\)](#) state that pork barrel is based on the distribution of resources in the form of government programs that are distributed to communities in certain areas. The emphasis in this initial concept was not on the individual but on the many people living in the area. Pork barrel politics is starting to be seen as a group-targeted policy, where funding is provided directly but is not targeted at the wider public, or is only oriented towards certain groups. Another shift is the tendency to see that pork barrel politics can not only be carried out by members of the legislature but can also be carried out by the executive ([Hessami, 2014](#); [Saragintan & Hidayat, 2017](#)). Problems that arise with the free electricity program assistance in Aceh Jaya need to be addressed wisely by the executive and legislature. In addition, every policy implemented by the executive together with the legislature can benefit all of society, not just a few people or groups. Based on the problems above, the author examines pork barrel politics in the free electricity assistance policy in Aceh Jaya district in 2014-2017.

METHOD

The method used in this research is a qualitative approach employing a case study method. This approach is relevant to the examined case concerning issues in government governance, specifically focusing on the implementation of the policy of pork barrel politics carried out by the executive and legislative branches in the free electricity program in Aceh Jaya from 2014 to 2017. This approach involves a detailed investigation of a program, event, activity, process, or group of individuals. The qualitative research process includes crucial efforts such as posing questions related to the pork barrel politics in the free electricity program in Aceh Jaya from 2014 to 2017, and procedures, and collecting data inductively, starting from specific details to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena related to the case of pork barrel politics ([Creswell & Creswell, 2017](#)).

The types of data used in this research consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data is data that the author obtained directly from informants in the field by studying the object under study. Meanwhile, secondary data is what the author got from various references, including books, documents, journals, and various reference sources that are relevant to this research. The method that the author uses in collecting data is conducting direct interviews to obtain information regarding pork barrel politics in the free electricity program in Aceh Jaya in 2014-2017. Data collection was also carried out using documentation techniques, where data was obtained from documents, textbooks, statutory regulations, and other reference sources that were relevant and related to this research. The sampling technique is a purposive sampling model that is based on objectives and considerations for respondents and informants who are directly involved in the research being studied. After the data is obtained, it is then processed for analysis and concluded as a result of the research. The results of the data analysis show an overview of the main problems studied with in-depth interpretation based on findings in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The electricity program is a flagship initiative implemented by the Aceh Jaya Regency Government. The electricity program was first implemented by Regent Ir. Azhar Abdurrahman in 2004. The regulation that served as the basis for this program

was Aceh Jaya Regent Regulation No. 21 of 2014 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Installation Assistance and Electricity Bill Payments for the Poor in Aceh Jaya Regency. This regulation has undergone several amendments, with the latest being Aceh Jaya Regent Regulation No. 38 of 2017 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Installation Assistance and Free Electricity Vouchers for Poor Families in Aceh Jaya Regency.

Based on the aforementioned regulation, the purpose of providing the free electricity assistance program is to ensure the availability of electricity for the impoverished and to alleviate the financial burden on low-income households in meeting their daily needs. The free electricity program provided by the Aceh Jaya government includes the installation of new electrical systems and the payment of electricity bills for both analog and prepaid installations, with a maximum capacity of 4 (four) Amperes.

Furthermore, the regulation specifies that the budget allocated for this program is sourced from the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD). The recipients of the free electricity assistance are individuals classified as destitute and impoverished. The provision of free installation services and electricity bill payments is not granted on a continuous basis, except for those who remain within the low-income household category. The table below provides details on the budget allocation and the number of beneficiaries for the free electricity program.

Table 2. The Allocation of Budget and Number of Beneficiaries in the Free Electricity Program

NO	Year	Pagu in APBK	Realization in APBK	Number of Recipients
1	2014	5.000.000.000,00	4.999.907.231,00	10.797
2	2015	10.144.000.000,00	9.922.340.958,00	14.731
3	2016	9.200.000.000,00	8.464.527.008,00	14.731
4	2017	9.725.015.498,00	9.723.079.498,00	14.470

Source: Author Processed, 2024

Additionally, the regulation outlines the criteria for assistance recipients, which include being a poor family, owning a residence, possessing an Aceh Jaya identity, and being registered in the sub-district's proposal. Recipients of the free installation and electricity bill assistance for impoverished individuals who meet these criteria are then determined by a decree from the regent. This has resulted in a discrepancy between the number of impoverished individuals receiving free electricity assistance and the number of poor people as reported by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Aceh Jaya. The number of poor residents according to BPS data is detailed in the following table.

Table 3. Aceh Jaya Poor Communities 2014-2017

No	Year	Number of Poor Population (People)	Percentage of Poor Population (%)	Total Population
1	2014	14.240	16.52	86.123
2	2015	13.850	15.93	86.385
3	2016	13.100	15.01	87.622
4	2017	13.230	14.85	89.681

Source: BPS of Aceh Jaya, 2024

The implementation of the installation and electricity bill assistance is managed by an execution team appointed by the regent. According to Regent Regulation Number 38 of 2017, Article (8) specifies the following duties of the execution team:

1. Conducting socialization of the installation assistance and electricity provision activities for Poor Families in each sub-district;
2. Receiving applications for installation assistance and electricity provision from prospective beneficiaries; and
3. Recording, verifying administrative details, and proposing prospective beneficiaries of the installation and electricity assistance for Poor Families to the regent, for further approval through a regent's decree.

The data on recipients of free electricity assistance, once verified by the implementation team, is formalized in a regent's decree. The next stage involves providing assistance for both the installation of new electrical systems and the payment of electricity bills. In 2014, the free electricity program was managed by the Mining and Energy Office within the Aceh Jaya Public Works Department. However, following the enactment of new regulations, its implementation responsibility was transferred to the Bureau of Economy and Natural Resources at the Aceh Jaya Secretariat.

The installation of new systems is carried out directly by PLN (the state electricity company) at the homes of poor families, according to data provided by the Bureau of Economy and Natural Resources. The payment of electricity bills involves several steps, as explained by Irwansyah, Head of the Bureau of Economy and Natural Resources at the Aceh Jaya Secretariat:

1. The Bureau of Economy and Natural Resources submits the recipient data to the Cooperative (Baitul Qiradh) under the Department of Cooperatives.
2. The Cooperative Baitul Qiradh then provides the recipient data to PLN to generate bills according to the data submitted by the Bureau of Economy and Natural Resources.
3. The processed electricity bills from PLN are then handed over to the Cooperative Baitul Qiradh, which in turn submits them to the Bureau of Economy and Natural Resources.
4. The Bureau of Economy and Natural Resources makes the payment for the electricity bills.
5. After payment is completed, Baitul Qiradh processes and prints the Tokens (Vouchers) through an application.
6. The Tokens are then provided to the Bureau of Economy and Natural Resources.
7. The Bureau of Economy and Natural Resources subsequently distributes the Tokens (vouchers) to officials in each sub-district.
8. Finally, the sub-district officials distribute the Tokens to the community through their respective village heads.

The free electricity program is highly susceptible to being used as a political tool by both executive and legislative elites. Government programs funded by the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget must be designed to serve the public interest and contribute to the welfare of the community. Policies that are discussed and jointly established cannot be claimed as the prerogative of any one party, even if the program or policy is proposed by a particular group. However, it is not uncommon for proposals

from specific parties to be utilized as a means of seeking personal or group advantages through regulatory means. Such behavior by political elites is referred to as rent-seeking.

Rent seeking is the effort by individuals or groups to increase their income through the exploitation of government regulations (Yustika, 2014). Members of the Aceh Jaya Regional Representative Council, comprising various political parties, inevitably have different interests and aspirations to advocate. These interests may include both the needs of their constituents and personal or group gains they represent. Rent-seeking behavior is characterized by political elites allocating resources to capture opportunities for private benefits offered by the government, with each individual or group striving to maintain their advantageous positions. Political elites within the government often have differing interests (Krueger, as cited in (Yustika, 2014). Theoretically, political phenomena such as policy or program implementation aimed at securing votes for incumbent political elites in elections can be referred to as pork barrel politics.

Referring to the meaning of politics as stated by Harold Lasswell (Sørensen, 2022) that it is all about "who gets what, when, how", then distributive politics, which involves the allocation of government goods and services, is at the heart of politics. Distributive politics can be interpreted as the allocation of goods and services by the government or elected politicians to their constituents (Golden & Min, 2013). One of the objectives of implementing distributive politics is related to utilizing state programs or government programs to achieve victory in elections. Therefore, distributive politics in this case will be more likely to benefit the ruling party in government. This is because the government party may have more exclusive control in exploiting the success of government programs (Saragintan & Hidayat, 2017). There are two different conceptual schemes in viewing distributive politics, one called programmed distribution and the other non-programmed. Programmed schemes are directed at goods allocated to the majority of citizens regardless of their geographic location; conversely, goods that are allocated to certain places and relatively small constituencies are called pork barrels (Golden & Picci, 2008; Stokes et al., 2013).

Pork Barrel is the implementation of a program or policy funded by the government that provides benefits to certain groups (Klingensmith, 2019). Pork barrel politics in practice is often carried out by political elites who sit in parliament. The practice of pork barrel politics is carried out by political elites in the legislature as an effort to obtain budget allocations that will be used for constituents in their electoral districts. The allocation of these funds is to ensure and strategy for the political elite so that voters can vote again in the next election period (Catalinac et al., 2020; Christensen & Selway, 2017). However, as time goes by, the practice of pork barrel politics has experienced a shift in which political elites who currently hold public office not only utilize the state budget but also do so in other ways. Apart from the legislature, pork barrel politics can also be carried out by officials who currently hold positions in the executive (Saragintan & Hidayat, 2017).

The political concept of pork barrel has changed from its basic meaning. Specifically, Evan (2011) explains that basically, this pork barrel occurs due to the government's practice of sorting in implementing policies by targeting only certain communities. This pork barrel approach is not aimed at individuals but rather at the

general public who live in the areas controlled by the political elite. This means that although the manifestation of this allocation is not individual, it cannot be felt by the entire community. However, in the latest developments, other literature states that pork barrel politics is starting to be embedded as a group-targeted policy, where financing is provided directly but is not targeted at the wider public, or is only oriented towards certain groups (Drazen & Eslava, 2006). Another shift is the tendency to see that pork barrel politics can not only be carried out by members of the legislature but can also be carried out by the executive, especially local executives such as governors, mayors and regents (Hessami, 2014; Taylor, 2008).

According to Saragintan & Hidayat (2017), There are several basic characteristics to see the phenomenon of pork barrel politics. First, although initially this concept was aimed at the behavior of legislative members, this can be carried out by a government leader and is especially related to those who will face general elections in their region to be re-elected. Second, pork barrel politics is carried out by using the state budget which is used to allocate available funds which are used to increase the electability of certain candidates. Third, pork barrel politics has a regional or regional context. Fourth, pork barrel politics is discriminatory (group targeted), meaning that only certain communities can enjoy the results of the allocation of funds. Fifth, pork barrel politics does not bind its constituents to vote for the incumbent because no agreement has been made.

Many previous research results regarding distributive politics show that low-income (poor) groups are targets of interest in being the object of this policy. Voters who fall into the poor category can shift their choices in response to every economic benefit they receive because every rupiah is very important to them (Golden & Picci, 2008; Stokes et al., 2013). Another reason is that the education level of poor people is also relatively low, making it difficult for them to evaluate the performance of politicians who occupy public office. The reward and punishment mechanism that is commonly used by voters in developed countries with mature democracies allows voters to re-elect politicians who perform well to occupy public office and vice versa not to re-elect/replace politicians who do not perform well during their term of office. Due to the inability to assess politicians' performance and provide punishment and rewards during elections, voters make choices based on policies that give them concrete benefits such as subsidies and social assistance. The incumbent's use of grant spending and social assistance spending for the benefit of his populist programs can benefit the incumbent in the election. Such voters prioritize meeting real needs and not something abstract such as democratic values (Habibi et al., 2017).

Another reason is that the education level of poor people is also relatively low, making it difficult for them to evaluate the performance of politicians who occupy public office. The reward and punishment mechanism that is commonly used by voters in developed countries with mature democracies allows voters to re-elect politicians who perform well to occupy public office and vice versa not to re-elect/replace politicians who do not perform well during their term of office. . Due to the inability to assess politicians' performance and provide punishment and rewards during elections, voters make choices based on policies that give them concrete benefits such as subsidies and social assistance. The incumbent's use of grant spending and social assistance spending for the benefit of his populist programs can benefit the incumbent

in the election. Such voters prioritize meeting real needs and not something abstract such as democratic values.

The implementation of the free electricity program was first initiated by the Aceh Jaya government in 2014. This policy's execution was a manifestation of the commitment of the Aceh Jaya Government under the leadership of the 2012-2017 regent, who was part of the local elite party. In the 2012 Aceh Jaya Regent and Deputy Regent Election, the candidates endorsed by the Aceh Party emerged victorious. In the 2014 legislative elections, the Aceh Party also dominated the Aceh Jaya Regional People's Representative Council for the 2014-2019 period, securing 10 out of 20 seats, or 50% of the total seats available. The shared political power and perspective between the executive and legislative branches facilitated the executive's ability to gain support from the Regional People's Representative Council, making it easier to approve and implement programs or policies in parliament. However, if this executive-legislative harmony is exploited for personal or group interests, it could have detrimental consequences for the region.

The provision of free electricity by the Regent of Aceh Jaya, who is a member of the Aceh Party and is fully supported by the Aceh Party elites in the legislature, was an effort to fulfill campaign promises made before the 2014 Legislative Elections. The primary target of this free electricity assistance was the underprivileged population. However, the issue arose when the recipients of this aid were primarily constituents who supported the Aceh Party. The funding for this policy's implementation was drawn from the Aceh Jaya District Budget. The budget allocated by the Aceh Jaya Government for the realization of the free electricity program from 2014 to 2017 amounted to IDR 34,069,015,498.00, with a realization rate of IDR 33,109,854,695.00. Since its inception in 2014, the allocated budget has steadily increased. The detailed allocation for the free electricity program can be seen in the following table 3.

Table 4. Free Electricity Budget Allocation 2014-2017

NO	Year	APBK of Aceh Jaya	Free Electricity Allocation	Realization of Free Electricity Budget
1	2014	747.724.571.217,00	5.000.000.000,00	4.999.907.231,00
2	2015	981.136.748.533,00	10.144.000.000,00	9.922.340.958,00
3	2016	1.125.799.512.675,00	9.200.000.000,00	8.464.527.008,00
4	2017	1.064.266.101.121,08	9.725.015.498,00	9.723.079.498,00
Total		3.918.926.933.546,00	34.069.015.498,00	33.109.854.695,00

Source: Processed by the author from various sources, 2024

The free electricity assistance policy implemented by the Aceh Jaya Government is in principle a program that can minimize and reduce the burden on economically disadvantaged people. However, in reality in the field, various problems are still found, such as finding recipients who have not met the requirements, meaning there are still recipients who are not entitled to assistance but receive assistance and there are people who meet the requirements in the underprivileged category but do not receive assistance. This problem cannot be separated from the existence of targets that are targeted at only a few community groups. This is of course contrary to the regulations that have been passed by the regent of Aceh Jaya. Even though all people have the same right to receive assistance as long as they meet the specified requirements.

Every government policy should require supervision from the legislature as the people's representative. Legislative members consisting of several political parties must work for the people, not for personal or group interests. As an institution that has the authority to monitor government performance and policies, the independence of legislative members is an absolute must. The purpose of supervision by legislative institutions is to ensure and prevent deviations from policies made by the executive (Iqbal et al., 2022). Supervision of legislative institutions can be carried out preventively and repressively. Preventive supervision is supervision carried out before the implementation of a regulation is carried out (Setiyowati et al., 2019). Meanwhile, repressive supervision is the implementation of supervisory activities when government programs or policies are implemented (Gafar et al., 2022).

The legislative institution which represents the voice of the people needs to show a neutral attitude in governance. Checks and balances in government are very important to ensure that policies implemented by the executive run as they should. However, in reality, it was found that checks and balances in the Aceh Jaya government had not been running optimally in implementing free electricity assistance. This is because some members of the Aceh Jaya DPRK have the same affiliation as the executive and do not criticize the policy. In 2015, the Golkar Party Fraction and the Joint Fraction criticized the irregularities committed by the Aceh Jaya Government in implementing free electricity assistance. The problem discovered in 2015 was the sticking of stickers with only the logo of one of the political parties on houses receiving free electricity assistance. The sticking of this sticker violates existing regulations, this is because the budget allocated comes from the APBK, where the APBK budget is the people's budget which is approved by the legislature and the executive. As stated by Teuku Hasyimi Puteh, Deputy Chair of the Aceh Jaya DPRK for the 2014-2019 Period, quoted from Serambi Indonesia (2015a), sebagai berikut:

"Free electricity is financial support from the APBK which was budgeted from 2014 to 2015. If you have to put a party symbol on it, then all parties have to put it on it, because it is a joint fund and ratified jointly in the DPRK. If the free electricity program is given to those who are not entitled to receive it and on behalf of only one party, then it is not by the provisions and violates procedures."

The same statement was also conveyed by T. Asrizal from the Golkar Party faction for the 2014-2019 period regarding the issue of irregularities in the free electricity program: "The jointly owned electricity program, funded from the APBK, cannot be claimed unilaterally. In the past, we approved the budget twice in the APBK, the APBK was pure and we approved the changes, that was in 2015" (Interview, 2 Agustus 2018)

The Chairman of the Aceh Party, Aceh Jaya Local, Safrian Toni, responded to the above statement in the media Serambi Indonesia (2015b) which confirmed that the stickers on some of the aid recipients' houses were made by the Aceh Party itself.

"The free electricity program in Aceh Jaya for underprivileged residents is a program of the Aceh Party that was promised during the previous campaign. The affixing of stickers bearing the Aceh Party symbol on free meters is our collaboration with the Aceh Jaya Local Government. According to him, DPRK members from the Aceh Party will continue to fight for free electricity services to underprivileged communities every year"

Still from the same source, [Serambi Indonesia \(2015b\)](#), The statement conveyed by Safrian Toni was then strengthened by a statement conveyed by Mawardi Wahed as Chair of the Aceh Party Fraction in the Aceh Jaya DPRK.

"You need to know that the stickers were attached by the Aceh Party who made them and were not printed by the Aceh Jaya Local Government and PLN. Stickers with the PA symbol are only affixed in a few sub-districts, such as Panga, Krueng Sabe and Setia Bakti. Meanwhile, in other sub-districts, there are no PA stickers attached. The realization of the free electricity program service is not only provided to PA supporters. However, every poor citizen also gets it. However, for those who are deemed not to be supporters, PA will not stick party symbol stickers"

Another statement regarding the sticking of stickers was also conveyed by Dasril A. Rahman, a PDA cadre who joined the Aceh Party faction in the Aceh Jaya DPRK;

"I have not found any stickers with the PA symbol affixed to the homes of PDA constituents. Stickers bearing the Aceh Party symbol are only placed on houses that are deemed to support it and I don't think there's any need to question that. Let the public judge it". ([Serambi Indonesia, 2015b](#)).

Based on various responses and responses from political elites both within the government and outside the government, it can be concluded that the free electricity assistance policy experienced irregularities in the implementation process. The free electricity assistance that is implemented can ideally target all underprivileged people who meet the criteria. However, what happened in the field was that the free electricity assistance program was used as a political and political marketing tool by the ruling political party during the campaign before the election. This is done as a strategy to attract sympathizers to elect political elites who will return to fight in political contestation. The use of various state resources for personal or group interests is also called pork barrel distributive politics. The free electricity program which uses APBK budget allocations should work together with the legislative body and not claim to be a program of a handful of political elites.

Aceh Jaya DPRK members from various political party affiliations certainly have different political interests and aspirations to fight for. The interests being fought for can be personal or group interests or the interests of the people (voters). The attitudes and behavior of the political elite who are in power by utilizing resources in government are characterized as rentier attitudes and behavior. The political elite will try to seize various opportunities offered by the government to claim property rights and this is also an effort to maintain the power they have or are currently occupying.

The free electricity assistance program was first initiated by the Aceh Party. The Aceh Jaya government in 2015 was controlled by the Aceh Party elite in both the executive and legislative branches. The domination of power held by the Aceh Party in government allows the political elite to realize various policies and programs for the benefit of the people. DPRK Aceh Jaya for the 2009-2014 period was controlled by the Aceh Party with 14 seats out of a total of 20 seats. This certainly becomes strength and capital in controlling the government, including realizing free electricity assistance for the community. The issue of free electricity assistance for the poor is being played up by the local political elite as a winning strategy and wanting to return to power in the next period. This was conveyed by Saudi, DPRK member from the Aceh Party faction,

"The free electricity program is a regional program that we initiated through the Aceh Party faction in 2013 ahead of the first council heading into the 2014 phase. We, the PA faction, sat with the regent, also from PA. We are launching this program, which is called party work. The council's first work will be to improve the welfare of the constituents because we made a promise to the constituents. If we choose this, it makes things easier. We offer other factions including Golkar, PPP and Democrat. They refused, and there was an official report which stated that they did not agree with the city's management of the aspirations of other parties and they did not put in place for the constituents, for free electricity. If they agree, it means we accommodate all constituents." (interview, 26 June 2018)

The above statement was reinforced again through a statement from Ir. Azhar Abdurrahman as Regent of Aceh Jaya for the period 2012-2017.

"In 2014, during the period leading up to the legislative elections, I developed a program aimed at securing victory for the Aceh Party, either by increasing the number of seats or maintaining the current ones. Each legislative candidate was able to influence the community by demonstrating the tangible benefits voters could receive. Consequently, candidates compiled lists of potential voters, focusing on those who could potentially support them. The target was to secure ten seats in the District House of Representatives out of the 20 available in Aceh Jaya. Thus, the free electricity program significantly influenced political support" (Interview, 11 July 2018)

Based on the interviews conducted, it can be concluded that the free electricity assistance implemented by the Aceh Jaya government is a manifestation of political promises. Although there was a decrease in the number of seats won, the Aceh Party considered this achievement aligned with their target of regaining control of the legislative body, as another local party, the Daulat Aceh Party, also secured one seat and joined the Aceh Party's faction. This legislative strength provided the Aceh Party elites with the opportunity to easily fulfill their political promises.

The realization of political promises is fundamentally an obligation and a form of commitment for political elites after being elected as public officials. However, the practice carried out by the Aceh Party elite in implementing the issue of free electricity assistance only benefits those who voted for the Aceh Party. Selecting specific communities to receive assistance funded by the Regional Budget clearly violates regulations. Constituents of the Aceh Party are prioritized, while those perceived not to support the local party are excluded from receiving free electricity assistance, even if they meet the eligibility criteria. Additional field findings indicate that political elites outside of the Aceh Party are reluctant to allocate their aspirational funds for free electricity assistance. This is cited as the main reason why those perceived as voters for other parties do not receive free electricity assistance from the government. Conceptually, the issue surrounding this free electricity assistance can be categorized as pork barrel politics.

Pork barrel can be seen as an effort to secure political positions carried out by political elites who hold positions in the hope of being re-elected during the election (Denemarrk, 2023). Pork barrel, in other words, is the provision of funds in the form of programs or projects to constituents (Atalino-Tang & Moreno, 2023). Incumbents have an advantage in political contestation, namely that incumbents have influence and

authority to allocate budget resources to influence voters. The incumbent will increase his electability if he has access to allocated state finances, has the support of power, and a good reputation in society (Firmansyah et al., 2021).

Pork Barrel politics practiced by the Aceh Party elite has several basic characteristics as explained theoretically. First, the incumbents who are in power, both in parliament and the executive, are looking for various ways to be re-elected in political contestation. Second, political elites in practicing Pork Barrel politics often use the state budget. Third, the target voters or selection of policy locations is regional or regional. Fourth, the practice of Pork Barrel Politics is very discriminatory because the beneficiaries of various policies and programs are only certain communities as targeted by the incumbents. Lastly, the practice of pork barrel politics does not bind constituents to voters (Saragintan & Hidayat, 2017). The provision of free electricity assistance to certain communities carried out by the Aceh Party elite cannot be separated from the distributive political interests that are practiced.

Providing free electricity to the community should target the entire community. Elected legislative members need to give up party attributes in carrying out their performance as members of parliament. If the political elite does not position itself as the people's representative, then it is certain that the elected party elite will work following the interests of the party or group. This hard democracy and the independence of legislative institutions as representatives of the people. The practice of pork barrel politics which seeks profit by using positions and titles in government is unnecessary, considering that the budget stated in the APBK belongs to all of society. The various programs and policies implemented can accommodate and have an impact on society which leads to regional prosperity and progress in eradicating poverty.

Ideally, every legislative member of parliament who is a representative of an institution that connects people's aspirations can be an intermediary in fighting for people's aspirations. The DPRK in Aceh Jaya district has the task and function of fighting for aspirations through ratifying various policies or regulations that are expected to support public welfare. Apart from that, the DPRK in Aceh Jaya district also has authority in terms of supervision. If the supervisory function of the legislature can run optimally then every policy or program implemented by the executive can be realized well and on target according to field data and not engineering and interests. group politics (Lesmana, 2010). This is because, in principle, supervision is carried out by legislative institutions to ensure conformity between planning and the realization of government policies. This supervision is also part of achieving good and clean governance (Jailolo et al, 2023)

CONCLUSION

The free electricity policy is a form of commitment and effort from the Aceh Jaya Government for underprivileged communities. This electricity assistance subsidy policy is a pro-people policy that directly touches the needs of the community. It's just that in implementing the free electricity policy, the recipients of benefits/assistance are only people identified as supporters and loyal voters of the Aceh Party. Providing government assistance targeting Partai Aceh constituents is pork barrel distributive political behavior, seeing as the implementation of the free electricity policy is the realization of the campaign promise of the Aceh Party political elite. The 2014-2019

legislative period in Aceh Jaya Local was controlled by local party elites who formed one faction, namely the Aceh Party Faction. The dominance of the Aceh Party faction in the legislature provides opportunities and open opportunities for the Aceh Party elite to realize political promises by targeting a small number of people in implementing the free electricity assistance policy through the executive who is also from the Aceh Party elite.

There needs to be awareness from the Aceh Party elite to eliminate pork barrel distributive political behavior in designing public programs/policies because this is a discriminatory act against society. Existing wealth resources must be used to prosper the entire community, not just a handful of political party sympathizers. The State Budget used by the incumbents in the process leading up to the election is State finance which must be able to provide benefits to all of society regardless of which political elite is chosen during the political contestation.

Based on the results of this research, the author acknowledges several shortcomings and limitations, particularly concerning field data. During interviews, members of the legislature from local parties did not comprehensively provide data related to the practice of pork barrel politics in the free electricity policy. However, when interviewing elites from national parties, the author discovered that the free electricity assistance, which was targeted solely at supporters of the Aceh Party, was indeed confirmed. This was evidenced by the placement of stickers featuring the Aceh Party's logo. The claim that the electricity assistance belonged to the Aceh Party further substantiates the occurrence of pork barrel politics practiced by the regent and legislative members affiliated with the Aceh Party. Another limitation of this research is that the interviewed community members expressed fear and reluctance to provide data. In addition to the challenges in field data collection, the research also faced difficulties in obtaining secondary data, particularly regarding studies on pork barrel politics, which are still scarce in the available references.

The author recommends that studies on pork barrel politics should be continued by researchers, as the practice is often employed by incumbents who are currently in power and seek re-election in subsequent electoral periods. Ideally, these incumbents should step down from their positions when running for office to avoid conflicts of interest. The author also suggests that local party elites in Aceh, particularly those in government, should remain committed and consistent in advocating for the welfare and prosperity of the community, regardless of political party affiliations and constituents.

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