

Aceh's Local Elite Power Strategy

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Abstract: This paper aims to see how the strategy of local elites in gaining power in village government in Aceh. In this case, Acehese local elites, former members of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), have economic and political advantages over other communities because they have networks within the Free Aceh Movement organization down to the grassroots. The qualitative method with the case study approach was used in this research. The findings of this study revealed that local Acehese elites used the connections of fellow GAM members in the government as a strategy to seize economic and political resources in the village. They contested in the village head election (*keuchik*) and competed to become village government officials after knowing the number of village funds managed by the village through general elections and even through direct appointment as interim village head officials. This study concludes with four main strategies for gaining power in government in the village. The main strategies are (1) successful team consolidation, (2) segmentation, targeting, and positioning, (3) candidate image, and (4) Aceh's contextual strategy in the form of a network of the former Free Aceh Movement in gaining political power at the village level in Aceh.

Keyword: *Strategy; Local Elite; Gaining Power; Local Government.*

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INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the strategies of local elites to gain power in governance at the village level in Aceh. Local elites in this paper include rural communities with economic and political advantages over other communities. They are former GAM members who have a dialectic in the process of power struggle at the village level, whose basis is the struggle for economic resources by taking advantage of their connections in the government. In a decentralized political system, the struggle between elites is centered on political parties and the parliament, with money being the driving force of the struggle (Hadiz, 2005). Especially, amid large village funds disbursed from the central government for each village, villages are no longer looked down upon as mere targets of government programs, projects, and policies but also a barn of money that attracts many local elites to come and rule (Nurfaisal, 2019).

Moreover, local elites have the resources to wait for the right time to participate in the direct election of village heads (*keuchik*). On the other hand, villagers expect transparency in village head elections to reduce the potential for corruption and create fairer representation across gender, age, and generation through stricter enforcement of rules and the use of sanctions

for violators (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2000; Gibson and Lehoucq, 2006). In addition, decentralization through village autonomy is one of the efforts of the central government to return decision-making power to indigenous village communities to achieve good governance at the grassroots level. This principle wants to ensure that the benefits of development flow to the community, especially the rural poor (Fritzen, 2007). However, this goal does not always work well. The effectiveness of pro-development policies in villages is subject to many vulnerabilities. One of them is the interference of local elites at the regency and provincial levels towards the autonomy that runs in the village (Masaki, 2007; Rohmah, 2018). In this case, decentralization, regional autonomy, and, most recently, village autonomy have made the village a "field" and "stage" for power struggles at the grassroots (Nugroho, 2018).

In addition to being autonomous in government administration, villages are also autonomous in financial management. It has increased the enthusiasm of local elites both in the village and at the top level to fight for power at the local level (Argenti, 2018). As a result, many parties act as the determining elite, interfere, and fight for access to control the economic assets owned by the village, as expressed by Mosca in Varma (2001). Often, the ruling class experiences severe shocks and eventually breaks, and the consequence is that the ruling class becomes very vulnerable to division and being replaced by another ruling class (Idrus & Purwaningsih, 2016; Marijan, 2010).

While research on elites has focused on elites who play at the same level, this study sees that the more attractive the resources being contested, the more actors, in this case, the elite, will be involved in the struggle for resources regardless of level. After the existence of village funds, the village is no longer an area of struggle for the elite in the village but also increasingly attracts the interest of the elite above it, such as the regency elite, to compete, and the intervention in village autonomy is more likely and often occurs.

Studies on the elite have been carried out by many experts and generally state that the elite is a small group of people who control most of the people (Varma, 2001). Elites can also be said to be a minority group in society, but they have advantages and disadvantages that are not shared by the general population. They comprise (1) having an important position in society, (2) possessing the qualities that made them elite, i.e., various advantages such as wisdom, intelligence, knowledge, expertise, courage, and heredity-based, (3) having a great social responsibility towards the environment, and (4) having a reward or getting a larger share in many cases (Keller, 1995). However, the superiority of the elite in people's lives depends on how far the elite has succeeded in manipulating society and its environment through symbols and kindness or even imposing its will through violence (Mas'ood, 2006).

Meanwhile, power is an actor's ability to influence other actors' behavior in such a way that the behavior of other actors is in accordance with the wishes of the actor in power (Budiardjo, 1984). "Suppose there are only two people in a system, A and B. A influences B to the extent that A changes B's actions or predispositions in some way." (Dahl, 1978). Thus, it can be said that power is very close to the behavior and efforts of actors in influencing others, and there is an element of coercion from the second party in the relationship. However, there is also another definition of power broadly, describing it as the power to exercise control with the use of most resources such as assets and the ability to obtain compliance from the behavior of other actors. In addition, Pareto stated that in the elite body, there is a tendency to decay, so in this condition, even though they are not elite at first, they have a potential opportunity to enter the elite environment and become elite. Therefore, a process known as elite circulation can occur in a society. Elite circulation involves the promotion process of non-elite groups into elites and, simultaneously, the demotion of elite groups into non-elite layers (Bottomore, 2006).

Furthermore, the study of elites is divided into two approaches: counter-elite and co-opt-elite. The counter-elite approach considers elites inherently bad and, therefore, should be excluded from the institutional design. By increasing public awareness about power inequality and building local capacities, this approach shows that community empowerment and political citizenship will effectively resist elite domination (Hickey, 2004; Stokke, 2000). Otherwise, elites will mobilize, accumulate, and invest in the social, political, and economic capital they already have to hijack the project (Platteau, 2004). On the other hand, the poor who contributed their

time, resources, and energy did not benefit much from the project and were disappointed to be prevented from participating further (Asmorowati and Marcus, 2006). Meanwhile, the coopt-elite approach indicates that collaboration with the elite, not confrontation, is the solution to poverty reduction. This assumption is based on the idea that not all elites are evil, and some can play a constructive (building) role in the development of society. It also assumes that power is not a 'zero-sum' game, and using elite pragmatic networks and their resource channels benefits the poor.

When talking about elite strategies in gaining power, several previous studies discuss, first, the idea of relative capture, which sees the vulnerability of local governments in access to power causing elite circulation to occur (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2002). Second, the electoral competition model is subject to the influence and lobbying of certain interest groups, making electoral competition at the local government level more vulnerable to elite struggles (Baron, 1994; Grossman & Helpman, 1996; Laffont & Tirole, 1991). Thirdly, information asymmetry and collusion, which are highly dependent on the economic ownership base and political structure, cause a person to become an elite (Lieten, 1996; Platteau, 2004). Meanwhile, this paper focuses on a different matter. In this case, the strategy of local elites is not limited to government vulnerabilities related to political lobbying or information asymmetry owned due to economic and political bases. The strategy of local elites that occurred in "ex-conflicted" areas did not only rely on the three strategies above but also utilized the network of movement groups (or rebellions) with the following attributes such as ideology and previous organizational networks.

Further, this study used Lock and Harris's (1996) theory of political marketing to see how local Acehnese elites carried out strategies to gain power in village government by becoming village heads by winning the hearts of constituents and making them choose the desired candidate or through other means. The indicators used in this theory are consolidation (internal and external), segmentation, targeting, positioning, and candidate image. This research was conducted in two villages in Aceh Barat District, Aceh Province, i.e., Jawi Village and Blang Mee Village. These two villages can help provide an overview of how the strategy for gaining power in the village works. As former conflict areas, Jawi Village and Blang Mee Village in Aceh Province have two autonomies at once, namely special autonomy and village autonomy, impacting the disbursement of many funds simultaneously at the village level, namely in the form of special autonomy funds and village funds. It is one of the reasons why villages in Aceh have become an arena for power struggles compared to other villages in Indonesia.

In addition to opening economic space, the autonomy that takes place also opens up democratic space so that the intensity of power struggles between actors at the village level is getting higher. In this regard, the local elite of Aceh currently sees the village as no longer a place for *Jen boh aneuk* (a genie who throws children away or other names for a remote place). However, the village is now seen using a new frame as a barn of money that can be taken advantage of at any time. The change in perspective on villages in Aceh has also increased the interest of local elites in Aceh to become village heads (*keuchik*). In the past, not everyone wanted to be a village head, but now, the position of village head has become a fierce battle arena, even to the point of seeking support from outside the village, either through political parties, parliament, regents, or governors. Therefore, research on how the Aceh elite's strategy in gaining power in governance at the village level is vital to do. The aim is to find out what strategies the local Acehnese elites used to gain power in the village.

RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative method with a case study approach was used during this research process. The case study approach was chosen because it is considered the most appropriate and helps the research run (Craswell, 2014). This research was conducted at the village level in several villages in Aceh Barat Regency, Aceh Province. Altogether, there were 321 villages in Aceh Barat, and most current village leaders were interim officials. The reasons for choosing the location were that (1) currently, each village had a large source of funds, namely from village funds and special autonomy funds, only given to the Aceh Province; (2) elites in the village were affiliated with the

Free Aceh Movement (GAM); (3) temporary village officials elected by the West Aceh Regent were former or sympathizers of GAM.

In addition, the location of this research was in two villages in Aceh Barat Regency, namely Jawi Village and Blang Mee Village, to provide an overview of how the local elite Acehese strategy worked. In this location, there is a dynamic succession of village heads between elected and temporary village heads. Then, resource persons were determined by purposive sampling by interviewing ten resource persons considered to know and have information related to this research. They were interim village heads, former village heads, village communities, West Aceh Regional People's Representative Council members, DPMG (Community and Gampong Empowerment Office), and the West Aceh Regent. This interview data became primary data, further supported by documents from Aceh Barat Regional Development Planning, Research, and Development Agency on poverty and related journals about local elites in the autonomy era, region, and village autonomy as secondary data. The data were then analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and finally, conclusions (verification) drawn from the existing research data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Village Autonomy and Community Economic Conditions

Village Law No. 6 of 2014 opens the tap for villages to shape themselves to be independent and autonomous. The purpose of village autonomy is in terms of village government, especially village financial management. It is evidenced by the program provided by the central government through the provision of village funds (Nurfaisal, 2019). Meanwhile, the purpose of providing village funds is to improve the welfare of the village community, which previously had always been placed as a tool for state authorities to bring order to their people by placing the village at the lowest level of a hierarchical government structure (Akbar & Mohi, 2017). The village was also treated as nothing more than the target of various projects that the government formulated without first asking the village community about the needs and desires of the village. In fact, the village is a socio-political entity that has developed before the existence of the modern state of Indonesia (Maschab, 2013).

Table 1. Changes in Perspective of the Old Village and the New Village

| Category | Old Village | New village |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Main Principle | Desentralitasion-Residuality | Recognition-Subsidiarity |
| Position | Local state government | Hybrid, government. society |
| Position and Role of Local Government | Great authority, broad | Limited powers |
| Delivery Authority | Target | Mandate |
| Place Politics | Local government project location | Arena for the community |
| Development Position | Object | Subject |
| Development Model | Government or society | Government and society |
| Approach/Action | Imposition and mutilation | Facilitation, emancipation |

Source: *Villages to Build Indonesia (Sutoro, 2004)*

In addition, regional autonomy and the autonomy granted to villages provide opportunities for the availability of public and public services to make economic development efficient and effective and realize political equality, local accountability, and local responsiveness. Although it is successful in several regions, its implementation also has many failures. For example, in Aceh, one of the reasons is that village autonomy became a battleground for the decisive elite at the regional level for power and wealth. In the end, decentralization, which is expected to realize the principles of equality, justice, and participation in several regions in Indonesia, marginalizes the community in both political and economic aspects. In Aceh Province, which has 6,497 villages (*gampong*) and 322 *gampongs* of which are in Aceh Barat Regency, the

village fund disbursement from the first year of implementation until now continues to increase every year: IDR 84.3 billion (2015), IDR 189 billion (2016), IDR 240 billion (2017), IDR 220 billion (2018), and IDR 249 billion (2019) with development priorities in 2019, such as (1) development, (2) empowerment, (3) superior products, (4) BUMDesa (Village Owned Enterprises), (5) sports facilities, (6) village dam, and (7) labor-intensive cash (cash for flow). Here, providing village funds for autonomous villages aims to reduce inequality and poverty in Indonesia. However, BPS data (2018) showed that the poverty rate in Indonesia has only fallen by one digit since 1998.

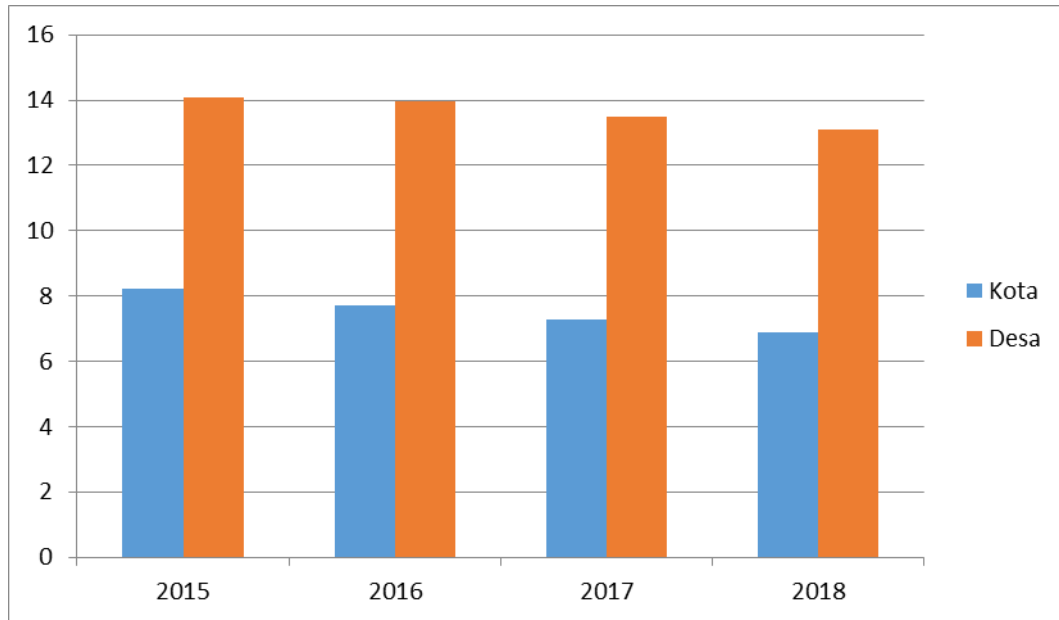


Figure 1. Poverty Reduction in Rural Indonesia

Source: BPS (2018)

Moreover, there are several reasons why economic inequality is getting worse and has not changed significantly compared to conditions in Indonesia under the New Order. It is due to material power in the form of wealth concentrated in a group of people. Apart from the concentration of wealth in a group of people, decentralization also thickens the contestation of power at the village level due to the policy of decentralizing power through the direct election of village heads. In the past, the position of village head was not an ideal profession. However, it becomes ideal since the provision of village funds to advance the village. In its implementation, the use of village funds is also still felt to be ineffective due to the inadequate capacity and capability of the village government and the lack of active community participation in management. Villages are still trying to enrich themselves with village funds. Thus, an increase in the volume of community involvement at the local level in choosing and becoming leaders arises. Further, the region as an arena for power contestation is characterized by direct community involvement and playing with the logic of how prospective leaders can influence and win the people's hearts (Kartodirjo, 1981).

Village autonomy is also related to autonomy in the election of village heads, and the opportunity to openly access positions in the village also affects the political dynamics at the village level, where everyone seeks to gain power openly and transparently. In the end, village autonomy also leads to new local elites in Indonesia and Aceh in particular.

Table 2. Poverty Rates in Aceh Province (2017-2018)

| Description | Percentage (%) |
|---|----------------|
| Number of Poor People in Aceh | 15.92 |
| Number of Poor People in West Aceh | |
| 2015 | 21.46 |
| 2016 | 20.38 |
| 2017 | 20.28 |
| 2018 | 19.31 |
| Unemployment Rate of Aceh | |
| Urban | 51.14 |
| Rural | 51.11 |
| Unemployment Rate of West Aceh | 13.35 |

Source: BPS (2018)

The Emergence of Local Elites in Village Communities in West Aceh

Talking about local elites in Indonesia, there are at least five forms of local elites fighting in the local political arena in the decentralization era. First, former elites raised by the New Order have learned to control democratic politics at the local level by money politics and various instruments of political mobilization and intimidation. Second, the old bureaucrats whom the New Order raised hope to transform their long-held bureaucracy into a political force that can be directly determined by building local coalitions as its supporting force. Third is local entrepreneurs with the category of entrepreneurs in the trade and service business whose ambitions are increasing. Fourth are thugs and violent groups who, during the New Order, became tools at the local level and wanted to try to make a fortune in democratic politics. Fifth is the political groups that were usually the operators during the New Order era, especially the mass organizations of students and youths fostered by the New Order (Mills, 1956).

However, local elites also use various methods, especially money politics and political thuggery, to maintain and secure their position. Money politics is carried out because there is no transparency in collecting political funds, especially at the local level. Today, elections are becoming a high-cost industry at the village level. In addition, when political thuggery at the national level was carried out by a task force of parties and mass organizations that became repressive militias of the New Order power (FKPPI and Pemuda Pancasila), religious and regional-based violent organizations (FPI and FBR), and the Jawara organization (PPPSBBI Banten), in Aceh, it is carried out by former Aceh GAM members. This type of local elite usually controls the community through money politics and violence, and it is not based on the wealth of the local elite but on the authoritarian political legacy of the previous group that was strong in controlling state power (its institutions and resources). It comes from the old forces of the New Order, old bureaucrats, businessmen, local groups, mass organizations and thugs, and former GAM combatants specifically for Aceh. Even though they have entered peacetime, the old organizational networks and forces are still very strong among former GAM members in Aceh.

The local elite in Aceh referred to as the Acehnese elite, fought over political, economic, and military power after the conflict ended (Hajad & Ikhsan, 2019). The significant difference is that the military is no longer the dominant arena of tension between parties. On the contrary, the political and economic arenas, where they are "attached" and joined in it, provide many benefits and advantages for the survival of local elites as arenas for fighting at the grassroots (village) after the increase in the village budget. The competition stems from the elite's

interests. For example, when Former GAM members conflicted, they shared the spoils of war among members from outside. However, after peace, they saw competition turning inward in the form of political position, privileges, facilities, business activities, and contracts with big companies belonging to the state, making them the main source of factionalism and antagonism.

Furthermore, the self-interest of the GAM elite has become increasingly evident in the post-conflict environment. They benefit greatly from their position in the hierarchical structure of the movement. In fact, some of them, through the Aceh Party and other local parties, seized top positions in Aceh Province and became active in various business sectors supported by their newly acquired political positions and connections. For example, one of GAM's negotiators during the Helsinki MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) peace agreement was appointed as Chairman of the Aceh Reintegration Agency (*Badan Reintegration Aceh*) during peacetime. Muzakkir Manaf, the former top commander of the TNA (GAM's armed wing), became Pulo's CEO. In addition, Gadeng, a main contractor company, received high incomes and other privileges resulting in open competition (conflict among local elites). Related to that, Ishak, a former GAM member in West Aceh Regency, said:

"The split among some former GAM members after the peace agreement was just a ripple of self-interested competition between them. However, most of the other former GAM members were not involved (the split)." (10 October 2019 at 14.30 WIB).

According to the expert, the power of the political elite is divided into three. The first is relative capture, which sees the vulnerability of local governments in access to power, causing elite circulation to occur (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2002). In Aceh Province, the government's vulnerability did occur during the ongoing conflict, where the Aceh government, especially at the village level, had to stand on two different legs. On the one hand, they must be loyal to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), and on the other hand, they must be proactive in supporting the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) by providing food aid through the Nanggroe tax (retribution) taken by GAM members every month to villages. Then, the vulnerability of the local elite in the village has decreased since Aceh entered a peace period with the implementation of special autonomy. Currently, the local elite can nominate themselves as village head (*keuchik*) every six years in direct village elections, in addition to being other village officials with quite large salaries like the village secretary, treasurer, *tuha peut*, and *tuha lapan*.

Second, the electoral competition model is subject to the influence and lobbying of certain interest groups, making electoral competition at the local government level more vulnerable to elite struggles (Baron, 1994; Grossman & Helpman, 1996; Laffont & Tirole, 1991). This strategy sees competition in a "fair play" condition, where every local elite who fights can use political influence and lobbies to get the opportunity to become a powerful local elite. In Aceh, this strategy was used by many village heads who wanted to be elected. Generally, they approach the elected regent for support, especially if the village where the village head is elected is based on the regent's vote. Thus, local elites can "stew" the regent's influence without struggling to find support.

Third, information asymmetry and collusion are highly dependent on the economic ownership base and political structure, causing a person to become an elite (Lieten, 1996; Platteau, 2004). This condition requires that the competing political elites have economic capital by becoming entrepreneurs or wealthy people in the village and ownership of strong political capital by becoming a politician or being active in a political party before running for village head. By becoming a candidate for village head who is rich or politically popular, the electability of the local elite is high, and they can compete in an honest and fair election process at the village level. However, this condition rarely occurs in Aceh; village heads' election is unlike the election of legislature members, governors, and regents, which require large economic and political capital.

In addition, the struggle for interests carried out by former GAM as Aceh's local elite after the conflict took various forms, such as position, property, profitable economic activities, and others. Many local elites from former GAM members in the village initially hoped to become civil

servants, government employees, or TNI/Polri members, but they were generally constrained by education and age. Hence, they switched to seeking a position through politics by becoming a regent (mayor) or a member of the legislature or so-called DPRK/DPR in Aceh. Even more, when funds are abundant in villages now, the focus of local elites originating from GAM members has shifted from cities to villages. The local elite also began to seek attention in the village and tried to become an important and influential elite by becoming the village head (*keuchik*).

The Strategy of Aceh's Elite in Getting the Position of Village Head

In this case, Jawi Village is one of the causes that can explain the phenomenon of Aceh's elite strategy in getting the village head position. As a village located in Woyla District, this village has an area of 18 km² and a population of 291 people, with 149 men and 142 women. In terms of population, this village is relatively small, so the dynamics of power struggles and conflicts are more prone to occur in the village, including in the village head election process. In the 2017 Jawi Village Head election, several candidates ran for election, but the village head position was eventually won by Abdul Manaf, a former GAM member who was well known at the village level and had sufficient social and financial capital to participate in the direct election of village heads. The strategies used by Abdul Manaf were (1) consolidating a successful team, (2) segmentation, targeting, and positioning, (3) candidate imaging, and (4) Aceh contextual strategies through the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) network in the government. Further explanation is as follows:

Success Team Consolidation

Consolidation of the success team is essential in the process of getting the village head position, in the form of internal and external consolidation. This success team's internal consolidation can be seen through the stages of selection and determination of village head candidates. In the selection process, Abdul Manaf emerged as a candidate for Jawi Village Head because he was considered a figure with good quality and electability compared to other village head candidates. Abdul Manaf, a former GAM member, was also deemed to have influence and could bring change to the village because he had social capital in the form of a network factor as a fighter. Through his identity as a former combatant, Abdul Manaf used GAM attributes, stories of times of struggle (conflict), and the mission of prospering conflict victims by approaching and getting voices from the village community. Thus, the success team in the GAM network in Jawi Village decided to provide internal consolidation for Abdul Manaf.

Meanwhile, external consolidation was carried out by the success team involving GAM sympathizers, village activists, the party organization wing (Aceh Party), and the Aceh Transitional Commission (KPA). GAM sympathizers are tasked with ensuring that the support from the village community does not change. Village activists are also involved as a success team to convince the community in the village that Abdul Manaf's figure is right and worthy to be the village head because of his alignment with the interests of the poor. Meanwhile, party organization wings, such as the Aceh Party and KPA, assisted the candidate for village head, namely Abdul Manaf, in carrying out execution missions in the field. In this case, execution in the field is not always smooth, and there is often intimidation. As a former GAM combatant, Abdul Manaf and his success team used intimidating tricks, such as threats: *"This village will be in conflict again if I am not elected" or "This village will be in chaos if the wrong leader is chosen."* This external consolidation strategy tends to be successful at critical times before the village head election takes place.

Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning

Segmentation, targeting, and positioning are used to identify the target community group so that opportunities can be found and see the tendency of choices, preferences, and value systems to beat the opposing team. Based on the research, the segmentation carried out by Abdul Manaf was poor and economically marginal rural communities in the village. Thus, the programs offered were populist programs that small communities needed, such as direct cash assistance (BLT) programs, free schools, scholarships, and free electricity. Abdul Manaf utilized

populist ideas to attract people's attention through concrete community empowerment programs that voters easily understood. For example, the Village Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) development program is also a means for prospective village heads like Abdul Manaf to provide business assistance, entrepreneurship training, and the limitation of convenience stores to people who need economic support in the village.

Meanwhile, targeting focuses campaign activities according to the issues created. It is useful for attracting the attention of voters who do not have a choice of the existing village head candidates. The campaign was carried out with the main mass base of supporters to ensure loyalists continued to vote for Abdul Manaf. In addition, the role of the GAM network is very important, and the network works by maximizing the potential to attract mass voters and convince voters by bringing in important GAM figures, such as Ramli MS (Regent of Aceh Barat) and Abu Yus (DPW from Aceh Party). In this regard, the positioning makes each candidate different and unique from other candidates. The distinguishing attribute of Abdul Manaf from the others is his attribute as a former GAM through the derivation of the slogan "*retribution for the people*" belonging to the Regent of West Aceh, who is also a former member of GAM. It means that it is crucial for the Acehnese elite to use GAM's attributes as part of a winning strategy.

Village Head Candidate Imaging

The candidate imaging is the formation of the candidate's character for the village head in accordance with what the voters want, namely the community. The limited campaign time before the election is also why forming the candidate's image is important before the village head election. As the campaign team, the success team planned an effective political strategy to reach the entire village community. For example, mass communication created a positive image for the candidate for the regional head in the community. The imaging was done repeatedly so that the information stuck in the heads of voters and encouraged them to vote for a candidate for village head. For example, the imaging of a loyal village head candidate was by providing enough funds (money) to buy the sympathy of the village community. During the election and campaign, Abdul Manaf provided food such as goat curry or beef curry to be eaten with the success team and the surrounding community. The candidate's imaging as a religious leader is also very important in the process of gaining power in the village government, so the candidate for the village head is elected to often worship in the mosque, provide compensation to orphans, and convey the promise of building a religious center in the village.

In addition to the three strategies above, which are in accordance with Lock and Harris' theory (1996) regarding political marketing, specifically for Aceh, based on research results, becoming a village head can also go through the fourth strategy, namely through the Free Aceh Movement network in the government. Thus, even though they are not elected in the head election village directly, they can become village heads through direct appointment as temporary village heads by the local government at the level of the regent. Here is a more in-depth explanation.

Aceh Contextual Strategy: Free Aceh Movement Network in Government

Contextual factors outside of the main strategy were the cause of the local elite in Aceh being able to serve as village heads even though they did not win in the direct village head elections. It was by getting support from the local government that they were finally appointed as interim village head officials. During ongoing village autonomy, it turns out that there is still a gap open for the power above the village (the power of the regency government) to intervene in the village autonomy. The strategy used is to remove the elected village head and then place the "ordered" village head to sit in that position until the end of the village head's term of office. This condition, for example, occurred in Blang Mee Village, which is in Woyla District, West Aceh Regency. In the village head election, Anuar was elected village head in Blang Mee Village in 2017 after being elected by most villagers. With a population of about 505 people consisting of 260 men and 245 women (2016), it is not easy for the candidate for the Blang Mee Village Head to convince the community to choose the local elite as the village head. Therefore, as done by

Anuar during the election, each candidate must implement an effective winning strategy, such as consolidation, segmentation, targeting, positioning, and candidate imaging.

However, it turned out that the strategy carried out by Anuar was defeated because he had recently served as village head. Anuar was removed by the West Aceh Regent, and his position was replaced by a new interim village head named Musliadi, the son of the former GAM Commander for the Woyla Region. Thus, it can be said that the three strategies, namely consolidation, segmentation, targeting, positioning, and candidate imaging, must be packaged within the framework of the Free Aceh Movement network. Otherwise, a change of village head in the middle of his term of office with various allegations and cases happens, such as the alleged corruption case. Although the alleged case is unclear and has not gone through the legal process, the replacement is still carried out. Based on the data, at least 50 village heads in West Aceh were dismissed unilaterally based on the inspectorate's findings. It is reinforced by the statement of the Chairman of the *Keuchik* Brotherhood Forum in West Aceh, Sofyan Suri. He said that according to the reports the forum had received (2017-2018), 50 village heads were fired, but the reports submitted to the West Aceh Regional People's Representative Council (DPRK) revealed 25 *keuchik* fired by the local government and replaced by the temporary head.

The primary reason for the unilateral dismissal of 25 village heads in West Aceh Regency was because they were considered problematic in the report on the use of gampong funds and became a finding for the inspectorate. For example, one of the fired village heads, Miswar, who was the Pasi Mali Village Head, stated:

"I received information that the regent was dismissed as Keuchik Gampong Pasi Mali, Woyla Barat District, Aceh Barat Regency on the grounds of the Inspectorate Audit Team Report on village funds (2016-2017), which previously dropped in early February 2018. At that time, it was down (to Gampong Pasi Mali) from the auditor team of Mr. Joni and Mr. Abdullah; then, not long ago, the Inspectorate of West Aceh Regency issued and submitted the village/gampong Pasi Mali Inspection Report (LHP) to the regent, which became the basis for my dismissal even though it should have been investigated further." (1 October 2019, 12.00 WIB).

Politically, the West Aceh Regency government is currently dominated by local Acehnese elites who are former GAM members, namely the executive (Aceh Barat Regent) and the legislature (DPRK of Aceh Barat). The Aceh Barat Regent (2017-2022) is Ramli MS. In this case, if something happens with the dismissal of the village head (*keuchik*) by the regent and the replacement of the elected village head with a new person as a temporary official, many people already suspect that the dismissal is not only due to the inspectorate's findings related to allegations of corruption. However, it is also due to efforts by the network of former GAM members to place the people in the village, especially the success team, to win the regent during the regional head election.

The decision of the West Aceh Regent regarding the dismissal of 25 *keuchiks* has been passed by the *keuchik*, who was dismissed unilaterally, and it is proven that the regent's decision is incorrect. The decision of the Banda Aceh State Administrative Court (PTUN) is in favor of the *keuchik's* lawsuit against the defendant Regent Ramli regarding the dismissal. Anwar, former *keuchik* of Pasi Soft Woyla, said: *"We hope that with the decision (PTUN), the regent will re-appoint the sacked keuchik."* The PTUN decision states that the West Aceh Regent must return the position to the person concerned, but so far, it has not been realized, and the village administration remains in the hands of the temporary official (*pjs keuchik*) appointed by the regent.

Several issues related to regency government intervention in village government management, especially in the use of village funds, can be seen in the issuance of several regent regulations related to the allocation of village funds for 322 *gampongs* in West Aceh. In 2018, the West Aceh Regent carried out socialization of the West Aceh Regent's Regulation regarding the allocation of village funds, including infrastructure development and strengthening the village economy with a business capital of IDR 15 million for ten people per village. There was also an increase in the salary of village officials under the regional regulation regarding

subsidies for *meugang* (beef and buffalo) meat ahead of the fasting month. In addition, the provision of business assistance of IDR 15 million/person was the regent's personal political promise during the campaign. In fact, this political promise was paid through village funds, which should have been budgeted through the autonomy of each village, not through a regent's regulation. The dismissal of the *keuchik* was also seen by many as an effort to fulfill political promises during the campaign period, i.e., to provide employment opportunities, especially for the success team that helped win the election. Thus, villages are important for local Acehese elites to be controlled and under the control of the GAM network.

CONCLUSION

This study shows four main strategies for gaining power in the village. The main strategies are (1) success team consolidation, (2) segmentation, targeting, and positioning, (3) candidate imaging, and (4) Aceh contextual strategy through the Free Aceh Movement network. These strategies occurred in the circulation of local elites within the village administration through direct village head elections or the appointment of interim village heads. In the village head election in Jawi, for example, the strategies used by the candidate for village head were (1) consolidation of the success team, (2) segmentation, targeting, and positioning, and (3) the candidate imaging, in which the instruments of ideology and power of the Free Aceh Movement network were used in every strategy taking place. Meanwhile, the fourth strategy, namely the contextual strategy through the Free Aceh Movement network in local government, occurred when the three previous strategies failed to make the local elites affiliated with GAM win direct village head elections, as happened in Blang Mee Village. Thus, it requires GAM networks within the local government to remove the old village head and place a temporary village head affiliated with GAM. In addition, the process of changing local elites in village governance in West Aceh occurred for various reasons, such as administrative errors or allegations of corruption, although in the end, it was not necessarily proven legally.

Moreover, the struggle for power takes place at the village level due to the implementation of village autonomy and the large annual grants of village funds, which are seen by local Acehese elites as a new "business field," apart from waiting for project funds to be disbursed from the regency government. The struggle is, among others, through the increasing interest of local elites to become village heads (*keuchik*). However, the problem is that the current *keuchik* position can only be obtained through direct elections at the village level every six years. Meanwhile, the dynamics of local politics after the re-election of the regent from GAM circles in 2017 raised the desire of the local elite to rule in the village.

Through this strategy, Aceh's local elites gain power in the village government through political and economic power. Political power is in the form of broad authority in managing government and budget planning, while economic power is through the distribution of various aids, subsidies, and funds circulating in the village to the success team, supporters, and families who are still in the Free Aceh Movement network. The difference between the strategies for gaining power in village government in Aceh and other areas lies in the use of ideological instruments and the Free Aceh Movement network in every strategy by Aceh's local elites, especially in the two villages of the research sites. As a former conflict area, local elites in Aceh Barat utilized a network of movement groups (or rebellions). Local Acehese elites, especially former members of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), did not rely solely on money or wealth politics as in other regions but used the previous Free Aceh Movement network to control village governance and the resources within it. It is certainly different from other areas. However, the struggle for power within the village government after the village funds law in Aceh created new chaos in the village community and hampered village development. In fact, the local government can address the problem of findings due to administrative errors in reporting the use of village funds by training and strengthening village officials' capacity rather than deciding to dismiss them. It is because the village community has directly elected the village head. With the background of the long conflict in Aceh, the education and capacity of the village apparatus in Aceh is still far behind compared to villages in other provinces. Then, it can be overcome and strengthened by improving the quality of human resources at the village level,

which is the responsibility of each local government, including the responsibility of the Aceh Barat government.

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