



Ferdinand Saussure's Semiotic Analysis of the Politicization of Social Assistance in the Film Dirty Vote

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Abstract: This study analyzes the politicization of social assistance in the film *Dirty Vote* using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic approach. The concept of signifier and signified is used to identify and interpret the visual and verbal signs presented in the film. The results of the analysis show that elements such as party symbols, dominant colors, budget graphs, and narrative scenes illustrate the close relationship between the distribution of social assistance and certain political agendas. Signifiers such as the overlay text "politicization of social assistance" and images of officials in the campaign reflect a systematic pattern that utilizes social assistance for electoral interests. The resulting signifiers reveal criticism of the abuse of power, the inequality of aid distribution, and its impact on public trust in the government. By understanding the sign system used, this study highlights the importance of public awareness of the issue of the politicization of social assistance in the context of democracy seen from the perspective of communication semiotics studies.

Keywords: Dirty Vote Film; Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotics; Politicization of Social Assistance.

1. Introduction

In general, the purpose of social assistance is to protect and increase the purchasing power of the community, especially the lower class community. The lower class community has difficulty meeting their living needs, therefore the State implements social assistance programs regularly (Nugraharti, 2024). According to Law Number 14 of 2019 concerning social workers, it is explained that the State has regulated social assistance programs by providing assistance in the form of money, goods, or services to individuals, families, groups or poor communities who are unable and vulnerable to social risks (Kristina, 2021). In his research Ahmad (2024) explained "the source of funds for the social assistance program comes from the State Budget (APBN) which is a manifestation of the government's commitment to providing direct support to those in need. However, the characteristics of this program which have a direct impact on its recipients make it very vulnerable to politicization, especially in the run-up to the democratic party".

In political years, the existence of social assistance becomes a vehicle for certain parties to achieve certain interests (Nugraharti, 2024). A similar thing was also expressed by Ahmad (2024) which explains that "political actors use social assistance as an instrument to increase their electability, in the hope of gaining political support from aid recipients". The practice of politicizing social assistance is nothing new, it continues to repeat itself every time the general election process approaches. According to Aspinall, E., & Berenschot (2019) explained "there are two main challenges related to social assistance, namely related to policy and distribution. Ministries and government

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Received: Jan 24, 2025;

Revised: Jan 28, 2025;

Accepted: Feb 02, 2025;

Published : Feb 28, 2025;



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institutions also have their own social assistance programs, and this applies at the regional level starting from the central government, provinces, to city districts. The existence of these various programs not only complicates supervision, but also increases the potential for overlapping in the distribution of social assistance".

The overlapping conditions are exacerbated by changes in the names of programs and types of social assistance, making it difficult to record a consistent roadmap for the implementation of social assistance programs by the government (Ahmad, 2024). Such practices can blur the boundaries between political interests and objective public services. social assistance programs that should be a tool to improve people's welfare are disrupted. People who feel that social assistance is treated as a political tool tend to lose trust in the government. In line with the explanation above, it is closely related to the phenomenon of politicization that was clearly depicted during the Indonesian election contest in 2024. Forms of election fraud, especially those related to social assistance, were shown through a film, namely the dirty vote documentary.

The film Dirty Vote describes in a structured manner the misappropriation of social assistance funds Moha (2024) explains "the potential for misuse of social assistance funds to win one of the candidate pairs". This makes it possible for state assistance to be diverted to the term personal assistance, because social assistance is often used as a lever to influence the political choices of the recipient of the assistance (Suryaningtyas, 2024). In the article written Benke (2024) explains that "the film dirty vote raises public awareness about the problem of abuse of power and the mobilization of bureaucracy that has become commonplace. The distribution of social assistance ahead of the election raises suspicions that the assistance is being used to gain election votes, not for the welfare of the people."

So in reality, films can be used as a tool to record what happens in society and then show it on the screen (Alex Sobur, 2016). This is in accordance with the incident of misappropriation of social assistance which was shown in a documentary Nabila's Pearl (2024) said that 80 percent of the contents of the dirty vote film are data clippings. To support this depiction, three constitutional law experts were involved, starting from Zainal Arifin Mochtar, Bivitri Susanti, and Feri Amsari. The three of them investigated and understood various information about candidates that had been spread in the media and survey results to study signs of fraud in the general election (Wijaya, 2024).

The screening of the film Dirty Vote coincided with the election quiet period, namely February 11, 2024. The film has been watched 6.4 million times on the Indonesian PSHK (Center for Law and Policy Studies) Youtube channel (Mulyana, 2024). From the virality of the film, we can see the power and ability of a film that can reach many social segments. The power of film can influence and shape society based on the message behind it (Alex Sobur, 2016).

The message content can be viewed while the communication is taking place Cangara (2018) explains "in the Osgood and Schramm communication model, communication is known as the encoding and decoding process". This means that the film actor as a communicator conveys ideas (encoder), by creating messages that contain visual elements and are shared with the communicant (decoder) with the aim of helping the communicant understand the message conveyed, after which the communicant will

interpret the message. This nature of communication is called one-way communication, for that in the dirty vote film, the audience will be presented with various tense scenes. They will show how power can make someone corrupt and lose their integrity. Such as the misuse of social assistance which is used as a fighting arena by certain groups.

From the explanation above, it can be seen that film is part of communication, because basically film is used as a tool to convey messages containing information about a case. Interpreting a message is sometimes different from one to another. Sometimes the meaning of the message in the film is made so unique as a form of creativity of the maker.

In the previous study entitled the polarization of pork barrel politics in the perspective of the film dirty vote, using a descriptive qualitative method, the results of which showed that the polarization of social assistance in the film dirty vote is the same as the depiction of pork barrel politics. In the sense that the fraud occurred due to the ruler's ambition for power through dynasty politics. This depiction is clearly visible when the leadership is in the hands of the President of the Republic of Indonesia who is still in power, but often violates the law and ethics for his political interests (Ferdiansyah et al., 2024). Similar things can also be seen from the title of the study of the semiotic analysis of the dirty vote film in the 2024 election which uses the Ferdinand Saussure semiotic method to identify the signs and symbols used in the film. for example the use of the term "pork barrel politics" to indicate the use of public funds for personal gain. In addition, there is a four-finger symbol that indicates the merger of certain political forces (Amin et al., 2024).

If related, these two studies have similarities in terms of research topics, both of which examine the depiction of political fraud in the context of social assistance which is linked to the concept of pork barrel politics. Specifically, these two studies have different analytical approaches. In Aldi's research, the narrative aspect and political context of the film are more focused, while Amin's research focuses on semiotic analysis with the depiction of the terms pork barrel symbol and the four-finger symbol. However, in the research conducted, there are still shortcomings in terms of completeness of the data. For Amin's research, he only focuses on analyzing the pork barrel political symbol from the Jokowi poster carrying a barrel.

If we look further, the description of the symbols explained is still very little and does not specifically refer to social assistance alone, but all the scene symbols from the Dirty Vote film are included in the research. In fact, based on a preliminary study conducted by the researcher, it turns out that there are still many symbols that need to be explained for the misuse of social assistance, starting from campaign scenes to data attachments regarding the spike in the social assistance budget. To perfect this, the researcher raised a research topic entitled Ferdinand Saussure's Semiotic Analysis of the Politicization of Social Assistance in the Dirty Vote Film.

2. Materials and Methods

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach which aims to collect and analyze data in the form of spoken and written words and human actions (Afrizal, 2017). The use of this qualitative descriptive method is explained through a semiotic analysis based on

Ferdinand de Saussure's theory, as explained by Alex Sobur (2016) which explains that in Saussure's theory there is a principle that states that language is a sign system, and each sign is composed of two parts, namely the signifier and the signified. A sign is a unity of the signifier form with an idea or signified. For its depiction, the researcher attaches a picture of Ferdinand Saussure's semiotics.

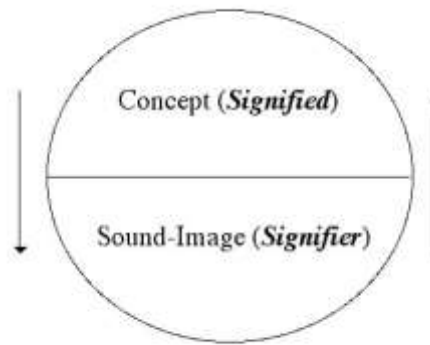


Figure 1. signified and signifier.

Source:(Cevikalp, 2020)

The conceptual framework provides a brief overview of the stages of research from beginning to end. The author needs a conceptual framework to examine the entire process of this research. The main focus of the author is the politicization of social assistance in the film dirty vote. for more details can be seen in the following conceptual image:

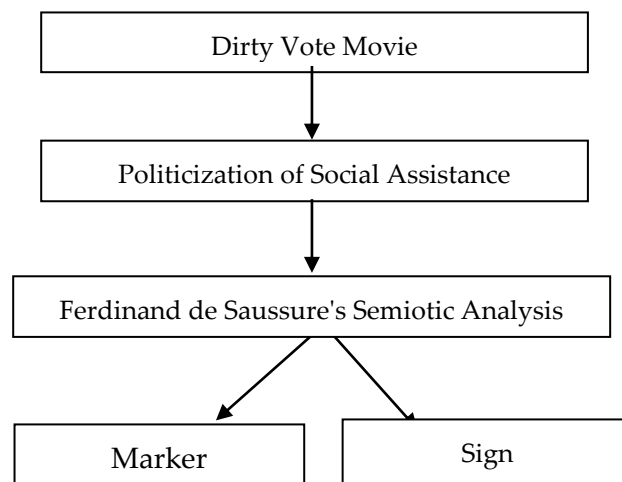


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher Processing

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Scene 1 A hidden campaign with social assistance nuances



Figure 3. Time code (00.34:16 – 00.34:36)

Source:(METRO TV, 2024)

The marker of the 1st covert campaign with social assistance nuances, depicted in the film *dirty vote* there is a man speaking using a microphone on stage, wearing a white shirt and a flower garland. Several people around him are smiling, wearing blue and white clothes. They are standing on the stage and behind them are flags and banners with party symbols. In addition, there is a crowd of people clapping in predominantly blue clothes. The overlay text in the video says "the politicization of social assistance is getting worse and recipients of social assistance are asked to support Jokowi's son".

The signifier of scene 1, namely the meaning or concept associated with the signifier, can be seen from several existing elements. Such as the naming of 'politicization of social assistance' means that there is an alleged use of social assistance for political interests, such as supporting certain candidates. This is in line with the statement of Zulkifli Hasan as the Minister of Trade who delivered a speech saying "those who like Jokowi can raise their hands. So the National Mandate Party (PAN) is part of Jokowi. That's why we support Gibran". Overall, the video images displayed are dominated by blue nuances. This indicates that the color blue is the visual identity of the PAN party.

3.2 Scene 2 Social assistance controversy through the image of the leader



Figure 4. Time code (00.34:37 – 00.34:53)

Source:(CNN Indonesia, 2024)

The marker of the 2nd scene of the social assistance controversy through the image of the leader, seen from a CNN news clip in the film *dirty vote* which shows two men wearing white and yellow clothes walking side by side with smiling faces. It is

suspected that the two men are Airlangga Hartano and President Jokowi. The big title at the bottom of the screen says 'alleged politicization of social assistance'.

The sign of scene 2 indicates that there are allegations related to social assistance being used for political interests, such as building a positive image or certain support. from the image of two men dressed casually, this is associated as an effort to show an image of leadership that is close to the people or the people, but in the CNN news image this context is associated with a form of criticism. Woolman et al., (2009) explains that the color of clothing is something that is familiar with everyday life, a color has the power to contain symbolic meaning, evoke certain emotions or atmospheres, convey a message, and simply color can attract attention. As a visual element, the color of clothing is able to convey messages and build meaning without the need to use words.

3.3 Scene 3 NTB Social Assistance and Jokowi's Thank You Instructions



Figure 5. Time code (00.34:54 – 00.35:08)

Source: (METRO Tv, 2024)

The marker of scene 3 related to the distribution of social assistance in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), a government official, Airlangga Hartarto, is seen holding a microphone and speaking at an official event. In addition, Airlangga asked the public to say 'thank you Mr. Jokowi' while being recorded. This form of delivery is supported by images of rice sacks placed neatly in rows on the floor. The rice sacks have certain labels, while people who receive social assistance stand behind them wearing formal and traditional clothes.

The signifier of scene 3 shows the representation of direct communication from the government to the community. This symbolizes the power of the government's narrative to influence public opinion, with a focus on the delivery of social assistance programs. Sacks of rice are a visual symbol of the social assistance program which is often associated as the government's effort to help the underprivileged, although its distribution is often also associated with political issues because the distribution process is approaching certain moments such as elections. Seymour (2007) said "usually the main target of political actors in the presidential election is the low-income group and the poor". This means that the narrative directed by Airlangga to the public about conveying 'thank you Jokowi' while being recorded indicates that there is an agenda setting process played by political chords to bring himself up in front of netizens. From these small and personal things, public opinion can be created against him and Jokowi.

3.4 Scene 4 Political Support Amidst Social Assistance Distribution



Figure 6. Time code (00:41:40 – 00:42:05)

Source:(tempo.co, 2024)

The marker of scene 4 related to political support in the middle of the distribution of social assistance is seen when an official speaks in a whisper to a police officer in front of a large audience. In addition, the audience at this event simultaneously wears uniforms with the same color, namely blue. This visual representation is supported by the news text containing 'the police distribute social assistance, the governor of the Riau Islands talks about a one-round presidential election and invites residents to choose a presidential candidate who continues Jokowi'.

The scene 4 marker in a text gives a political message that links social assistance programs with an invitation to support certain candidates in the presidential election. From the news written by Tempo, it really highlights how social welfare programs can be used to build a political image. This is supported by the image of a regional leader and a state institution (the police) who have a relationship of power and influence to run a social assistance scheme as a political communication tool. The form of text and visuals presented in the film *dirty voteworking* together to give the impression that there are political motives behind the distribution of aid, which can influence public opinion about the candidate who is said to be continuing the policies of the previous president, namely Jokowi.

In fact, if we look at Law No. 7 of 2017 concerning elections in Article 280 paragraph 1, it is explained that state officials including members of the Police are prohibited from being involved in campaign activities. This is done to prevent abuse of authority for certain political interests.(Central Government, 2017). if they are involved in the campaign, it is feared that it will create bias or conflict of interest.

3.5 Scane 5 Trends in Increasing Social Assistance Budget



Figure 7. Time code (00:35:13 – 00:35:58)

Source:(Dirty Vote, 2024)

Scane 5 markers related to the trend of increasing social assistance budgets ahead of the general election. It can be seen from the visual image explained by Bivitri in the bar graph data showing the social assistance budget from 2014 to 2024, each of which uses yellow for the main bar and white for the election sign. from the image it is explained that in 2024 the social assistance budget will almost reach 500 trillion.

The indicator in scene 5 shows that the social assistance budget graph tends to increase especially when approaching the election year, namely 2014, 2019, 2024. This can give rise to the interpretation that social assistance has the potential to be used to attract sympathy or political support. Because in reality the election marked with a white bar provides an important message that during the election year there is a significant relationship with the social assistance budget policy. The Last Supper (2022) said the years leading up to the election are the right time to build a positive image and gain public support to win. The years leading up to the regional head elections are an easy target for a number of parties to accommodate their personal political interests by exploiting policies, programs, regional budgets, and politicizing the budget in several spending components. Arifin & Purnomowati (2017) explains the significant increase in grant spending as the easiest way for the government to obtain campaign resources for the next election.

3.6 Scane 6 Money Shocked Ahead of Election



Figure 8. Time code (00.37:02 – 00.38:04)

Source: (Dirty Vote, 2024)

The marker in scene 6 related to the surprise money before the election is seen in the text and numbers in an image explained by Bivitri. The numbers detail the number of social assistance recipients and the type of social assistance program such as social assistance in the form of 10 kilograms of rice per head of family covering 22 million heads of families. There is also assistance from the family hope program that will be received by 10 million heads of families. The visualization is supported by the depiction of icons that symbolize each type of assistance, such as money bags, rice, and others. On the left side of Bivitri there is a picture of scattered money. This gives the impression of wealth or a large amount of money.

The sign in scene 6 is seen from the representation of images around the large amount of social assistance provided by the government in 2024, which is often associated with political interests ahead of the election. phrases such as 'suara kk' indicate that this social assistance has implications for the potential for political support

from recipients of assistance who often depend on government social programs. In the narrative that is often repeated by Bivitri regarding the mention of figures and the number of recipients is quite large. Implicitly shows that social assistance can be a tool to influence voters in a political context.

3.7 Scane 7 Distribution of Social Assistance in Political Years



Figure 9. Time code (00.40:37 – 00.41:38)

Source:(Dirty Vote, 2024)

The marker on scene 7 related to the distribution of social assistance in the political year is seen in the image of the map of Indonesia showing the region and the division of provinces. Above the map image there is a text title, namely 'distribution of social assistance by Jokowi'. This distribution form is marked with a red line connecting the time information and the location of the distribution of social assistance. Bivitri explained that the location of the distribution of social assistance focused on the Java region from Serang to Manggarai for two months.

The sign in scene 7 is that there is information related to the distribution of social assistance programs by Jokowi. However, on the other hand, there is a gap in the distribution area where only certain areas that are priority areas or strategic areas receive more attention, while other areas such as Sulawesi, Kalimantan, even Papua is not touched by the distribution of social assistance from the government. From the depiction it can be seen that this map can be interpreted as a form of political visualization to show the government's contribution in helping the community even though only in certain areas such as Java. from the image it can be seen that there is a Java-centric phenomenon there, as Samuel et al. (2022) revealed in his research that Java-centric is a phenomenon where development is centered on Java Island, without considering other islands. This causes conflict in society about the role of government in economic development, still greatly favoring Java as in social assistance.

For this reason, the problem of distributing social assistance needs to be continuously improved because the social assistance program is a program that is predicted to make a strong contribution to reducing the number of people living in poverty in Indonesia.(Salsabila et al., 2024). Social assistance can be optimally transformed by making it a training program so that people not only receive social assistance to meet their living needs, but also gain new knowledge and skills to continue their lives, so that people can develop more while reducing the level of community dependence on existing social assistance.

3.8 Scene 8 Social Assistance Cartoons



Figure 10. Time code (00.39:11 – 00.40:08)

Source:(Dirty Vote, 2024)

The scene marker 8 shows a large man who looks relaxed lying on a pile of sacks that are probably sacks of rice. Underneath is a thinner man standing supporting the pile of sacks, with a tense facial expression. This depiction is decorated with a striking red background. Bivitri's presence is seen explaining something on the side of the image.

The signifier in scene 8 for the big man on top of a pile of sacks depicts someone identified as the ruling party or political elite who is 'relaxing' on the fruits of hard work or resources in this case social assistance of rice. Meanwhile, the thin man supporting the sack is seen having to bear the burden of policies that are often used for political interests. Furthermore, the four piles of rice sacks symbolize social assistance which is a symbol of power and unfair distribution. From the film, Bivitri explains that "social assistance is already a state obligation that must be carried out in accordance with the mandate of article 34 of the law which states that the poor and neglected children are cared for by the state". The correlation of Bivitri's explanation and the symbolization of the visible image can be concluded that social assistance such as rice which is used as a political tool is very detrimental to the common people who really need it. The red background as a supporter of the image can be interpreted as a critical situation or strong social criticism of government policy.

Use of cartoons in films *dirty vote* identified as a form of visual communication work that is effective and relevant in conveying messages and social criticism as explained by Heru Dwi Waluyanto (2000) expressing in a good caricature there is a combination of elements of intelligence, sharpness, and accuracy of critical and expressive thinking in the form of cartoon images in responding to the phenomenon of problems that arise in the lives of the wider community. People or society prefer pictorial information when compared to written information, because seeing images is much easier and simpler.

3.9 Scene 9 Pork Jar Politics



Figure 11. Time code (00.42:06 – 00.43:30)

The marker in scene 9 shows someone carrying a pig in one hand and a jug in the other, with a pig farm in the background. There are elements visuals such as neat clothes (white shirts) and serious expressions of the characters in the picture. The title of the picture reads 'Jokowi's pork barrel politics'.

The signifier in scene 9 symbolically tries to convey criticism of certain political policies or actions, which is equated with the term 'pork barrel politics referring to the concept of pork barrel politics'. Bivitri explains that the term pork barrel politics refers to the concept of American slavery which describes the badness of slavery itself, so at that time the slaves had to fight over taking preserved pork in the barrel. After that, the term emerged that there were people who would fight over an official quota for their own comfort. So the correlation with the image above is seen from the way someone does politics by using state money to be poured into electoral districts by politicians so that they can be re-elected. But of course Jokowi is not asking people to vote for him but his successor.

Therefore, the use of pigs as a symbol can be interpreted as a sharp criticism, which culturally and politically in Indonesia is often used to give a sarcastic or provocative effect. This single message is very offensive to government policies such as social assistance which is considered to benefit certain groups and is full of political interests. The Last Airbender (2024) said "pork barrel politics has experienced a shift in ethics and morals, which results in practices that have negative consequences because in it there are political activities that use state money to realize individual politics. whereas, ethics and morals must be manifested in the form of a sincere attitude, not pretending, far from hypocrisy and not carrying out public lies".

3.10 Discussion

Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, which includes the basic concepts of signifier and signified, provides a relevant framework for understanding the hidden meanings behind the verbal and visual narratives of the Dirty Vote film. This documentary uses various visual elements and symbols to record and critique the phenomenon of the politicization of social assistance in Indonesia.

Signifiers in the film include visuals such as party flags, dominant colors in the campaign and text elements such as overlays that mention 'politicization of social assistance'. These elements provide visible and easily recognizable signs. For example, the scene of officials in white shirts with flower garlands surrounded by political party attributes is a sign that shows the close relationship between social assistance and mass mobilization efforts for electoral interests.

The signifiers that emerge from the signifier refer to deeper meanings or messages, such as criticism of the use of social assistance as a political tool to build an image or gain support. For example, the color blue in several scenes is not only a party identity, but also a symbol of a structured approach to influencing public perception of a particular party.

The concept of signifier and signified can also help explain more complex symbols in films. *dirty vote*, such as the graph of the increase in the social assistance budget ahead of the election. The graph as a marker visualizes real data, while the signifier leads to the

assumption that the increase in the budget has a political motive. Likewise, the cartoon scene depicting a powerful figure relaxing on a pile of rice sacks sends a sharp social criticism message, indicating inequality in the distribution of power and resources.

Through this semiotic analysis, the film *Dirty Vote* not only documents reality, but also becomes an effective communication tool to expose the phenomenon of abuse of power in the context of social assistance. Each element in the film can be interpreted based on a sign system that reflects the relationship between visual language, action, and its socio-political context. Thus, this approach allows the audience to understand the hidden dimensions of the film's narrative and strengthen critical awareness of the issues of politicization of social assistance in Indonesia, especially ahead of the general election.

4. Conclusions

The research examines how the documentary film *Dirty Vote* utilizes Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic approach to critique the politicization of social assistance in Indonesia. Through the analysis of visual and verbal symbols such as party logos, color schemes, budget graphs, and campaign narratives, the study reveals systematic misuse of social assistance programs for political interests, particularly during election periods. The findings highlight how these manipulations undermine public trust and ethical governance. By employing semiotic elements effectively, the film communicates complex socio-political issues, fostering public awareness of the misuse of resources intended for public welfare. This research emphasizes the importance of transparency and stronger regulatory mechanisms to ensure that social assistance serves its intended purpose rather than being exploited for political gain. Furthermore, it contributes to the broader understanding of semiotics as a tool for political critique and underscores the role of media in addressing systemic issues within governance.

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