



Research Article

Political-Business Relations and Their Influence on Public Policy and Economic Governance in Bulukumba Regency

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between democracy and business actors within the context of local political contestation in Bulukumba Regency, Indonesia, with particular attention to economic activities in coastal areas. The research aims to analyze how business actors in key coastal sectors interact with political elites and influence democratic processes and governance practices at the local level. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving political actors, community leaders, and observers of local political dynamics. The findings show that business actors play a significant role in supporting political candidates through financial contributions, social networks, and strategic alliances that strengthen their influence during electoral competition. In coastal regions where economic activities such as fisheries, marine tourism, and traditional shipbuilding dominate the local economy, these interactions often develop into patronage networks linking economic resources with political authority. Consequently, political-business relations shape democratic competition and influence governance and development priorities in coastal areas.

Keywords: Political-Business Relations; Political Economy; Business Actors; Local Political Contestation.

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Introduction

The relationship between politics and business has become an increasingly prominent phenomenon in the dynamics of modern governance. In practice, these two sectors cannot be separated because they have reciprocal interactions that influence the process of public decision-making. Political-business relations refer to the interactions between political actors and business actors that play a role in determining the direction of public policy, the distribution of resources, and the management of economic development (Grabs et al., 2021; Surya et al., 2021). These interactions may produce positive outcomes when conducted in a transparent and accountable manner; however, they also have the potential to generate various problems when such relationships are dominated by particular interests that disregard the broader public interest.

Within democratic systems, the relationship between politics and business is often an inseparable part of political processes (Carlsson & Rönnblom, 2022; Saittakari et al., 2023). Business actors possess strong economic resources that enable them to provide financial support to political actors, particularly in electoral contests that require substantial campaign funding. Conversely, politicians who receive support from business actors often gain access to economic networks that can facilitate the implementation of development programs. This situation creates a symbiotic relationship between political power and economic strength. Nevertheless, such relations also open opportunities for the misuse of power, including practices such as corruption, collusion, and nepotism that may undermine the principles of good governance.

The interconnection between politics and business can also be observed in the increasing participation of business actors in political arenas. In many countries, including Indonesia, numerous entrepreneurs have become directly involved in political processes by running as candidates in general elections or regional leadership elections. This involvement is not only driven by the desire to participate

in governance but also by opportunities to expand economic influence and power networks. When business actors succeed in occupying strategic positions within government institutions, they gain the ability to influence public policies related to business regulations, licensing processes, and the management of economic resources (Ahmad & Mahmood, 2024; Taylor, 2021). This condition has sparked debates regarding the boundaries between public interests and private interests in the administration of government.

In the Indonesian context, the dynamics of political-business relations cannot be separated from the historical development of the political system, which has undergone various transformations influenced by social, economic, and institutional factors. One of the most significant changes occurred after the 1998 reform era, which opened broader democratic space for public participation in political processes. These reforms also transformed the electoral system into a more open and competitive one, providing opportunities for various social groups, including business actors, to become directly involved in political contests (Feldmann & Morgan, 2021; Skorge, 2023).

The largest economic and business activities in Bulukumba Regency are concentrated in its coastal areas, which serve as the primary centers of local economic development and community livelihoods. The coastal region supports several strategic sectors, including fisheries, marine tourism, and the traditional shipbuilding industry, which have long been recognized as key drivers of the regional economy. Small-scale and commercial fishing activities provide employment and income for a large portion of coastal communities, while the marine tourism sector continues to grow through attractions such as beaches, diving sites, and coastal cultural heritage. In addition, Bulukumba is internationally known for its traditional wooden shipbuilding industry, particularly the construction of *phinisi* ships, which contributes significantly to regional income and attracts both domestic and international interest (Akhmad et al., 2022)s. These economic

activities not only generate local revenue but also stimulate related sectors such as trade, transportation, and small-scale enterprises. As a result, the coastal zone plays a central role in shaping the economic structure of Bulukumba Regency, making it a strategic area for regional development policies and investment in sustainable economic growth.

The development of local democracy following the implementation of regional autonomy has further strengthened the involvement of business actors in local politics. Direct regional head elections have created highly competitive political arenas that require substantial resources to secure electoral victory. In this context, financial support and economic networks have become important factors in determining the success of political candidates. Consequently, a phenomenon has emerged in which entrepreneurs not only act as political financiers but also participate directly as candidates in regional head elections. This development illustrates a shifting pattern in the relationship between economic power and political authority at the local level (Lewis & Hossain, 2022; Nightingale et al., 2022).

Several previous studies have examined the dynamics of the relationship between political actors and business actors in the public policy-making process. A study by Guo et al., (2025) showed that political connections between companies and government officials can increase investment opportunities, but at the same time, they can potentially lead to investment inefficiencies due to political interests influencing economic decisions. Another study conducted by Danso, (2020) highlights the complexity of the relationship between government and the business sector in the privatization process in Ghana, showing that the proximity between political and economic actors often influences the direction of public policy and the distribution of state resources so that they do not always fully reflect the interests of the wider community. Meanwhile, Paster explained that business interest groups have various strategies in responding to political pressure and government policies, ranging from confrontation strategies to adaptation to regulatory changes, which

shows that political and business relations are influenced by power dynamics and institutional structures in the political system Paster, (2018). These three studies show that the relationship between economic power and political power has a significant influence on the process of formulating public policy, but studies on how the dynamics of this relationship occur in the context of local politics, especially the direct involvement of business actors in regional political contestation and its implications for local government practices, still require deeper exploration.

One region that reflects these dynamics is Bulukumba Regency, where the involvement of entrepreneurs in local political contests has become increasingly visible in several regional election periods. This phenomenon is particularly interesting to examine because it demonstrates how business actors utilize their economic resources and social networks to gain political power. At the same time, such involvement raises important questions regarding how business interests interact with public policymaking within the context of local governance. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of political-business relations in local politics, particularly focusing on the involvement of entrepreneurs in political contests and its implications for governance practices and public policymaking at the regional level.

Literature Review

Political-Business Relations in Political Economy Perspective

The relationship between politics and business has long attracted scholarly attention in political science and political economy because both sectors significantly influence public policymaking processes and the management of state resources. The literature on political-business relations generally emphasize how interactions between political actors and economic actors shape the configuration of power within governance systems. From a political economy perspective, this relationship is often understood as a reciprocal interaction in which business actors

provide financial support or economic resources to political actors, while political actors provide access to policies, regulations, and economic opportunities. These interactions may generate positive outcomes for economic development when conducted in a transparent and accountable manner. However, such relationships may also create opportunities for the misuse of political authority when dominated by particular economic interests (Cioffi et al., 2022; Gligor et al., 2021).

Scholars in political economy have long argued that the distribution of economic resources often determines the structure of political influence. In many political systems, economic elites possess significant leverage in shaping public policies through lobbying, political financing, and strategic alliances with political elites. As a result, business actors frequently play an important role in influencing government decisions related to economic regulation, taxation, investment policy, and resource allocation. This perspective highlights that political-business relations are not merely institutional interactions but are deeply embedded in broader structures of power and economic interests.

Elite Power and the Political-Business Nexus

Classical studies in political economy frequently explain the interaction between economic power and political authority through the concept of elite power. Economic elites often possess the material resources necessary to influence political institutions and public policy. Developing democracies, oligarchic actors maintain significant political influence because they have the economic capacity to protect and expand their interests through political channels. This influence may manifest in various forms, including campaign financing, political lobbying, and informal networks that connect economic elites with political decision-makers. In many developing countries, the relationship between political elites and business groups is often shaped by patronage networks. Political-business relations frequently operate through informal alliances between political leaders and

economic actors who benefit from state policies and government contracts (Hutchcroft et al., 2024; Ur Rehman, 2023). Through such networks, business actors may gain preferential access to government projects, regulatory protection, and economic opportunities. At the same time, political elites benefit from financial contributions and economic resources that strengthen their political position in electoral competition. These patronage-based relationships demonstrate that the political-business nexus often operates beyond formal institutional mechanisms and is embedded within broader networks of power.

Business Actors in Democratic and Local Political Contestation

The development of democratic governance and economic liberalization has significantly transformed the nature of political-business relations in many countries. In increasingly competitive democratic systems, the involvement of business actors in politics does not only occur through financial support for political campaigns but also through direct participation in political contests. Many entrepreneurs actively participate in elections by running for political office in order to secure strategic political positions (De Vries et al., 2021; Warburton, 2024). This phenomenon reflects a shift from indirect influence toward direct political participation by economic actors.

In the Indonesian context, these dynamics have become increasingly visible following the implementation of decentralization and regional autonomy. Local governments now possess greater authority in managing economic resources and implementing development policies at the regional level. This shift has created opportunities for business actors to establish closer relationships with local political elites and to participate directly in local political processes. In many cases, entrepreneurs become key actors in financing electoral campaigns or even contest elections themselves. The increasing involvement of business actors in local

political competition illustrates how economic power and political authority intersect within decentralized governance structures.

Several empirical studies indicate that the participation of business actors in local politics can produce both positive and negative consequences for governance. On the one hand, business actors may contribute managerial expertise, innovation, and efficiency in development planning and economic management. On the other hand, close relationships between political actors and business interests may create conflicts of interest and encourage policy decisions that prioritize private interests over public welfare. Consequently, understanding the dynamics of political-business relations is essential for analyzing how economic power interacts with political authority in shaping governance practices and public policy outcomes, particularly in increasingly competitive local political environments (Serbina et al., 2024).

Methods

The study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive research design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of political-business relations within the democratic system in Bulukumba Regency. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of social phenomena based on empirical realities observed in the research setting. Data were collected through several techniques, including in-depth interviews with informants who possess knowledge and experience regarding the development of local politics, direct observation of the social and political conditions within the study area, and the examination of relevant documents and official records related to the research topic. In addition, the study incorporates information from community leaders and local political actors who have closely followed the development of democratic processes and political contestation across several election periods in Bulukumba Regency. The collected data were analyzed

descriptively by interpreting various field findings in order to explain how business actors become involved in political activities and how the interaction between economic interests and political power is constructed in local political practices. This approach is expected to provide a comprehensive explanation of the relationship between business actors and political elites while offering a deeper understanding of the dynamics of political-business interactions within the local democratic system (Puspita & Sugiyono, 2021).

Results and Discussion

Political-Business Relations in Political Economy Perspective

The findings of this study indicate that the interaction between political actors and business actors in Bulukumba Regency reflects a reciprocal relationship explained in a political economy perspective, especially in the coastal areas. Business actors possess significant economic resources that enable them to influence political processes, particularly in the context of local electoral competition (Bisbee & You, 2024). During regional elections, economic capital becomes an important factor in determining the competitiveness of political candidates. Entrepreneurs often provide financial support, logistical assistance, and access to wider economic networks to candidates they support during campaign periods. This support strengthens the capacity of political actors to mobilize voters and conduct political campaigns more effectively. As a result, economic resources become closely intertwined with political competition, illustrating how financial capital can shape political influence in local democratic processes.

In addition to financial contributions, business actors also play a role in strengthening political networks through their social and economic connections within the community. Many entrepreneurs maintain close relationships with community leaders, social organizations, and local elites through their economic activities. These networks enable them to influence public opinion and mobilize

support during political contests (Petrova et al., 2021). Consequently, the relationship between politics and business in Bulukumba is not only limited to financial exchanges but also involves broader social interactions that shape local political dynamics. This finding supports the argument within political economy literature that economic power can significantly influence the configuration of political authority, particularly in decentralized political systems where local actors possess greater autonomy in managing political competition.



Figure 1 The analysis focuses on the word cloud related to political-business relations from a political economy perspective.

(Source: Data Processed by the Author 2026)

Figure 1 displays the most frequently occurring terms related to the theme of "Politics-Business Relations from a Political Economy Perspective." In this visualization, words that appear more frequently in the dataset are displayed in a larger font size; while less frequently occurring, terms are displayed in a smaller font size. The dominant words visible in the word cloud include politics, business, actors, economy, power, and policy. The prominence of these terms indicates that the interaction between political and business actors is the primary focus of the analysis. This visualization highlights how political authority and economic resources are

closely intertwined in shaping the dynamics of governance and decision-making processes within the political system.

The presence of terms such as influence, network, capital, campaign, and resources reflects the mechanisms through which business actors participate in the political process. These words indicate that economic capital and social networks play a crucial role in supporting political campaigns and strengthening alliances between businesspeople and political elites (Rakhmani & Saraswati, 2021). The relatively larger presence of these terms in the word cloud indicates that financial support, social connections, and access to economic resources are frequently mentioned in discussions of politics-business relations. This pattern reinforces the argument in the political economy literature that economic actors can exert influence on political processes through material resources and strategic networks. The word cloud also highlights the presence of governance-related terms such as policy and governance, suggesting that interactions between business actors and political elites extend beyond electoral politics and can influence the policymaking process. Therefore, this visualization demonstrates that the relationship between economic power and political authority extends beyond campaign support but also has implications for public policy and governance practices. Overall, the word cloud provides a visual representation of key concepts emerging from the data and confirms that the dynamics of political-business relations revolve around the interplay between economic capital, political influence, and governance structures within local democratic systems.

Elite Power and the Political-Business Nexus

The research also finds that the relationship between business actors and political elites in Bulukumba often develops through informal networks characterized by patronage and reciprocal interests. Business actors who provide financial or logistical support to political candidates frequently expect continued

access to economic opportunities once the supported candidates obtain political office. These relationships are commonly built through long-standing social ties between entrepreneurs, political figures, and influential community leaders. Through these networks, business actors can maintain access to policy discussions, government programs, and economic opportunities related to local development initiatives (Masuda et al., 2022).

Furthermore, these patronage-based relationships illustrate how alliances between political elites and economic actors can shape local governance practices. Informants in this study indicated that support provided by business actors during electoral campaigns may create expectations of reciprocal benefits after elections. These benefits may include easier access to government projects, business permits, or participation in development initiatives initiated by local governments. Such patterns reflect the broader concept of the political-business nexus described in political economy literature, where economic elites utilize their resources to secure political influence while political elites rely on economic actors to strengthen their political power.

Elite Power and the Political-Business Nexus Map

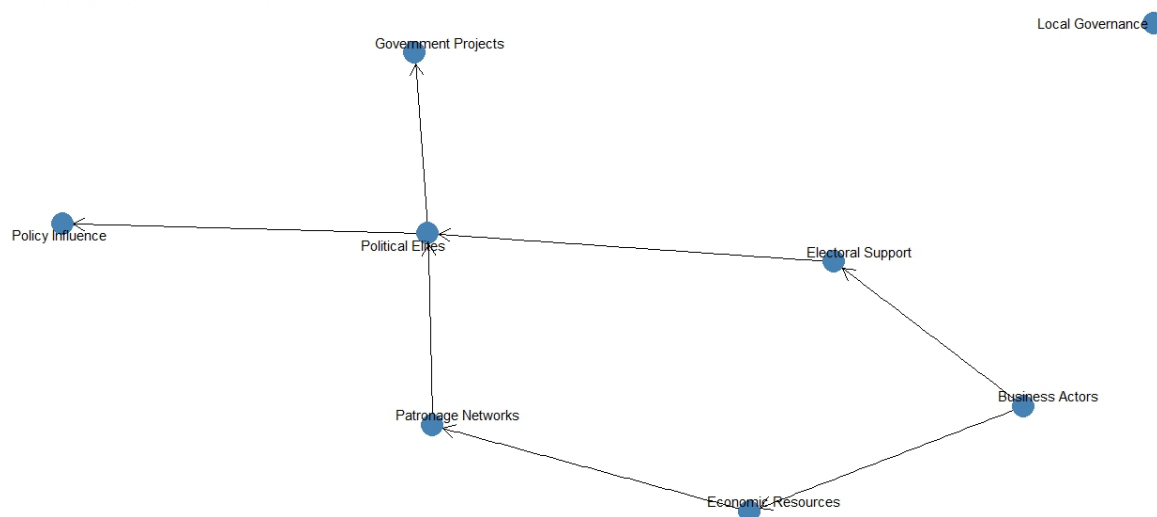


Figure 2 Elite power and political-business Nexus Map

(Source: Data Processed by the Author 2026)

Figure 2 presents a network map of structural relationships between political elites and business actors within the political-business nexus framework. This

visualization positions key actors and concepts as interconnected nodes, demonstrating how economic and political interests interact within the broader governance structure. In this map, nodes such as political elites, business actors, economic resources, and patronage networks emerge as central elements connecting various aspects of political and economic activity. The presence of directional links between these nodes indicates the flow of influence and resources that shape the relationships between actors within the local political-economic system.

This visualization highlights the role of business actors as a key source of economic resources that can influence the political process. Through financial contributions and economic capacity, business actors are able to provide electoral support to political elites during political campaigns and election contests. These relationships often lead to the formation of patronage networks that connect economic elites with political decision-makers (Szanyi, 2022). These patronage relationships serve as a crucial mechanism through which economic actors maintain influence within political institutions, while political elites benefit from the material resources and networks provided by business actors. Consequently, the network map demonstrates how alliances between political and economic actors are formed through the reciprocal exchange of resources and influence.

The map also illustrates how these relationships extend to policymaking and governance processes. Political elites supported by business actors can gain greater capacity to influence policy decisions, particularly those related to government projects, economic development programs, and resource distribution. The relationship between policy influence, government projects, and local governance in the map demonstrates how the interaction between economic power and political authority can shape the direction of development policy at the local level. Overall, the network visualization provides a conceptual representation of how elite power operates within the political-business relationship, emphasizing

that political authority and economic resources are closely intertwined in shaping governance dynamics in decentralized political systems.

Business Actors in Democratic and Local Political Contestation

Another important finding of this research is the increasing involvement of business actors in direct political participation within Bulukumba Regency. In several regional elections, entrepreneurs have begun to actively participate in political contests by running as candidates or by occupying strategic positions within political organizations. This phenomenon indicates a transformation in the pattern of political-business relations, where business actors are no longer limited to indirect political influence through financial support but increasingly seek direct political authority. Their participation in electoral politics provides them with greater opportunities to influence policy decisions, particularly those related to economic development, resource management, and local business regulations (Adam et al., 2021).

In addition to their financial capacity, business actors often possess extensive social networks that enhance their political influence within local communities. Through their economic activities, many entrepreneurs establish strong relationships with employees, local communities, and community leaders, which can strengthen their social legitimacy as political actors. These relationships enable business actors to mobilize political support more effectively during electoral campaigns. However, the increasing involvement of business actors in politics also raises concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest between private economic interests and public policy objectives. The findings therefore highlight the complex relationship between economic power and political authority within local democratic systems, particularly in regions where economic resources and political influence are closely interconnected.

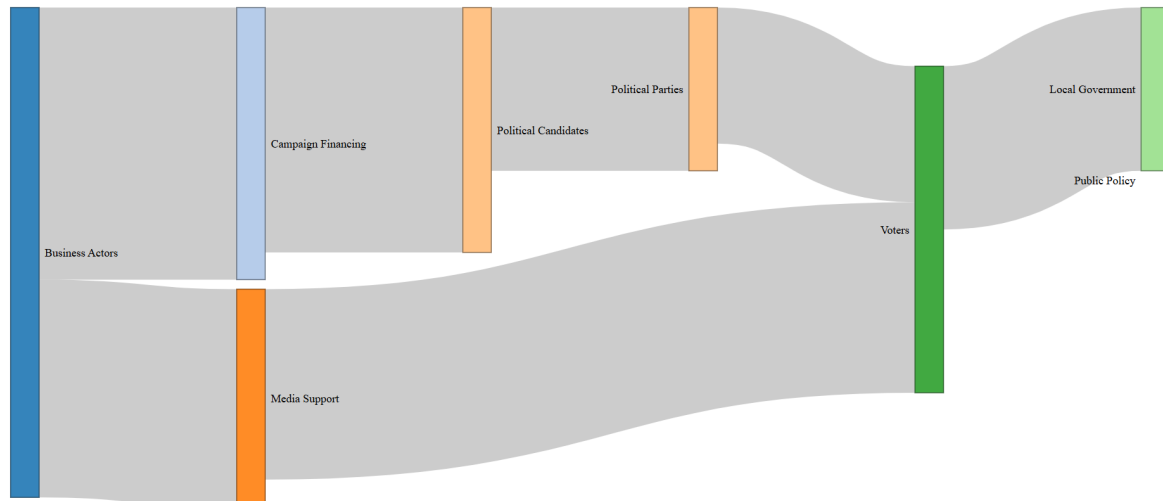


Figure 3 the flow of influence and resources involving business actors in democratic and local political contestation

(Source: Data Processed by the Author 2026)

Figure 3 depicts the flows of influence and resources involving business actors in democratic and local political contestation. In this visualization, each node represents a key actor or component in the political process, while the connecting flows represent the direction and intensity of the relationships between them. Business actors appear as the starting point of several flows, demonstrating their role as significant contributors to political dynamics, particularly through financial resources and strategic support mechanisms. The width of the flows in the diagram reflects the relative strength of these relationships, demonstrating how economic resources can move through different stages of political activity.

The diagram shows that business actors often channel their influence through campaign funding and media support, which in turn influences political candidates and the broader electoral process. Campaign funding allows political candidates to strengthen their political campaigns, build organizational structures, and expand their reach to voters (Fisher et al., 2024). At the same time, media support can shape public perceptions and influence voter preferences by amplifying political narratives or profiles of particular candidates. These flows demonstrate how economic actors are involved not only in providing material

resources but also in shaping the information environment surrounding democratic political competition.

The visualization highlights how these interactions ultimately connect to local governance institutions and public policy outcomes. Once political candidates gain electoral support and secure positions in local government, the influence of the networks that supported them during political contestation can continue to influence governance processes and policy formulation (Verhoeven et al., 2022). The relationships between voters, local governments, and public policy in the diagram demonstrate that the outcomes of democratic competition are closely linked to the relationships established during the electoral process. Overall, the Sankey diagram provides a conceptual representation of how business actors contribute to shaping political competition and governance dynamics in local democratic systems.

The findings of this study indicate that the relationship between political elites and business actors forms a significant structure within the local political economy. The word cloud analysis demonstrates that key concepts such as political, business, actors, economic, and power appear dominantly in the data, reflecting the central role of economic resources and political authority in shaping political dynamics. Meanwhile, the network map analysis highlights the structural interaction between business actors, political elites, patronage networks, and policy influence, showing that economic resources often become an important instrument in building political alliances. These findings reinforce the argument within political economy literature that the interaction between economic elites and political actors tends to form mutually beneficial relationships, where business actors provide financial and strategic support while political elites gain access to resources that strengthen their political position in electoral competition and governance processes.

In addition, the Sankey diagram analysis further illustrates the flow of influence from business actors to political candidates, voters, and ultimately to local government and public policy outcomes. This pattern suggests that business actors do not merely participate as external economic entities but play an active role in shaping democratic political contestation through campaign financing and media support (Buzogány & Spöri, 2025; Nyberg, 2021).

The policy implications of this study highlight the importance of strengthening transparent and accountable local governance in managing the relationship between business actors and political elites, particularly in the development of the coastal economy in Bulukumba Regency. Coastal areas in Bulukumba possess significant economic potential, including fisheries, marine tourism, and the traditional shipbuilding industry, which often become strategic sectors attracting investment and economic interests linked to local political dynamics. In this context, the involvement of business actors in political processes may contribute positively to regional economic development if it is directed through policies that support the empowerment of coastal communities, improve access to economic resources, and strengthen micro and small enterprises based on local potential. However, without clear regulatory frameworks and effective oversight mechanisms, these relationships may also create opportunities for patronage practices that influence the distribution of development projects, business licensing, and the management of coastal resources.

From a democratic perspective, the findings of this study suggest that the interaction between economic power and political authority represents an inherent aspect of local democratic dynamics. Nevertheless, such interactions need to be balanced by strong democratic institutions, effective public oversight, and meaningful participation of coastal communities in policymaking processes. Ensuring the inclusion of coastal communities in decision-making is essential to prevent development policies from being dominated by elite economic interests.

Instead, participatory governance mechanisms can help ensure that economic development in coastal areas contributes to broader social welfare, equitable resource distribution, and sustainable development. In this regard, strengthening democratic governance at the local level becomes crucial to ensure that the involvement of business actors in politics does not undermine democratic quality but rather supports inclusive economic growth and sustainable coastal development in Bulukumba Regency.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the relationship between political elites and business actors plays a significant role in shaping democratic dynamics and local political contestation. The analysis shows that business actors contribute not only through financial resources but also through networks of influence that support political candidates and strengthen patronage relations within the political system. These interactions form a political-business nexus in which economic capital, electoral support, and political authority are interconnected. As a result, the influence of business actors extends beyond electoral processes and may affect governance practices and policy directions within local government institutions. Overall, the study confirms that the interaction between economic power and political elites constitutes an important element in understanding the structure of political competition and governance outcomes within local democratic systems.

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