

LOCAL POLITICAL ELITE POWER AND NETWORK GOVERNANCE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION POLICIES: A Case Study of Gresik

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses local political elites' power and the application of network governance in implementing poverty alleviation policies in Gresik Regency. The primary focus of the study is on how the dominance of local political elites affects the decision-making process, resource distribution, and policy effectiveness, and how network governance plays a role in overcoming these challenges. The research method used is qualitative, collecting data through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. The results show that the dominance of local political elites often prioritises political interests over substantive policy objectives, resulting in unequal distribution of resources and limitations in achieving policy targets. In addition, network governance in Gresik District faces challenges in the form of weak coordination between stakeholders, the limited role of the private sector and civil society organisations, and the lack of active participation of local communities. This research emphasises the need for network governance reform to create more inclusive, transparent, and sustainable poverty alleviation policies. A collaborative approach involving equal roles between the government, private sector, NGOs, and communities is crucial to improving policy effectiveness. In addition, limiting the dominance of local political elites is necessary to ensure that policies are based on the community's needs, not political interests alone.

Keywords: Local Political Power, Network Governance, Public Policy, Poverty Alleviation, Gresik District.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty eradication has become one of the main goals in the development agenda of many countries, including Indonesia. (Yuliansyah, 2022). The Indonesian government, both at the central and local levels, has launched various policies to reduce poverty, focusing on more equitable distribution of resources and community empowerment. However, despite the multiple policies that have been implemented, poverty alleviation at the local level still faces significant challenges. One factor influencing the success of poverty policy implementation is the power of local political elites who control policy-making and resource allocation in the local government context. As the central actors in the governance structure, local political elites often greatly influence policy priorities and resource distribution (Lawelai & Nurmandi, 2023).

In this case, the question arises as to the extent to which the power of the political elite influences the implementation of poverty alleviation policies in certain regions, such as

Kabupaten Gresik, East Java. Gresik, one of Indonesia's important industrial areas, faces significant social challenges, including economic inequality that leads to structural poverty in some areas. Although various government programmes have been aimed at reducing poverty, the results often do not align with expectations, indicating problems in implementing these policies (Nabila, 2021). This study conducts the analysis using two main theoretical perspectives: the Power Elite theory proposed by C. Wright Mills and the Network Governance theory. The Power Elite theory reveals that public policies, including poverty alleviation, are often dominated by elite groups controlling resources and political decisions.

On the other hand, Network Governance theory emphasises the importance of interaction between various actors in managing public policies, be it the government, the private sector, or civil society (Ipmawan et al., 2022). These two theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how local political power and governance networks manage poverty alleviation policies in Gresik. This study aims to explore the role of local political elites in the decision-making process related to poverty alleviation policies in Gresik, as well as how the government networks that are formed influence the implementation of these policies. This research will analyze how local political elites control resource allocation and determine poverty policy priorities using qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews with local government officials, legislative members, and community leaders (Ardiansyah et al., 2020).

In addition, this research will also examine how interactions between actors in the government network can influence the effectiveness of poverty alleviation policies, both in terms of planning and implementation. In particular, this research is expected to significantly contribute to understanding local political dynamics in social policy management and provide recommendations to improve the effectiveness of poverty alleviation policies at the regional level. By paying attention to the role of political elite power and the structure of government networks, policies are expected to be more responsive to the community's needs and more inclusive in addressing complex poverty problems.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the role of local political elite power and network governance in implementing poverty alleviation policies in Gresik. The qualitative case study design allows an in-depth investigation of context-specific socio-political dynamics (Danugroho, 2022; Moelong, 2016). Gresik District was selected as the research site due to its complex interaction between local political structures and poverty alleviation programs.

To provide a structured network analysis, the unit of analysis in this study is the actor involved in the policy implementation process: local political elites, bureaucrats, NGOs, community leaders, and beneficiaries. Each actor is examined based on their role, influence, resources, and inter-relational ties within the governance network. This study mapping these relationships integrates Stakeholder Network Analysis (SNA) elements to identify

stakeholder collaboration patterns, power asymmetries, and strategic alliances (Prell et al., 2009; Vance-Borland & Holley, 2011).

Data collection involved in-depth interviews with key informants such as local government officials, political party figures, civil society actors, and community representatives. Additionally, participatory observations were conducted during public meetings and coordination forums to observe the practical interactions among actors. Supplementary data were obtained from official documents, policy texts, local regulations, budget reports, and statistical data related to poverty indicators.

Data were analysed thematically using coding techniques to identify recurring patterns of power distribution, stakeholder positions, and governance mechanisms (Thompson, 2022). Network maps were developed to visualise the structure of stakeholder interactions and the centrality of actors within the network. The combination of qualitative thematic analysis and stakeholder network mapping allows a nuanced understanding of the content and governance structure (Scott, 2014). Triangulation was applied to ensure credibility and trustworthiness by cross-verifying data from interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodological integration is expected to yield rich insights into how local political elite power shapes policy implementation networks in Gresik's poverty alleviation efforts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Power Dominance of Local Political Elite in Poverty Alleviation Policies

Given the high economic disparity between industrialized and rural areas, poverty alleviation policy in Gresik Regency is one of the regional development priorities. Although the local government has initiated various programmes, the effectiveness of these policies is often affected by the dominance of local political elites who have significant control over resource allocation and programme implementation (Panda, 2015). The power of these political elites not only influences the direction of policies but also determines the extent to which these policies can reach people with low incomes. In Gresik's local politics, political elites have a strategic position as the link between the local government, the business world, and the community. Most of these elites have backgrounds as politicians or businesspeople who utilise power to strengthen their position in the political and economic arenas (Dörffel & Freytag, 2023). They often hold important positions in government institutions, either as regional heads or members of the regional legislature.

This position gives them the ability to determine development priorities and budget distribution. Poverty alleviation policies in Gresik are often coloured by politicisation, where programs that should be based on the community's needs are primarily directed to support specific political interests. For example, budget allocations for social assistance programmes are often directed to areas that are the elite's political support base (Patrick, 2020). Consequently, the programmes are unevenly distributed and are ineffective in reducing poverty. One clear example of political elite domination is the capital assistance programme for micro-enterprises. This programme aims to encourage the economic independence of

people with low incomes (Rudra & Tobin, 2017). However, in practice, beneficiaries are often selected based on political affiliation rather than need. This shows how political elites use poverty alleviation programmes as a tool to strengthen their support base in the community.

In addition, local political elites also greatly influence the determination of program implementing partners, such as private institutions or community organisations. The partners chosen often have personal or political ties with these elites. As a result, implementing programmes is often not optimal because they are more aimed at strengthening the power network than solving fundamental poverty problems. These local political dynamics are also reflected in the structure of regional budgets (Kotsko, 2023). In recent years, budget allocations for poverty alleviation programmes have shown an imbalance. Most of the budget is directed towards infrastructure projects with high political appeal, while programmes based on empowering people with low incomes receive a much smaller allocation. This imbalance shows how political considerations, rather than community needs, often drive policy priorities.

The dominance of the political elite is also reflected in the control of information. Political elites often have exclusive access to poverty data, which is used to support policies that favour their position (Limbert & Bullock, 2005). This control of information creates an asymmetry of knowledge between the elite and the community, making it difficult for the community to evaluate or question the policies implemented. In addition to information control, political elites also utilise their influence in the legislative process at the local level. For example, regulations related to poverty alleviation are often designed to benefit specific groups with close ties to the elite. This shows how elite power not only resides in the executive realm, but also in the legislature. In some cases, local political elites also use poverty alleviation programs as a tool for political mobilisation, especially ahead of regional head elections (Samndong et al., 2018). Social assistance, which is supposed to be nonpartisan, is often used as a disguised campaign tool. This distorts the policy's original objective, which is to reduce poverty sustainably (Sidik & Habibi, 2024). The involvement of political elites in poverty alleviation programmes also affects the relationship between local governments and the private sector. In Kabupaten Gresik, many poverty programmes involve large companies through corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes.

However, this involvement is often directed by political elites to support projects that provide political benefits for them, rather than to address the needs of people experiencing poverty. However, not all political elite influence is negative. In some cases, local political elites can use their power to accelerate the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes (Grimm et al., 2014). However, this effectiveness depends heavily on the intentions and integrity of the individual elite. Poverty alleviation policies in Gresik also face significant challenges in terms of accountability. The dominance of political elites often creates an environment where transparency is limited. Communities are rarely involved in the planning and evaluation process, making it challenging to ensure policies address their needs. The

dominance of political elites also affects the network governance that is supposed to be the foundation of poverty alleviation policy implementation.

In many cases, actors in these networks, such as NGOs and local communities, have limited roles due to elite domination. This creates an imbalance in collaboration, where power is concentrated in one group. Another challenge faced is the lack of coordination between stakeholders. Political elites often capitalise on this fragmentation to strengthen their position by creating dependency of other actors on their power. (Muchlis, 2018). This complicates efforts to build inclusive and effective governance networks. In the context of poverty alleviation policies, the dominance of local political elites in Gresik shows that political power greatly influences policy implementation. However, this dominance also creates a high risk to programme sustainability, primarily if policies are geared more towards short-term political interests rather than long-term social change (Prihatini, 2019). Therefore, serious efforts are needed to reduce the dominance of political elite power in poverty alleviation policies in Gresik. One step that can be taken is increasing transparency and accountability in policy planning and implementation. The community must be allowed to participate actively and become independent supervisors of the implemented policies.

In addition, an effort needs to strengthen the capacity of governance networks. Local governments must encourage greater involvement from other actors, such as NGOs, academics and local communities, to create more inclusive collaboration (Jackson & Pye, 2023). This approach can help reduce dependence on political elites while improving the effectiveness of policy implementation. Another step is to improve the monitoring of local budget allocations. The central government or independent institutions can ensure that the budget for poverty alleviation is used for its original purpose. In the long run, changing the political culture at the local level is also very important (Mosley, 2012). A political system that allows for the concentration of power often maintains the dominance of political elites. Therefore, reforms in the local political system are needed to create a more democratic and inclusive environment.

Dynamic Network Governance in Policy Implementation in Gresik Regency

Poverty alleviation policies in Kabupaten Gresik require a network governance approach that involves various stakeholders. This network governance aims to integrate the roles of the local government, private sector, NGOs, and local communities in inclusive and effective policy implementation. However, the dynamics of network governance in Gresik show structural challenges that affect the effectiveness of the policy implementation. In practice, network governance in Gresik often does not work ideally due to the inequality of roles between the actors involved. The local government is often the dominant actor that controls the course of the policy. In contrast, the role of other actors, such as NGOs and local communities, tends to be marginalised. This imbalance creates a hierarchy within the network, limiting the collaboration process. The private sector, which has huge companies operating in Gresik, has great potential to support poverty alleviation policies through corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes.

However, this sector's involvement in network governance is often transactional and less integrated with the needs of local communities. In some cases, CSR programmes focus more on corporate image than solving fundamental poverty problems. On the other hand, NGOs, which are supposed to act as liaisons between communities and the government, face various obstacles (Przebylowski & Cunha, 2024). One of the main obstacles is limited resources, both in terms of finance and access to policy information. In addition, the relationship between NGOs and the government is often subordinate, with NGOs acting more as programme implementers than strategic partners in policy planning and evaluation (Anttiroiko, 2023). Local communities also play an important role in network governance. However, community participation in poverty alleviation policies in Gresik tends to be low. This low participation is due to the lack of access to information and space for the community to express their aspirations.

As a result, the community is often only an object of policy, not an active subject in the implementation process. One of the main challenges in network governance in Gresik is the lack of coordination between stakeholders. The power elite theory emphasises that political elites have a significant influence on policy decision-making and have a direct impact on social structures. In the context of Gresik District, political power is held by a small group of individuals who control key resources in society. In Kabupaten Gresik, local political elites involved in poverty reduction policies are limited to formal government structures and involve non-structural actors with significant influence in the decision-making process. As in the following interview with the deputy chairperson of the Gresik Regency DPRD:

"Local Regulation No. 14/2019 is part of revising the previous local regulation in 2013. Our seriousness as legislators to revise the regulation was due to an audience with Mr H. Khozin and other legislators who saw the anomaly of poverty inequality in Gresik Regency where the industry is very high, like that sir, I do not understand because I served as a member of the DPRD from 2009 until thank God now in 2024' (Interview with the Chairman of the DPRD).

This statement certainly illustrates and confirms that local political elites in Gresik are not only centred on formal government structures but also on non-formal forces that play an important role in decision-making. On the other hand, Network Governance theory explains that public policy results from interaction between the prevailing political system and inputs from the social environment (Colm et al., 2020). In this context, the policy-making process for poverty reduction in Gresik involves the interaction between the formal political system (DPRD, local government) and inputs from external actors (such as civil society, the private sector, and community leaders). The formal elites in terms of the researcher's understanding and the findings in the field include the Legislative Body or DPRD, the Regent, the Heads of relevant agencies including the Social Agency, the Labour Agency, the Community and Village Empowerment Agency, and most importantly the Head of Bappeda, especially the Head of the Regional Infrastructure and Spatial Planning Section. In implementing this policy, there is a slight overlap with health, education, and other services

because they are included in fulfilling basic services, which are part of the regional poverty aspect.

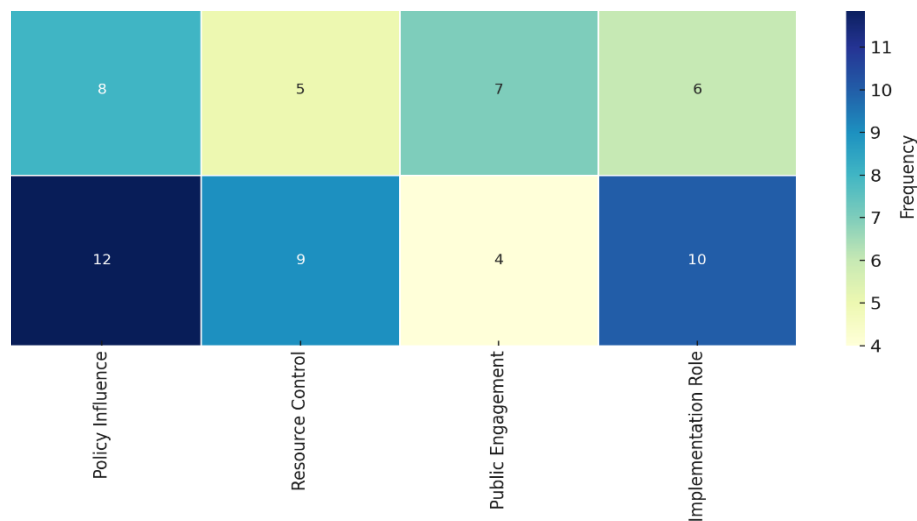
Bappeda, or the regional development planning agency, plays a direct role in designing and implementing poverty reduction policies through providing basic services, such as education, health, and public infrastructure and others as the right hand of the executive agency, in this case, the regional head. The relevant agencies run programmes such as the free education programme, improved health facilities through Puskesmas and Posyandu, and infrastructure development to support the community's economic activities. In addition, the government designed programmes such as the Direct Cash Transfer (BLT) and the Family Hope Programme (PKH) to ease the burden on low-income families. To reduce open unemployment, job skills training and the absorption of local labour became the primary focus, supported by policies that encouraged regional companies to prioritise local labour.

On the other hand, in the findings in the field, researchers saw that the role of non-formal political elites was quite central in Gresik Regency, where the arrangement of the Gresik Economic Zone, in its journey from the beginning which was then able to absorb local labour and fulfil the aspects of basic services in poverty reduction, which brought in investors and gave an agreement with the government was a non-formal elite where in this case it was H. Khozin, non-formal political elites, such as community leaders, religious leaders and others became additional substitutes which showed that in the field, non-formal political elites had a significant complementary role. Apart from Mr Khozin and several other figures, the findings in the field often become mediators between the community and the government, help channel social assistance, and encourage community participation in empowerment programmes.

Advocating for the rights of people with low incomes. Local business actors contribute through job creation, support for MSMEs, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes that focus on education, health, and local creative economy development. The field's policy formulation and implementation process certainly involves detailed and lengthy processes, such as those in the Bappeda or Regional Development Planning Agency. Based on an interview with the Head of Infrawil Gresik Bappeda, poverty reduction policies in Gresik are often hampered by the unequal distribution of resources and coordination between institutions. In this context, policies that regional political elites have formulated often experience distortions when implemented in the field, due to differences between the political decisions taken and the implementation capacity at the regional level.

The Head of Bappeda said:

"Although we have a clear policy, its implementation often has obstacles. For example, the lack of coordination between institutions such as the Social Affairs Office, the Manpower Office, and Bappeda means that policies formulated at the central and regional levels cannot be implemented optimally." (Head of Bappeda) Infrawil Gresik, interview, 2024).

Figure 1. Thematic Engagement of Political Elites in Poverty Alleviation Governance

Sources: Researcher Analysis, 2024

The matrix coding query presented in the heatmap illustrates the thematic distribution of coded references associated with formal and non-formal political elites in Gresik's poverty alleviation governance. The horizontal axis displays four central themes: Policy Influence, Resource Control, Public Engagement, and Implementation Role, while the vertical axis distinguishes between formal political elites (e.g., government officials and party representatives) and non-formal elites (e.g., religious leaders and influential community figures). The numerical values indicate the frequency with which each theme was referenced across interview transcripts and policy documents, serving as a proxy for the extent of each group's engagement in respective governance functions.

The results highlight that non-formal political elites demonstrate a more substantial presence in the domains of Policy Influence and Implementation Role, suggesting their informal authority plays a significant part in shaping program direction and field-level execution. Conversely, formal elites appear more actively involved in Public Engagement activities, reflecting their institutional mandate to mobilize support and communicate official programs. The relatively higher engagement of non-formal elites in Resource Control reveals the embedded patronage structures and informal negotiations that often govern access to aid resources. This thematic distribution underscores the hybrid nature of governance in Gresik, where formal institutions and informal networks co-produce and mediate poverty alleviation policy outcomes.

Meanwhile, in the action of the role of non-formal political elites that researchers found in the field, one of them is Mr H. Khozin, a political elite figure outside the formal structure who has a significant influence on the development of Gresik Regency, who has a role in structuring the Gresik Economic Zone and bridging the arrival of other company investors in industrial growth in Gresik. Power in society is not centralised in one group or social class alone. However, it is spread in a network of power involving political, economic

and military elites who interact with each other (Lipsky, 2023). Although not always visible in government structures, Mills argues that local political elites significantly influence public policy-making. These elites operate outside the direct control of the people and often have interests that conflict with the public interest. In the context of poverty reduction policies in Gresik, local political elites can include community leaders, local entrepreneurs, and other influential individuals who have close power networks with formal government actors such as the DPRD and Bappeda.

Their role in policy-making can be seen from how these policies are often influenced by the interests of these elite groups, both in formulating policies and implementing them in the field. According to Mills, the role of political elites in poverty reduction policy in Gresik often prioritises pragmatic interests and power interactions between political actors who have the resources to influence policy. This creates a dynamic where poverty reduction policies made by local governments may not fully reflect the real needs of the poor, but rather the interests of the elites involved in the process. The interaction between local political elites and formal actors in the policy-making process indicates an imbalance in Gresik's political system. This also indicates the possibility that policy outputs do not always reflect the real expectations or needs of people experiencing poverty, but are more influenced by the power of elites who have greater access to the political and decision-making processes. Each actor's unclear roles and responsibilities often lead to overlapping programmes and wasted resources.

In some cases, programmes run by the private sector are not integrated with government programmes, so their impact is not maximised. In addition, the dominance of local political elites in governance networks exacerbates the situation. (Kupriyanov, 2022) Political elites often use governance networks to strengthen their influence, appointing politically close implementing partners and controlling the distribution of resources. This creates unhealthy dynamics within the network, where collaboration is based more on political interests than common goals (Masujima, 2021) Network governance also faces challenges in terms of accountability. Although various programmes involve many actors, transparency in policy implementation is often low. The lack of an effective monitoring system makes it difficult for the public to evaluate the actors' performance in the network. As a result, many programmes run without adequate evaluation, making it difficult to measure their impact. One concrete example of the dynamics of network governance in Gresik is in the micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) development programme.

The programme involves various actors, including local government, the private sector, and NGOs. However, a lack of coordination often causes the programme to miss its target. Many MSME actors who should receive assistance are not reached, while those with close ties to the political elite benefit more (Rahayu et al., 2023). As the primary driver of network governance, local government plays an important role in creating synergy between the actors involved. However, in many cases, the government tends to centralise control in the bureaucracy, so initiatives from other actors are often stifled. This overly bureaucratic approach creates distance between the government and the community, making

collaboration difficult. Overcoming this challenge requires a paradigm shift in network governance (Sindhwani et al., 2023). Local governments must adopt a more inclusive approach, where all actors have an equal role in the policy planning, implementation and evaluation.

This inclusiveness can be realised through dialogue forums that actively involve various stakeholders. In addition, it is important to strengthen the capacity of actors in the network, especially NGOs and local communities. The government can provide support through training, funding and access to information to NGOs and communities, so that they can contribute more optimally to network governance (Ang & Wickramasinghe, 2023). This can also help reduce dependence on political elites. Effective network governance also requires a transparent monitoring and evaluation system. Local governments must develop monitoring mechanisms that involve the community as independent watchdogs (Moshtari & Vanpoucke, 2021). This way, the community can ensure that the policies implemented align with their needs. In addition to strengthening network governance at the local level, collaboration with actors at the regional and national levels is also necessary.

This collaboration can help overcome resource limitations at the local level, while strengthening the network with experience and expertise from actors at higher levels. In the context of Gresik District, the challenges and opportunities in network governance reflect complex dynamics. Despite the constraints, the potential to create more inclusive and effective governance remains open. However, this requires a commitment from all actors to abandon transactional approaches and move towards collaboration based on shared goals. By addressing the challenges in network governance, poverty alleviation policies in Gresik have the opportunity to become more effective and sustainable. The government's role as a facilitator, not a controller, is key to creating a balanced and productive collaboration.

CONCLUSION

This research explores local political elites' power dynamics and the application of network governance in implementing poverty alleviation policies in Gresik District. The results show that the dominance of local political elites significantly impacts the decision-making process and the distribution of resources in the policy. This domination often prioritises political interests over the substantial goals of poverty alleviation, thus creating inequality of access and limited policy effectiveness. In addition, network governance in Gresik is still characterised by challenges, such as weak coordination between stakeholders, limited participation of the private sector and NGOs, and the lack of active involvement of local communities. This imbalance of roles in the network hinders the achievement of optimal results, especially in dealing with complex problems such as poverty.

However, this research also identifies opportunities to improve network governance to support more inclusive and sustainable poverty reduction policies. Reforms oriented towards strengthening coordination, transparency, and accountability between actors can enhance synergies within the network. A more collaborative approach, where the private sector, NGOs, and communities play an equal role with the government, is crucial to

improving network governance at the local level. Furthermore, this research emphasises the importance of limiting the dominance of local political elites in governance networks. This aims to ensure that policies are based on community needs and aspirations analysis, rather than solely on political interests.

Thus, an inclusive, effective, and transparent governance network can encourage implementing more impactful poverty alleviation policies. This conclusion underlines that strengthening network governance oriented towards cross-sector collaboration is the key to comprehensively addressing poverty in Kabupaten Gresik. With better network management, policies can achieve more equitable, effective, and sustainable development goals, while serving as a learning model for other regions with similar contexts. This research contributes to the literature on network governance and local politics and is relevant for evidence-based policies at the local and national levels.

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