

Exploring Patterns of Collective Corruption and Integrity Risks by Regional Heads in Indonesia

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Article Info

Article History;

Received:

2024-04-09

Revised:

2025-02-02

Accepted:

2025-05-20

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the collective corruption networks involving regional heads in Indonesia. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were gathered from secondary sources, including major national online media outlets such as Kompas, Tempo, CNN Indonesia, Antara, Detik, Liputan6, Tribun, and Jawapos. The data were analyzed through content analysis, focusing on news reports concerning regional head corruption cases from 2005 to 2023—a period marked by the implementation of direct regional elections. The findings reveal a growing phenomenon of collective corruption in which regional heads and business actors engage in collusion, forming new oligarchic power structures at the local level. This model of collective corruption encompasses both internal and external networks. Internal networks include the regional head's family members and close staff, while external networks involve entrepreneurs and legislative representatives such as members of local parliaments. Empirically, the study identifies a pattern of systemic corruption facilitated by political actors who collaborate across government and business sectors. Theoretically, the research contributes to the evolving discourse on collective corruption by illustrating how corruption becomes institutionalized and deeply embedded in local governance structures. Regional heads emerge as central actors, establishing corruption networks that divert public funds—particularly from the Regional Budget and Revenue and Expenditure allocations—to serve private interests and consolidate political power. The novelty of this research lies in its identification of the dual role played by both private entrepreneurs and bureaucratic elements in financing corrupt practices. Moreover, it highlights how family members and staff serve as intermediaries in the process of fund misappropriation, enabling the entrenchment of corruption at the local level.

Keywords: *Collective corruption; Regional head; Oligarchy*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18196/jgpp.v12i2.22081>



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INTRODUCTION

The issue of collective corruption is gaining attention globally. In many countries, the dishonest actions of government officials are a cause for concern among various groups. Research on corruption has been extensively conducted in the last five years, including a study on political

and collective corruption in Argentina (Pereyra, 2019). Similarly, there are other democratic countries, such as Brazil, that are not immune to political and collective corruption. Allegations of corruption have played a significant role in every major political turmoil in Brazil since the 19th century (Saad-Filho & Boffo, 2021). The most powerful actor orchestrates collective corruption within a particular sphere. This actor coordinates and facilitates corrupt activities among subordinates and other individuals under their influence and control (Palmer, 2008). As a result, collective corruption involves multiple actors within and outside the organization and often persists over an extended period (Smith-Crowe & Warren, 2014). Collective corruption thrives in environments that enable and tolerate deviant and corrupt practices (Persson & Teorell, 2012). Corruption is a systematic act that has widespread impacts and persists over an extended period (Carson & Prado, 2016).

In many cases, collective corruption is carried out by political actors (Heydari, 2024), both in the executive and legislative (Heywood, 1997). Collective corruption among political actors tends to make corruption an institutionalized deviant act (Gerring & Thacker, 2004). Politically motivated corruption is a major challenge to development. This type of political interference increases the cost of building road infrastructure and the likelihood that the road will not be completed (Lehne et al., 2018). In addition, corruption also hurts development, especially in developing countries (Spyromitros & Panagiotidis, 2022). Political corruption also increases government spending (Nguyen & Bui, 2022). Data from 130 countries shows that corruption has an impact on weakening the country's economy (Saha & Sen, 2023).

Collective corruption can be compared to cancer because it slowly kills society and its values. Unfortunately, in some cultures, corruption has been normalized and accepted as a way of life. While some people view corruption as everyday activities, others perceive it as a range of social actions, from the rebellious and destructive to the efficient and culturally legitimate. The lack of transparency, accountability, efficiency, and punishment in state and private institutions and the need for structural change contribute to the widespread prevalence of corruption (Kerrigan, 2020). In various countries, the political and democratic systems are gradually being undermined. It is not limited to officials at the central level, such as the president, ministers, and members of parliament, but also involves corruption by officials at the regional level. Collectively, corruption at the local level occurs in the United States, and research shows that it hinders corporate innovation (Huang & Yuan, 2021).

Corruption in Latin America is not limited to the national government level but also occurs at the local government level. Local citizens often judge the government's performance based on the level of corruption present. If citizens perceive their government as corrupt and dishonest, they may become cynical about political life, making them less likely to participate in democratic governance. Interestingly, citizens' willingness to engage in local governance is positively related to their experience of corruption but not to their perception of corruption (Neshkova & Kalesnikaitė, 2019). In Nigeria, the same bribery also occurs with a more even distribution of corruption. Nature of corruption in Nigeria: Nigeria's "top-to-bottom" corruption has negatively affected its economic development (Igiebor, 2019). Corruption in Bangladesh also occurs at the local level. Collective corruption at the local level makes it difficult for people to meet their daily needs because bribing state officials damages the environment. Corruption significantly reduces the ability to respond to climatic stressors. Findings draw attention to this critical issue in climate change adaptation and international development in general, particularly for developing countries (Rahman, 2018).

Several previous studies have examined political corruption networks involving many parties. Willeke Slingerland's research states that corruption carried out collectively can take the form of network corruption (Slingerland, 2021). Such as the corruption networks in Tanzania and Uganda involving private actors (Baez-Camargo et al., 2021). Research by Brandy Aven and Alessandro Iorio also revealed the involvement of private parties in corruption networks (Aven & Iorio, 2023). The collective corruption network in Mexico involved hundreds of large companies with funds reaching hundreds of billions of dollars (Luna-Pla & Nicolás-Carlock, 2020). Network corruption in South Korea involves the private sector and bureaucracy (Yu et al., 2018). Previous studies have revealed the private sector's and bureaucracy's involvement in collective corruption networks. Research that specifically examines the model of political corruption networks involving regional heads has not been conducted by political experts and political researchers. So,

this study is novel and urgent in political corruption research; political actors, in this case, regional heads, build collective corruption networks in Indonesia.

This study aims to uncover and analyze the collective corruption network model involving political actors, particularly regional heads in Indonesia. It investigates the role of political parties and interest groups that provide illicit financial support to regional authorities, the utilization of these corrupted funds, and the compensation granted to funders. The findings reveal that collective corruption among regional heads in Indonesia operates through various models and mechanisms involving internal and external networks. The study identifies five key elements in the collective corruption network: Corrupt funders. Individuals or entities that provide illicit financial resources to regional heads. Corrupt recipients. Regional heads and their close associates who receive and manage corrupt funds. Corrupt programs. Government projects or initiatives are exploited for corrupt activities—compensation for corruption funders. Political and economic benefits are granted in return for corrupt financial contributions. Distribution of corruption proceeds. The flow of illicit funds to various actors within and outside the government.

Beyond its empirical contributions, this research advances the theoretical framework of collective corruption by offering a detailed analysis of corruption networks. Collective corruption is sustained through intricate internal and external networks, with internal actors including family members, staff, government officials and external actors comprising business elites, interest groups, and political organizations. Despite the widespread prevalence of collective corruption, limited scholarly research has focused on its network dynamics in Indonesia. This study fills that gap by providing evidence-based insights into how hundreds of regional heads engaged in corrupt practices between 2005 and 2023, coinciding with Indonesia's direct regional head elections. A significant policy implication of this study is the emergence of a new oligarchic model at the local level, facilitated by collusion between regional heads and business elites. Contrary to the expectation that direct regional elections would reduce corruption, the findings suggest that these elections have not eliminated collective corruption. Instead, they have contributed to consolidating corrupt networks, underscoring the need for stronger institutional safeguards, enhanced oversight mechanisms, and more effective anti-corruption policies in Indonesia's decentralized political system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Collective corruption in this study refers to acts of corruption carried out by political actors with networks in various institutions and agencies, both in government and private institutions. Collective corruption involves many parties, starting with office staff or subordinates of political actors and families as intermediaries for corrupt practices. In addition, collective corruption also involves private parties and bureaucracy as sources of funds that are corrupted. This parameter is used as an indicator of collective corruption in this study.

Some characteristics of collective corruption involve institutions. Collective corruption does not operate alone or only involves one person but many people in an institution (Bazurli & Portos, 2019), the evils due to corruption at the institutional level bring about wider evils (Hannon & de Ridder, 2021). Second, involving political actors. Collective corruption is not only carried out by ordinary staff but is carried out by political actors, both at the executive and legislative levels (Lewis, 2020). Third, it involves many groups. Collective corruption involves political actors, many groups, including the private sector (Nyberg, 2021), and companies (Nicolás-Carlock & Luna-Pla, 2021).

Collective corruption is different from other corruption, such as petty corruption, as revealed by Mark Ruhl. Ruhl said that corruption by low-ranking officials is petty (Ruhl, 2018). Petty corruption occurs in the public service sector in many countries (Sadik-Zada et al., 2022). Petty corruption is bribes in public services (Romero, 2024). Petty corruption in the service sector often occurs in countries with weak law enforcement systems (Nieto-Morales et al., 2024). Petty corruption tends to be tolerated by many people, so it becomes a habit (Kamel et al., 2021) that was paid illegally with small amounts (Levati & Nardi, 2023).

Collective corruption is a crime involving many parties in one institution and requires a line of coordination with one another. According to Donald Palmer and Michael Maher, it cannot run if carried out by one person alone. It involves the sustained coordination of multiple organizational

participants (Palmer & Maher, 2006). Furthermore, according to Donald Palmer, collective corruption is caused by actors not being rational, negligent, and unaware when committing corruption collectively. The impact of the spreading effect of collective corruption ensnares from one actor to another within one organizational scope over time. The process model of collective corruption explains how corruption spreads from one participant to another within an organization over time. It also outlines the gradual involvement of individual participants in corrupt activities. Most importantly, this model shows how participants can become involved in corruption without much thought or with limited rational consideration (Palmer, 2008).

According to Kristin Smith-Crowe and Danielle E. Warren, collective corruption is inherently difficult to control or eradicate due to its occurrence at two interconnected levels. The first is the personal level, where individuals develop a sense of permissiveness toward corrupt practices, viewing them as an accepted or unavoidable aspect of organizational culture. This normalization of corruption further leads to deliberate efforts to recruit others, thereby expanding the network of corrupt actors. In other words, corruption is not merely an individual act but a systemic process in which perpetrators actively seek to perpetuate corrupt behavior across an organization. At the organizational level, collective corruption often becomes institutionalized as a routine, reflecting specific patterns of behavior based on established rules and norms. Organizational members interpret these rules within their operational context and align their actions accordingly (Smith-Crowe & Warren, 2014). Therefore, eradicating corruption will face increasingly difficult challenges because it must deal with acts of corruption that are structured and deep-rooted, not just individual behavior.

Collective corruption involving many groups is a challenge in itself in eradicating corruption and even tends to weaken law enforcement in eradicating corruption. While corruption may provide short-term solutions in weak institutional environments, it ultimately undermines governance, erodes public trust, and weakens state capacity. Implementing effective anti-corruption measures in such contexts is particularly challenging, as these efforts often face institutional resistance, entrenched political interests, and systemic loopholes that allow corrupt networks to persist. Institutional reforms must strengthen governance structures, foster transparency, and ensure accountability to combat collective corruption effectively. Additionally, anti-corruption strategies should consider context-specific challenges and avoid overly simplistic solutions, recognizing that corruption operates within complex political and socio-economic systems (Marquette & Peiffer, 2015).

This research is grounded in the theory of collective corruption, which requires continuous refinement to remain relevant and aligned with contemporary developments in corruption studies. Heather Marquette and Caryn Peiffer emphasize the necessity of updating this theory to understand better the evolving nature of collective corruption and its persistence in various institutional settings. According to Marquette and Peiffer, eradicating collective corruption is significantly more challenging than addressing individual corruption, particularly in weak institutional frameworks. When institutions lack the structural strength and internal mechanisms to combat corruption effectively, corrupt practices become deeply embedded within organizational norms. In such settings, corruption can paradoxically serve as a functional solution to complex bureaucratic and governance challenges, enabling individuals and groups to navigate inefficient systems or circumvent institutional bottlenecks.

So far, the disclosure of corruption cases carried out by the KPK against regional heads who commit corruption crimes not only involves the regional head alone but also involves a network of people within the regional head's circle of power, such as family and staff, and also other people outside the circle of power such as businessmen, in the form of giving money for compensation given in the form of government programs or business permits (Fatkuroji & Diana, 2021). This study places regional heads as actors in collective corruption. Regional heads do not commit corruption alone but work in a collective network involving many parties. These parties include people in their closest circle who help receive illicit funds, such as family and staff, and external parties who act as financial providers, such as entrepreneurs and bureaucracy. So, eradicating corruption in the future also needs to highlight the existence of families and staff connected to political actors who become regional heads, not only highlighting business people and companies. Here, the importance of the role of society in supervising and reporting on the possibility of corrupt practices, including the existence of mass media, is highlighted.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research method, specifically a descriptive qualitative approach, to analyze the corruption network of regional heads in Indonesia. The research focuses on 2005 to 2023, as 2005 marked the first year Indonesians held direct local elections. Since 2020, regional head elections in Indonesia have been conducted directly and simultaneously across all provincial, district, and city regions. A key data collection technique used in this study is document analysis. This approach involves tracing news reports from online mass media, which serve as secondary data sources. The reliance on secondary data is necessary because the researcher does not have direct access to police investigation reports, trial proceedings at district courts, or case records from the Corruption Eradication Commission concerning regional officials charged with corruption. The use of secondary data is justified when primary data is inaccessible. The study gathers information from reputable mass media outlets, including Kompas.com, Tempo.co, Cnnindonesia.com, Liputan6.com, Detiknews.com, Merdeka.com, Mediaindonesia.com, Jawapos.com, Antaraneews.com, Tribunnews.com, Kontan.co.id, Tirto.id, and Idntimes.com.

This research was conducted through a series of structured steps. The first stage involved mapping research issues and problems. The study focuses on collective corruption among regional heads in Indonesia, a pressing issue frequently discussed in academic and public discourse. Given the prevalence of corruption in Indonesia, this research examines collective corruption as a distinctive and systemic practice among regional heads. Additionally, the study maps the activities associated with collective corruption in Indonesia, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of its patterns and implications. Tracking. The next step involved tracking cases of collective corruption among regional heads in Indonesia. It was carried out through extensive searches of online media sources. The findings indicate that collective corruption among regional heads has been a persistent issue from 2005 to 2023. To maintain focus, the study limited its analysis to 100 documented cases of collective corruption involving regional heads.

The research collected both primary and secondary data. The primary data consists of information on collective corruption involving regional heads in Indonesia. Secondary data was derived from news reports published in various online media outlets. To ensure accuracy and reliability, the researcher cross-checked primary data with secondary sources, verifying consistency in reported cases of collective corruption. Once verified, the data was incorporated into the research findings. The primary data collection technique employed in this study is document analysis. Relevant documents, including online media reports, were examined to track and document instances of collective corruption involving regional heads. The systematic analysis of these documents provides a comprehensive overview of corruption networks and their impact on governance in Indonesia.

Data collection by document search and other documents is a process of triangulation of research sources. Triangulation of sources needs to be carried out by social researchers so that mutual checks are performed on the sources used. Triangulation in social research is needed to reduce bias while increasing the validity of the data collected. Karine da Silva Santos et al. confirmed this. According to him, one technique used in collecting research data is more likely to cause bias. Triangulation of research sources reduces the possibility of bias occurring (Santos et al., 2020). According to Rebecca S. Natow, triangulation sources are used in qualitative research to improve the accuracy of research data (Natow, 2020).

This research used a qualitative analytical approach. Data analysis used in this study uses data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (Hashimov, 2015). The data analysis was conducted in three stages: data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. This stage involves organizing the collected data, selecting relevant information, and filtering out data that does not align with the research topic. Data gathered through document searches is carefully sorted and categorized based on its relevance to the study of collective corruption among regional heads in Indonesia. Only pertinent data is retained, while irrelevant information is discarded. Data Presentation. Once the relevant data is selected, it is presented according to the research focus and analyzed using the theoretical framework employed in the study. The data is primarily presented in a textual or narrative format.

Additionally, visual representations such as charts, tables, and images are incorporated to enhance clarity and emphasize key findings. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and formulating research hypotheses based on the findings. The conclusions are derived from the analysis of collective corruption cases, contributing to a deeper understanding of corruption networks among regional heads in Indonesia. In summary, the stages carried out in this research can be described in Figure 1.

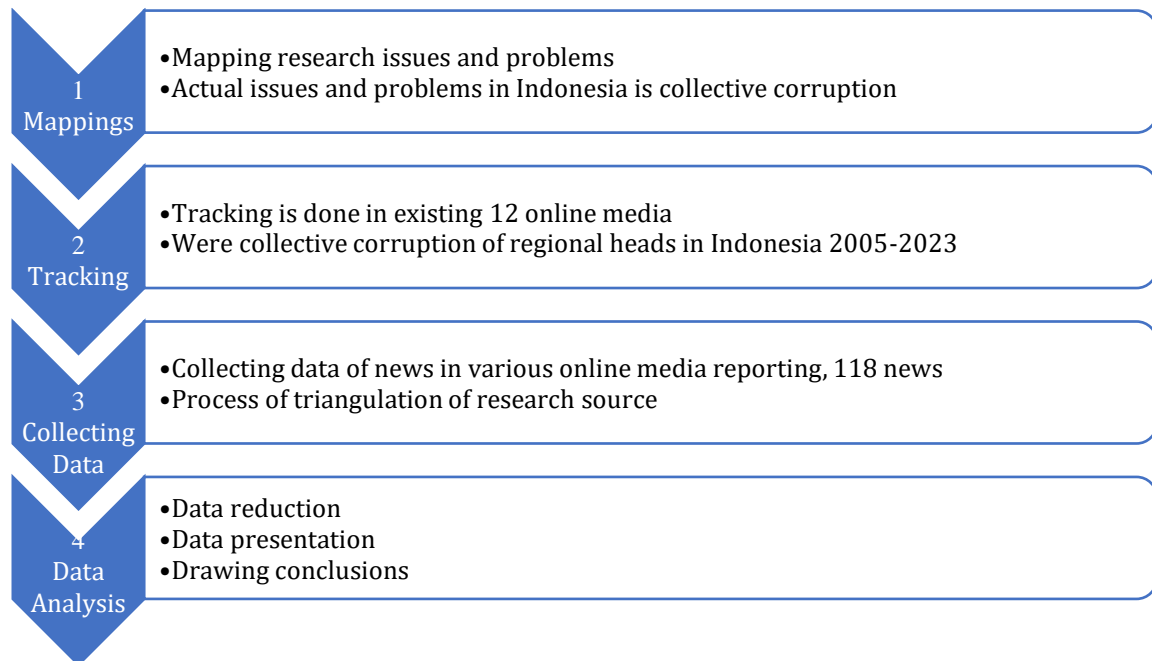


Figure 1. Steps for Collecting and Analyzing Research Data

Source: Hidayaturrahman et al., 2024

This study employs content analysis as its primary data analysis technique, focusing on news reports from leading media outlets selected in advance. The content analyzed consists of news coverage on corruption cases involving regional heads in Indonesia from 2005 to 2023. The analysis begins by mapping the relationships between regional heads—political actors and public officials—and other parties involved in collective corruption. These parties include private-sector actors outside the government, bureaucratic officials under the regional head's authority, staff members and assistants, and family members connected to the regional head. Additionally, the analysis identifies the individuals or entities that provided financial resources to the regional head, funders, and intermediaries who facilitated the transfer of illicit funds. It also examines the recipients of funds distributed by the regional head. Through this content analysis, the study establishes a model of the collective corruption network among regional heads in Indonesia, shedding light on the intricate web of corrupt practices and relationships that sustain these activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Network of Collective Corruption of Regional Heads in Indonesia

Since 2005, regional head elections in Indonesia have been conducted through direct voting. Previously, regional heads were elected by representatives in parliament. From 2005 until the present study was conducted, the people have directly elected their regional leaders. In addition to being chosen by the public, regional head elections are now held simultaneously across Indonesia. Leaders elected through this process are expected to represent and advocate for the aspirations of their constituents genuinely. However, many directly elected regional heads have become involved in corruption cases, engaging in criminal acts that harm state finances while enriching themselves and their associates. An extensive review of reports from leading Indonesian

online media has revealed numerous cases of regional heads implicated in collective corruption. This study identified 100 cases of collective corruption involving regional heads.

The findings indicate that cases of collective corruption among regional heads in Indonesia from 2005 to 2023 were distributed across various provinces and regions, demonstrating that these corrupt practices were widespread. No specific region was exclusively affected, although some areas experienced recurrent corruption cases where multiple regional heads were implicated over time. Moreover, a lack of deterrence has led to a continuation of corrupt practices—regional heads accused of corruption in previous terms were often succeeded by new officials who engaged in similar activities. This pattern suggests that regional heads systematically build economic networks through political power.

This research has uncovered significant findings regarding corruption committed by regional heads in Indonesia. Regional heads do not engage in corruption alone; they operate within a collective network involving multiple parties. These parties include individuals within their inner circle who help receive illicit funds and external actors serving as financial backers. The collective corruption of regional heads in Indonesia can be categorized into the following key aspects. This study identified the various sources of funds used for corruption, tracing the actors who provide financial resources to regional heads. Corrupt payments originate from multiple groups, with businesspeople being the most common source. The data reveals that Businesspeople: In 54 cases, business actors provided illicit funds to regional heads. Government officials: Corrupt transactions also involved officials at various levels of government, with 24 cases recorded. Project managers: Individuals managing projects funded by the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget were involved in 22 cases. Colleagues and political partners: Members of the Regional People's Representative Council or other regional parliamentary representatives were implicated in eight cases. Illegal levies: Corruption funds were obtained through unauthorized charges in three cases. Other sources: Additional sources of corruption funds were identified in seven cases.

Recipients of Corruption Funds. Funds obtained through corrupt practices are distributed among various actors. The study categorizes the recipients of illicit money as follows: Directly received by the regional head: In 78 cases, regional heads personally accepted bribes without intermediaries. Government officials as intermediaries: In 14 cases, corruption funds were channeled through officials within the government. Staff members: In six cases, regional heads used their direct subordinates to receive illicit funds. Family members: In two cases, family members acted as intermediaries in receiving corruption funds.

Programs Exploited for Corruption. Numerous government programs and projects serve as a basis for collective corruption by regional heads. These include Project permits and allocations sourced from the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget. Business licenses are granted in exchange for illicit payments. Gratifications and bribes from private actors for facilitating contracts or permits. Promotions, transfers, or career advancements for civil servants. Approval of the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget in exchange for financial incentives.

Compensation for Corruption Funders. Illicit payments to regional heads are not given freely; they come with compensation expectations. These rewards typically include project permit grants for companies to undertake projects funded by the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget or the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget APBN. Business licenses: Authorizations to establish businesses, permits for environmental impact assessments, and traffic-related permissions. Project allocations: Awarding infrastructure and development projects to funders. Job assignments: Directly appointing companies or individuals for smaller-scale projects (under IDR 200 million) without a formal bidding process. Career advancements for officials: Facilitating promotions or job transfers within local government institutions. Regional regulation approvals: Supporting legislative measures favorable to funders, particularly those related to budget allocations.

Distribution of Corrupt Funds. The illicit proceeds from corruption are not solely enjoyed by the regional head but are distributed among various parties, including colleagues and political allies, such as other regional heads, organizations, political parties, and regional parliamentarians. Family members: Spouses, children, and extended family members, such as parents. Government officials: Individuals in strategic positions who can further the interests of corrupt actors. Companies and sports clubs: Corruption funds are sometimes funneled into businesses or sports

organizations as part of money-laundering schemes. Figure 2 image below, illustrates the collective corruption cycle of regional heads in Indonesia.

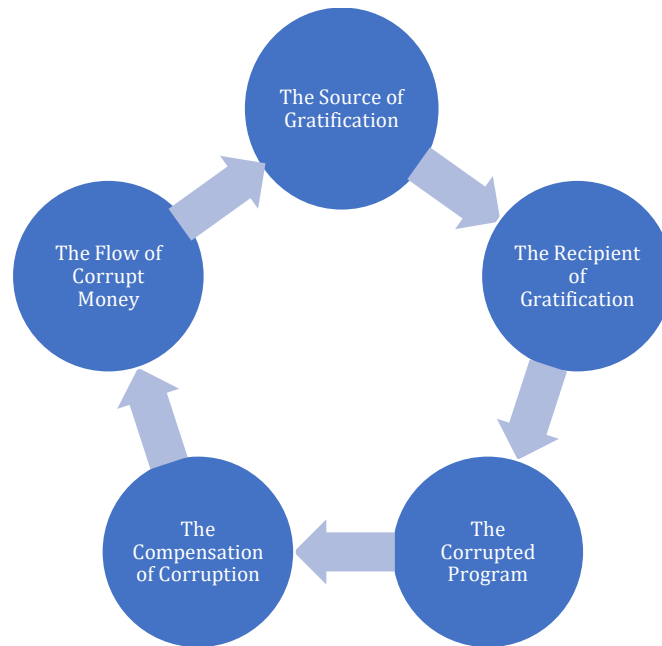


Figure 2. Form of Collective Corruption of Regional Heads in Indonesia

Source: Hidayaturrehman et al., 2024

Network Model of Collective Corruption of Regional Heads in Indonesia

Regional heads' collective corruption in Indonesia fundamentally differs from other collective corruption research studies. The collective corruption model of regional heads in Indonesia can be explained in two forms. The first is the internal network. The circle is small in scope, involving only the regional authority, family, and staff. This small network functions to receive gratification from other parties. This small network also receives the flow of corruption funds from regional heads. According to Domhoff, individual or personal preferences strongly influence the power structure. Organizations are places where power holders are the key to controlling power (Domhoff, 2005). Personal choice to get material benefits from regional heads, met with management opportunities gained as regional heads, causes collective corruption of regional heads in Indonesia.

The external network of collective corruption at the regional level involves businesspeople and government officials. Entrepreneurs seek to secure projects and business permits, while officials aim to obtain positions and power within the government under the regional head's authority. Similarly, officials with ties to the regional head—such as heads of government agencies and members of the Regional People's Representative Council—also play roles as both givers and recipients of corrupt funds. Regional heads possess inherent resources and control over the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget, which they leverage to grant permits and allocate projects to business entities. However, these permits and project assignments are not awarded freely; they come with financial kickbacks, either received directly by the regional head or funneled through intermediaries. The first layer of the corruption network consists of individuals closest to the regional head, who handle illicit financial transactions. These funds are then distributed to additional recipients, such as regional parliament members, political figures, and social organizations, forming the outermost layer of the corruption network.

Although businesspeople and officials exist outside the direct structure of collective corruption involving regional heads, their influence is substantial in shaping policies. Their financial and political interests often precede the needs of voters who initially empowered the

regional head. From a power structure perspective, William Domhoff's analysis illustrates how business elites, corporations, and power groups manipulate government institutions to serve their interests. The external network of collective corruption reinforces this dynamic, as regional heads become dependent on financial contributions from business elites and political actors, further entrenching corrupt practices within the political system. Forms of collective corruption can be seen briefly in the following Table 2.

Table 2. Collective Corruption by Regional Heads in Indonesia 2005-2023

No.	Giver Corruption Funds	Intermediary Recipient of Corruption	Program which is Corrupted	Compensation for Corruption	Distribution of Corruption Proceeds
1	Businessmen 35 cases	Direct approve 73 cases	Project License	Project permits	Colleague
2	Official 24 cases	Through the staff 6 cases	Project quota	Project allocations	Family
3	Project Management APBD 22 cases	Through the official 19 cases	Business License	Provision of jobs	Corporate
4	Colleague 8 cases	Through the family 2 cases	Job gift	The career path for officials	Official
5	Wild levy 4 cases		Career path	The ratification of Regional Regulations	Sport club
6	Other 7 cases		APBD legalization		

Source: Hidayaturrahman et al., 2024

Collective Corruption of the New Oligarchy Model at the Local Level

Empirically, collective corruption is a recurring action that occurs and has a pattern that people in the organization routinely carry out. Jetta Frost and Sarah Tischer repeatedly convey several things that are thought to cause collective corruption. According to Frost and Tischer, repeated collective corruption occurs due to a lack of control over policymakers who have authority and power; besides that, there is the power to influence parties in power or subordinates to accept acts of corruption carried out by individuals who have power. Theoretically, analyzing the collective corruption of regional heads is a power elite, too. The power is in the hands of the elite, which are regional authorities, business people, and officials. According to Janine Wedel, the power elite theory allows for regular use of influence to avoid public accounting, is controlled by connected networks, and moves outside the official structure. The elites with influence have a unique way of organizing themselves and wielding power that allows them to avoid public accountability, a key characteristic of a democratic society. To better understand how these new elites are structured, examining how they are organized is important. Through case studies, it becomes clear that these influence elites operate through hierarchies and networks. They serve as connectors to coordinate influence from multiple positions inside and outside official structures. Their adaptable and multi-faceted approach to organizing challenges traditional elite theory and raises important questions about their impact on a democratic society (Wedel, 2017).

In Table 3, we can find the research contribution to the research that has been done related to the topic of collective corruption. The contribution of this research can be seen in number 20.

Table 3. The Significant Contribution of This Research

No.	Topic	Focus	Research by
1	Public officials become actors of collective corruption.	The power possessed makes the acts of corruption continue to take place.	Palmer, 2008
2	Public officials become actors of collective corruption.	Collective corruption continues to be carried out due to a lack of public oversight.	Ceva & Ferretti, 2017
3	Collective corruption actors.	Private companies and bureaucracies become collective actors of corruption.	Yu et al., 2018
4	Collective corruption actors.	Political actors become actors of collective corruption.	Heydari, 2024
5	Collective corruption actors.	At the executive level and legislative level	Heywood, 1997
6	Collective corruption actors.	Actors try to institutionalize their corrupt actions.	Gerring & Thacker, 2004
7	Collective corruption actors.	The private sector is involved as an actor in collective corruption.	Aven & Iorio, 2023
8	Collective corruption actors.	Large-scale companies become actors of collective corruption.	Luna-Pla & Nicolás-Carlock, 2020
9	Collective corruption actors spread corruption.	Collective corruption is accepted consciously or because other parties force it.	Smith-Crowe & Warren, 2014
10	Corrupt practices occur over a long period.	The efforts of the ruling government to reveal to the public	Pereyra, 2019
11	The spread of collective corruption.	Not only at the central level but also at the regional and local levels	Huang & Yuan, 2021
12	Collective corruption practices.	Evenly at all levels of government	Igiebor, 2019
13	Collective corruption processes and practices.	Over a long period and is carried out systematically	Carson & Prado, 2016
14	Causes of collective corruption.	A social environment that supports collective corruption practices	Persson & Teorell, 2012
15	Causes of collective corruption.	Weak public awareness and systematic efforts made by actors	Kerrigan, 2020
16	The impact of collective corruption.	Causing poor public services	Rahman, 2018
17	The impact of collective corruption.	Collective corruption causes public unrest.	Saad-Filho & Boffo, 2021
18	The impact of collective corruption.	Citizens are apathetic and cynical about the political process.	Neshkova & Kalesnikaite, 2019
19	The impact of collective corruption.	Making development spending costs increasingly expensive.	Lehne et al., 2018
20	Collective corruption actor-network.	Regional heads become collective corruption actors who build internal and external networks to perpetuate power and economic gain.	Hidayaturrahman et al., 2024

Source: Hidayaturrahman et al, 2024

The corruption involving regional heads in Indonesia follows a collective corruption network model that includes regional heads who hold the highest power in their jurisdiction and high-ranking regional officials, state civil servants, businesspeople, and even the families of regional heads. Although these corrupt practices occur outside the formal government system, they exploit government programs and resources for personal gain. The existing system, which includes layered supervision, is designed to prevent corruption. However, corrupt actors manipulate it by concealing illicit activities and restricting access to incriminating information. This effort aims to preserve the politician's public image, ensuring continued support from the

people and maintaining their hold on power. Maintaining a positive image is crucial for political survival, as public perception influences electoral success and legitimacy.

Politicians may respond differently when dealing with political scandals depending on whether the scandal involves members of their party or an opposing party. However, research suggests that there is no significant difference in how politicians perceive the impact of scandals on their party's local reputation. In cases where a scandal has national repercussions, politicians tend to downplay its effects at the local level. This strategy suggests that politicians attempt to mitigate the damage to their party's reputation by shifting the public's focus to national politics rather than allowing the scandal to affect their standing within local communities. (Schönhage & Geys, 2021).

Data from 100 corruption cases involving regional heads indicates that corrupt funds were primarily received directly, without the involvement of intermediaries. However, in cases where a third party was used, they were typically part of the regional head's inner circle, such as family members, staff, or government officials under their authority. This pattern of collective corruption follows a structured network model specifically designed to circumvent existing oversight mechanisms and evade detection by law enforcement. Corrupt actors strategically exploit loopholes in the system to facilitate illicit financial transactions while minimizing the risk of exposure. However, over time, this model has become a subject of study for law enforcement officials, enabling them to identify and dismantle these corruption networks. As a result, even when regional heads execute corrupt schemes meticulously, law enforcement agencies can increasingly uncover and prosecute collective corruption practices. It demonstrates an evolving anti-corruption strategy to disrupt entrenched political corruption networks and hold perpetrators accountable.

The corruption network of regional heads in Indonesia, which is carried out by regional heads as political actors, creates a political-economic oligarchy at the local level. This model of collective corruption network by regional heads is a continuation of the political-economic oligarchy that has occurred at the central level. Vedi R. Hadiz and Richard Robison refer to oligarchy as the arrangement of power in Indonesia (Hadiz & Robison, 2014) in a democratic political system (Winters, 2014). Direct democracy in Indonesia after the New Order, in the reform era, also allowed for the emergence of oligarchy (Ford & Pepinsky, 2014). Democracy in the reform era of direct democracy in Indonesia is more directed toward the practice of oligarchic democracy (Fukuoka, 2013). The direct elections in Indonesia strengthen the existence of an oligarchy (Mietzner, 2010). The oligarchy has been able to direct the course of legislative elections in Indonesia (Tambunan, 2023). The oligarchy that controls the government and legislature creates political compromises to pass policies that favor the oligarchy (Asrinaldi et al., 2021). There is competition between political parties and many groups in controlling the oligarchy (Mietzner, 2014). Oligarchy spreads to various regions in Indonesia (Haryanto & Mahsun, 2024). The oligarchy network in Indonesia is operated by a democratic process (Damanik et al., 2025). The oligarchy's power has also entered regional head elections in Indonesia (Hidayaturrahman et al., 2020).

As political actors, regional heads in Indonesia establish collective corruption networks while simultaneously emerging as new oligarchic forces at the local level. These regional leaders control corruption networks within their administration and among external parties with vested interests in regional governance, such as those seeking business licenses and government contracts. This oligarchic power is sustained through bribery, where funds are extracted from businesspeople and other economic stakeholders. The illicit proceeds are then strategically redistributed to maintain political dominance, including securing popular support and reinforcing alliances with influential groups. In doing so, regional heads consolidate their control over local governance, ensuring the continuation of their political and economic influence despite legal and institutional safeguards.

This study also contributes to previous studies that discuss economic oligarchy that has penetrated the regions, not only in the center of power. It occurs through direct regional head elections that allow regional heads elected through direct regional head elections to receive power in the form of a mandate from the people. With this mandate, regional heads can regulate regional finances and business permits. In this study, this power is used by regional heads to collect "dirty money" in the form of corruption obtained from parties who have an interest in

their power, such as businessmen and officials under their authority. Furthermore, regional heads carry out this collective corruption by using close people and subordinates to collect funds from corruption from outside parties. Figure 3 can clearly explain the model of collective corruption of regional heads in Indonesia.

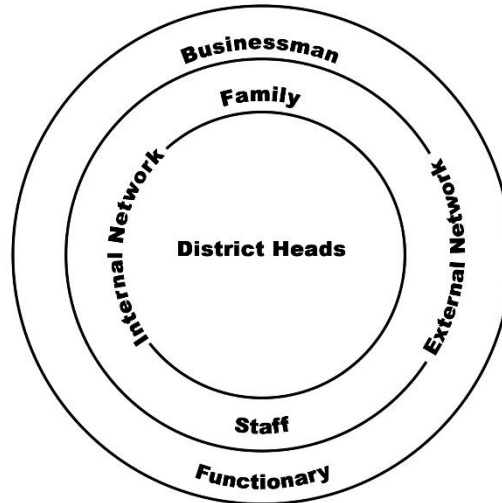


Figure 3. Collective Corruption Model of Regional Head in Indonesia

Source: Hidayaturrahman et al., 2024

CONCLUSION

The collective corruption involving regional heads in Indonesia operates through well-structured internal and external networks. The internal network consists of individuals closely associated with the regional head, including family members (such as spouses, children, and parents), staff, and subordinates within the local government. These actors play crucial roles in receiving, managing, and distributing illicit funds acquired through corrupt practices. Meanwhile, the external network comprises businesspeople and government officials who provide financial support in exchange for favorable access to government policies, permits, and project allocations. Although these actors may not be directly affiliated with the regional head, they benefit from corruption through preferential treatment in public procurement and regulatory advantages. Despite the rising number of regional heads implicated in corruption cases, this has not significantly deterred others from engaging in similar activities. Instead, regional leaders have adapted by adopting more sophisticated strategies to evade legal scrutiny and maintain control. This study identifies a distinct model of collective corruption wherein regional heads form and sustain power through coordinated networks designed to conceal corrupt behavior. A significant finding of this research is the emergence of a new form of local oligarchy, characterized by the collusion between political elites and business actors. This dynamic has become increasingly pronounced since the introduction of direct regional elections in 2005 and continued through 2023. The study offers critical policy recommendations for strengthening anti-corruption efforts, including enhanced oversight, greater transparency, and improved law enforcement mechanisms targeting regional governance. Moreover, this research lays the groundwork for future investigations into the financial networks underpinning regional head corruption. A more comprehensive exploration of the flow and laundering of illicit funds could yield deeper insights into the systemic and institutional dimensions of political corruption in Indonesia, thereby informing more effective and targeted anti-corruption strategies.

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