

Local Power Dynamics and Procurement Politics in Bima-Dompu: Uncovering Embedded Structural Corruption

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Received: date; Accepted: date; Published: date

Abstract: *This study aims to reveal the latent structure of systemic corruption in public procurement in Bima City, Bima Regency, and Dompu Regency, reflecting a pathological convergence of state capture, neopatrimonialism, and crony capitalism. Employing a critical qualitative method with an intrinsic case study design, it integrates Foucault's governmentality, institutional corruption theory, and Baudrillard's simulacra to explain how procurement mechanisms shift from administrative tools into instruments of predatory power consolidation. Data were collected through elite interviews, legal and audit document analysis, and participatory observation, and were examined using critical discourse analysis within abductive logic. The findings show that procurement processes are hijacked through orchestrated collusion, fabricated documents, and bureaucratic manipulation legitimized by pseudo-legality. Bima City exhibits vertical rent-seeking networks; Bima Regency forms an organized project cartel, while Dompu demonstrates acute institutional decay through elite protection pacts. The study concludes that procurement corruption has evolved into an institutionalized governing regime that undermines democratic legitimacy, distorts bureaucratic ethics, and threatens the sustainability of local public governance.*

Keywords: Systemic Corruption; Public Procurement; State Capture.

1. Introduction

In the local political landscape of Bima Regency, Bima City, and Dompu Regency, the public procurement system has evolved into an arena of power domination characterized by highly manipulative budgetary politics (Baker, 2005); (Mas & Savirani, 2011); (Pertwi et al., 2021). Beneath the rhetoric of regional autonomy and fiscal decentralization, which were initially envisioned to promote public welfare through efficient resource allocation, lies a configuration of power that fosters a mutualistic symbiosis among political elites, bureaucratic actors, and local business networks (Cahyono, 2017); (Riyadi, 2020). This condition demonstrates acute symptoms of structural corruption that is no longer incidental but institutionalized within the operational logic of local governance (Ablo et al., 2019); (Kim, 2023).

A central characteristic of this structural corruption is the emergence of state capture, whereby oligarchic actors subtly yet systematically hijack state institutions (Liu & Mikesell, 2014); (C et al., 2025). In Dompu, for instance, the budgeting process often becomes an entry point for political elites to accommodate the interests of business partners by inserting fictitious or predetermined projects. This process involves the formation of procurement cartels controlled by individuals close to the regional head or legislators, in which service providers are selected not on the basis of merit but on political proximity and patron client loyalty (Jancsics, 2013); (Mchopa et al., 2015); (Williams et al., 2017).

Such dynamics give rise to a configuration of kleptocracy, whereby public resources are appropriated by ruling elites for private wealth accumulation (Sorola et al., 2024); (Miller & Miller, 2024). Evidence from investigations conducted by the Corruption Eradication Commission and rulings of the anti corruption court indicates that several regional leaders in these areas have been implicated in procurement scandals involving shell companies or third party intermediaries. These schemes were used to seize strategic projects ranging from road construction to the procurement of medical equipment (Hessami, 2013); (Nicaise & Nicaise, 2019); (Eckersley et al., 2023). This situation is further exacerbated by weak internal and external oversight, as well as ineffective local legislatures that, rather than acting as mechanisms of checks and balances, become co opted into project sharing arrangements (Jam et al., 2025).

Rent seeking practices emerge when political and bureaucratic actors no longer prioritize public service but instead manipulate policies to extract economic rents from procurement projects. This tendency is evident in the formulation of technical regulations that are deliberately tailored to benefit specific groups (Haan, 2020); (Irasema, 2022);. ocal regulations are frequently drafted in ambiguous terms to allow flexible interpretation

during the tendering process, thereby creating opportunities for collusion and nepotism (Barker et al., 1986);(Irawan, 2015);(Pertwi et al., 2021).

Furthermore, patrimonialism remains a dominant feature of local political culture, in which power is exercised through personal networks rather than impersonal, rule based systems. Regional leaders act as paternalistic figures who allocate projects to political cronies as rewards or as tools for consolidating power ahead of elections. This pattern is reflected in the appointment of structural officials in key technical agencies, such as the Public Works Office and the Investment and Licensing Office, both of which play central roles in managing physical development projects (Romayah et al., 2014); (Juliarso, 2019).

The consequences of cronyism include the erosion of meritocracy, declining project quality, and the deterioration of budgetary efficiency and effectiveness. Projects tend to be over budget yet low in quality, carried out by contractors who lack competence but maintain close ties with political elites. This condition directly affects public satisfaction with government services, increases distrust toward state institutions, and contributes to lower regional integrity indices (Surdin, 2016); (Muliawaty & Hendryawan, 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, these dynamics affirm the neo patrimonialism framework described by Magam and Wilson, in which the boundaries between the public and private spheres become blurred and the state is transformed into a vehicle for distributing private gains among elites. In this context, procurement systems function not as administrative instruments for achieving development objectives but as mechanisms of political transaction and local power reproduction.

From a legal standpoint, as noted by Maryanto, ambiguity between administrative and criminal sanctions in procurement regulations, such as Presidential Regulation No. 12 of 2021 and Law No. 1 of 2004 on State Treasury, exacerbates the

problem. When legal norms lack clarity, law enforcement agencies acquire broad discretionary authority that can be exploited for political purposes, including the criminalization of opponents or the protection of corrupt allies.

Empirical evidence from procurement corruption reports indicates that more than 70 percent of regional corruption cases originate in the procurement sector. In Bima City, common schemes include pre arranged tender winners, falsification of administrative documents, and manipulation of unit prices in contract documentation. Meanwhile, oversight institutions such as the Inspectorate and the Regional House of Representatives are often weak or entangled in these collusive practices.

Comprehensive restructuring of the procurement system is therefore essential at the regulatory, institutional, and cultural levels. Systemic reform should not focus solely on technical procedures but must also aim to transform political values from patronage oriented practices toward integrity based governance. Measures such as digital transparency, civil society participation, and whistleblower protection constitute critical entry points for meaningful structural change.

The urgency of this research lies in the complex dynamics of local power and budgetary politics in Bima and Dompu, which structurally create fertile conditions for corruption in public procurement. Rather than enhancing public service delivery under fiscal decentralization, the prevailing outcome is the consolidation of state capture, whereby local government institutions are appropriated by private interests through elite collusion among politicians, bureaucrats, and business cronies. These patterns reflect a chronic manifestation of kleptocracy, in which state apparatuses are transformed into predatory actors that systematically extract public resources for personal gain. This phenomenon represents not merely a moral or bureaucratic deviation but a concrete expression of institutional failure and the absence of effective mechanisms for controlling power relations, accountability, and transparency.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach to rent seeking, patrimonialism, and cronyism within the framework of structural corruption embedded in local budgetary politics and procurement systems. Unlike previous studies that separate political analysis from the technical domain of procurement, this research connects power relations with the logic of rent extraction within procurement arenas. It demonstrates how local patron client networks hijack budgetary mechanisms through selective allocation strategies and politically motivated project distribution. By employing neo patrimonialism and institutional corruption theory, this study offers a new theoretical and empirical lens for understanding corruption not merely as a series of procedural violations, but as a socio political system that is constructed, reproduced, and sustained by local elites within oligarchic and exploitative power relations.

2. Result

Rent-Seeking Politics in Regional Budget Arenas

The phenomenon of rent-seeking in the public procurement systems of three regions in West Nusa Tenggara Bima City, Bima Regency, and Dompu Regency does not merely indicate administrative deviation but reflects a pathological configuration of power that has become systemically institutionalized. In this context, corruption does not occur in an institutional vacuum; rather, it is the outcome of long-standing coalitions involving political actors, technical bureaucracies, local business networks, and compromised law enforcement institutions. Rent-seeking has transformed into an informal mode of governance that co-opts public procurement mechanisms to serve elite interests rather than the public good (Firmansyah et al, 2025).

One of the most prominent cases affirming this analysis is the conviction of Muhammad Lutfi, former Mayor of Bima (2018–2023). He was proven to have engaged in corruption in multiple government procurement projects, accepted illicit gratuities

amounting to billions of rupiah, and orchestrated the distribution of rents by using bureaucratic apparatuses as oligarchic instruments. This case illustrates how rent-seeking practices have fused entirely with the local power infrastructure, where Lutfi functioned not only as a perpetrator but also as the principal architect of an integrated rent-distribution system embedded within regional institutions,

Lutfi's *modus operandi* demonstrates the systemic operation of hierarchical and vertically structured rent-seeking logic. He exploited his position to pre-arrange project winners even before tenders were formally announced. Manipulative actions such as securing technical documents from the Public Works Office (PUPR) and the Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD), designing tender winner simulations, and organizing fee distribution to internal government networks became routine practices within the patronage-based local power scheme. In this arrangement, bureaucracy ceased to function as a guardian of procedure and instead served as a loyal operator of the political will above it.

The forms of corruption identified in this case include criminal conspiracy, abuse of authority, and the acceptance of unlawful monetary and material gratification from project contractors. According to the indictment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), Lutfi violated Article 12 letter (i) and/or Article 12B of Law No. 31/1999 on the Eradication of Corruption Crime, as amended by Law No. 20/2001. The financial loss to the state was substantial, with restitution of Rp1.92 billion demanded.

Legally, Lutfi is positioned not merely as an individual offender but as a manifestation of structural corruption. He formed a core team responsible for gathering project information, preparing tender simulations, and controlling monetary flows from private actors into bureaucratic channels. In other words, he designed a pseudo-procurement system deliberately engineered to reinforce local oligarchic interests

through the systematic disregard of principles of fairness, accountability, and transparency.

The court verdict confirmed the existence of this corruption network. The Corruption Court in Mataram sentenced Lutfi to seven years in prison and imposed a fine of Rp250 million, with an additional six months' imprisonment if unpaid. He was also ordered to reimburse state losses, with the provision that his assets be seized and auctioned if he failed to comply. Although symbolically significant, this verdict also reveals the entrenched and complex nature of corruption within local governance systems.

Beyond legal violations, Lutfi's case exposes the involvement of legislative bodies in rent-seeking practices. Legislative intervention in the planning and approval of the Regional Budget (APBD) highlights a predatory consensus between the executive and legislative branches, transforming fiscal documents into rent-distribution arenas. Procurement projects become tools for political consolidation, while budget planning serves as a medium for legitimizing group interests rather than reflecting societal needs.

From a theoretical perspective, this condition is aligned with Jean Baudrillard's concept of "simulacra," wherein the formal appearance of institutional procedures becomes a hollow image masking the informal power dynamics operating behind the scenes. The procurement system in Bima City appears to follow administrative steps tendering, announcements, and evaluations yet these stages are controlled by closed and exclusive power relations. The substantive purpose of procurement as a development instrument is replaced by the logic of rent accumulation and political loyalty transactions.

At this juncture, local democracy experiences structural hijacking. Development projects intended for welfare distribution are reduced to political commodities. Civil society, which should play a monitoring role, is marginalized due to limited information

access and weak legal protection. Within entrenched patronage systems, power not only shapes policies but also creates destructive incentives that reproduce itself through project rents and electoral concessions.

In Bima Regency, rent-seeking practices consolidate through a model of structural kleptocracy. The procurement of a Rp3.9-billion vessel by the Transportation Office which resulted in state losses of Rp777 million provides concrete evidence of how bureaucratic structures are reduced to machines of rent accumulation. Actors not only manipulated tenders but also constructed institutional shields against internal audits, reinforcing the notion that oversight functions have become ritualistic rather than substantive.

The relationship between political authority and the business sector forms a mutualistic symbiosis through cronyism and socially embedded distribution of projects. Contractor selection is determined by kinship and loyalty networks rather than by technical competence. Procurement thus becomes an arena of rent reproduction and a mechanism of political control through selective concessions to cronies.

Within a state-capture analytical framework, procurement institutions in Bima Regency have lost their epistemic autonomy. Institutional functions such as local government agencies (SKPD), the Procurement Service Unit (ULP), and the Inspectorate no longer operate as normative entities safeguarding accountability but as procedural legitimizers of pre-engineered rents. Even LPSE and SPSE symbols of transparency are manipulated to create a veneer of accountability.

Patrimonialism permeating local democracy in Bima Regency demonstrates the conversion of electoral authority into a mechanism for distributing economic rents. Public offices are no longer associated with service but with access to budgetary resources. Regional heads, structural officials, and political campaign teams form a distributive configuration of power operating within a closed ecosystem. Horticulture and social

assistance projects are not immune to rent manipulation, reinforcing the argument that administrative functions have been supplanted by the logic of accumulation

The persistent repetition of corruption schemes, price mark-ups, document falsification, fee sharing indicates not only system leakage but a failure of bureaucratic reform. This affirms the neo-institutionalist argument on institutional isomorphism in corruption, wherein adaptation to legal pressures generates more sophisticated and institutionalized forms of wrongdoing.

Dompu Regency presents the most complex variant of rent-seeking in procurement, characterized by the convergence of bureaucratic, private, and law enforcement powers into a single network of structural impunity. Cases such as fictitious receipts at the Transportation Office, vessel tender manipulation at the Marine and Fisheries Office, and metrology equipment procurement at the Industry and Trade Office highlight that rent practices are not isolated actions but strategies of power reproduction permeating all governance dimensions.

Syarifudin, former Transportation Office head, not only abused administrative authority but also created validation spaces for fictitious procurement. Violations occurred not merely at the project execution level but were embedded within planning and reporting systems. In Foucauldian terms, this represents a form of “deviant governmentality,” where public administration techniques are hijacked for private interests through state apparatuses.

Rent domination is also evident in the procurement of Dompu’s Community Health Center, where the Commitment-Making Officer and contractors orchestrated document manipulation and budget engineering. This symbiosis transcends conventional gratification and evolves into a business-political ecosystem detached from accountability logic. Patronage becomes the primary mechanism for selecting project partners, with political intimacy outweighing principles of open competition.

The District Attorney's Office in Dompu publicly regarded as "performing" ironically reflects a paradox of law enforcement: selective prosecution, minimal efforts to expose higher-level actors, and lack of transparency. This structure of impunity signals institutional decay, wherein oversight functions collapse due to systemic co-optation. When oversight is institutionalized to facilitate political compromise, accountability becomes a simulation devoid of deterrent effect.

A crucial dimension in Dompu's rent-seeking ecology is the involvement of local business actors affiliated with government officials. These relations surpass individual transactions and evolve into chronic structures of crony capitalism; wherein capital accumulation occurs not through market efficiency but through power networks. Public procurement becomes a legal vehicle for transferring public resources to private actors within closed networks.

Delayed law enforcement such as the 2006 vessel procurement case executed only in 2020 demonstrates weak tracking systems and the absence of political will. The delay stems not from case complexity but from political intervention and judicial collusion. Consequently, the legal system not only fails but reinforces cycles of impunity.

Across the three regions, similar structural patterns of rent-seeking emerge, although operational expressions differ. Bima City represents a model of single-actor domination orchestrating a vertically integrated rent system. Bima Regency exhibits a kleptocratic configuration diffused within bureaucratic–legislative networks with recurring schemes. Dompu presents a convergence of rent-seeking and impunity in which all state instruments serve as protective mechanisms for rent extraction.

Rent-seeking in procurement systems has evolved into a new form of informal power embedded within formal instruments. Budget politics, project tendering, internal auditing, and external oversight are all operated through simulacra that project accountability while perpetuating predatory power. Within such a configuration, citizens

lose meaningful participatory space, and local democracy is reduced to an electoral procedure devoid of ethical substance (Munandar et al., 2023).

Cronyism and Procurement Cartels

Cronyism and procurement cartels function not merely as instruments of power exchange, but as mechanisms for articulating oligarchic domination that hijack democratic institutional systems through bureaucratic patronage and procedural co-optation. Within this configuration, procurement no longer operates as a technocratic mechanism grounded in efficiency and transparency. Instead, it has transformed into an arena of structural domination that blurs the boundaries between formal authority and informal networks.

In the case of Bima City, the corruption scheme involving Muhammad Lutfi illustrates a deeply embedded form of crony state relations. He did not act as an isolated perpetrator but rather as the architect of a pseudo procurement system operated through informal power networks involving family members, technical bureaucrats, and politically affiliated contractors. This condition reflects the logic of neo patrimonialism, in which public office and state resources are controlled by elites who behave more as political entrepreneurs than as public administrators. Lutfi orchestrated predetermined procurement outcomes prior to the formal bidding process, a practice consistent with *ex ante* collusion in political economy, referring to pre arranged manipulations that undermine competitive market mechanisms.

In Bima Regency, procurement cartels emerge in a more complex form through systematic state capture. The ship procurement project and the public street lighting housing project demonstrate the erosion of institutional autonomy, with state agencies repurposed to serve the interests of political cronies. In this context, relationships between political actors and contractors are no longer merely transactional but have

become institutionalized and mutualistic, forming a sustained rent seeking structure. From a rentier state perspective, public institutions do not merely fail to prevent corruption but actively generate rent economies by allocating projects designed not for public benefit but for reinforcing local oligarchic power through selective contract distribution.

Cronyism in Bima Regency further manifests as entrenched crony capitalism, where contractor selection and bid conditioning are governed by personalistic ties, revealing a structural collapse of meritocratic principles. Horticulture programs, social assistance schemes, and even micro level procurements such as metrology become channels for diffusing the interests of political cronies. This demonstrates that cronyism permeates not only large scale projects but also lower administrative levels, where social connections consistently outweigh technical competence. Such conditions indicate institutional displacement, in which technocratic functions are supplanted by political functions embedded within patron client relations.

In Dompu Regency, procurement cartels operate within an institutional environment characterized by normative collapse. Bureaucratic actors, particularly agency heads, play central roles in constructing rent networks by facilitating fictitious procurement, manipulating receipts, and falsifying accountability documents. From a theoretical standpoint, this represents an advanced form of predatory governance, in which state actors exploit public authority for extractive purposes, producing a regime of informal legality that disguises illegal practices through engineered procedural compliance.

The dominance of informal structures in Dompu's procurement practices also reflects a variant of local oligarchy that is politically inclusive yet economically exclusionary. Political elites monopolize access to public resources and determine which actors may enter rent distribution networks. In cases such as metrology equipment

procurement and community health center construction, contractors were selected not on the basis of technical qualifications but on political loyalty. This pattern aligns with Mancur Olson's conceptualization of the transformation of roving bandits into stationary bandits, whereby elites establish permanent systems of exploitation through state mechanisms.

Across the three regions, cronyism and procurement cartels signal a shift from Weberian bureaucracy toward patrimonial bureaucracy, in which the boundaries between public and private spheres collapse. The deployment of state institutions to serve elite interests resonates with O'Donnell's concept of delegative democracy, wherein democratic mandates are utilized not to strengthen public accountability but to consolidate power through loyalty based arrangements. Consequently, both internal and external oversight mechanisms frequently fail to expose corruption networks involving powerful actors, as these institutions have become integrated into the very oligarchic systems they are intended to monitor.

Baudrillard's notion of simulacra further illuminates procurement practices in these regions. Formal procedures such as open bidding, electronic procurement documentation, and audit mechanisms function largely as symbolic representations of governance that conceal pre engineered fraudulent outcomes. While administrative processes appear orderly on the surface, substantive results are predetermined through informal alliances between political and business elites. What emerges, therefore, is not bureaucratic dysfunction but a pathological function of bureaucracy repurposed as a rent extraction apparatus.

As political elites in Bima City, Bima Regency, and Dompu instrumentalize procurement mechanisms for power consolidation, public procurement becomes a means of producing political authority. Government projects no longer generate legitimacy through public benefit but through the distribution of resources to cronies and

political allies. This relationship produces not only oligarchic but also recursive power structures, in which each budget cycle reinforces pre-existing rent arrangements. Even when key actors are prosecuted, similar patterns reappear through different individuals embedded within the same networks. This reflects a form of institutional isomorphism in power pathologies, whereby dysfunctional systems reproduce their logic through structural continuity.

At the macro level, the three regions exhibit a coherent pattern in which cronyism and procurement cartels constitute the backbone of local oligarchic consolidation. Weak civil society capacity and the underperformance of local media oversight create an environment with minimal effective scrutiny, enabling the persistence of structural impunity. Legal violations become strategic instruments rather than anomalies. Within a broader theoretical framework, this phenomenon exemplifies local illiberal democracy, in which electoral procedures function as rituals of legitimacy for actors who already dominate regional political economic structures through control over public procurement institutions (Maulani, 2020).

3. Conclusion

The findings indicate that the corruption practices observed are not merely individual deviations but constitute concrete manifestations of systemic decay shaped by state capture, neo-patrimonialism, and crony capitalism. From a theoretical standpoint, this phenomenon reflects a convergence of Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, theories of patrimonial democracy, and the elite circulation perspectives of Mosca and Pareto, all of which illuminate the dominance of oligarchic power within a dysfunctional configuration of local democracy. In practice, procurement processes are no longer grounded in principles of efficiency and accountability. Instead,

they are governed by informal patron client relations, with technical bureaucracies transformed into instruments for legitimizing political rent extraction.

Procurement mechanisms such as the Electronic Procurement Service and the Electronic Procurement System function merely as procedural simulacra, as dominant actors pre engineer project outcomes through interventions in planning processes, document preparation, and the distribution of illicit fees within elite networks. The inability of both internal and external oversight bodies to dismantle these networks reveals a condition of severe institutional decay, compounded by structural impunity that effectively eliminates deterrence. Furthermore, budget legislation processes have been commodified as instruments of electoral consolidation through oligarchic negotiation among political elites. In this context, corruption no longer constitutes a legal aberration but has evolved into an institutionalized infrastructure of local politics, in which the logic of predatory power erodes democratic legitimacy and systematically undermines the ethical foundations of governance.

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