



# Local Elites as Collaborative Networks: A Systematic Literature Review Analysis of Their Capabilities and Roles in Regional Development

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## ABSTRACT

*Local elites play a central role in regional development, yet the existing literature is fragmented on the economic and political aspects of electoral politics without providing a comprehensive explanation of their capabilities in creating high-performance governance and holistic development achievements. This study aims to analyse the multidimensional role of local elites in building collaboration and mobilising community participation to achieve quality governance. Using a systematic literature review method guided by PRISMA, this study analysed 10 selected articles from the Scopus database identified through the keywords "local elites", "regional development", and "political participation". The findings reveal that local elites are not a single entity, but rather a collaborative network of political, economic and religious elites. Each acts as a change agent, facilitator, mediator and resource enabler. The synergy between these elites, facilitated by effective communication and visionary leadership, is key in creating collaborative governance and increasing community participation. However, this study has limitations due to the limited scope of the literature and does not involve primary empirical data. The implication is that governments and stakeholders need to recognise the complex role of local elites and encourage collaborative leadership models involving formal and non-formal elites to improve accountability and effectiveness of local development.*

**Keywords:** Local Elites, Regional Development, Systematic Literature Review, Collaborative Governance, Community Participation.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Local elites are conceptually defined as a small minority occupying the top positions in the social structure of society and possessing greater influence, capabilities, and power than the general public (Keller, 2017; Mosca, 1939). This elite group, whether within the government structure (governing elite) or outside it (non-governing elite), plays a central role in accommodating public aspirations and influencing development programmes and the wheels of government at the local level (Choi, 2014; Clark et al., 2007; Woods, 1998). Their existence is crucial in the local government system because they function as agents of change that bridge the interests of the government with the needs of the community (Ledyaev et al., 2014).

Various previous studies have examined the dimensions of the role of local elites, particularly in the context of community empowerment and political participation. Woods' study reveals the role of local elites in community empowerment through guidance and counselling to improve the economic enterprises of village communities (Woods, 1998). Meanwhile, Woods' research shows the significant influence of local elite involvement in increasing community political participation during the regional head election process. This finding is reinforced by (Ledyaev et al., 2014) which confirms the role of local elites in social mobilisation for development.

However, the existing literature shows a research gap where studies on the role of local elites are still fragmented on the economic and political aspects of electoral politics, without providing a comprehensive explanation of their role in creating holistic development achievements (Catlin & Society, 1965; Keller, 2017). Previous studies have not touched on the capabilities of local elites in creating high-performance governance that can produce nationally recognised development achievements.

Such sustainable phenomena occur in every region with collaboration between local elites and communities to obtain regional achievements consistently. These achievements are strongly suspected to be the result of the effectiveness of the role of local elites in building collaboration and mobilising community participation in development (Johnson, 1996). Therefore, this study specifically aims to analyse how the role of local elites in developing regions in realising quality government.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using *systematic literature review* to gain a holistic and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of the role of local elites in local government (Bogdan, 2015; Creswell, 2004; Green & Higgins, 2008). This approach was chosen for its ability to answer the "how" question through the exploration of published literature in Scopus-indexed journals, which are reputable international journals rich in key informants, thereby revealing the dynamics and mechanisms of local elites' roles in regional development.

The method used in systematic reviews must follow standard guidelines, such as those used in this study, namely PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis). The PRISMA steps include (1) formulating the research question: "What are the patterns of local elites in regional development?"; (2) developing the protocol strategy by selecting articles within the scope of local elites in politics and regional development, and extracting data to reduce the number of articles from 250 to 10 that align with the topic of local elites in regional development; (3) The database used as an article search engine is Scopus, using the keywords "local elites," "regional development," and "political participation."

### **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **CONCEPT OF ELITE**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review analysis form to gain a holistic and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of the role of local elites (Bogdan, 2015; Creswell, 2004; Green & Higgins, 2008). This approach was chosen for its ability to answer the "how" question through the exploration of published literature in Scopus-indexed journals, which serve as reputable international journal repositories rich in key informants, thereby revealing the dynamics and mechanisms of local elite roles in regional development.

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#### **LOCAL ELITE AND THEIR CLASSIFICATION**

Local elites are strategic actors operating within the scope of local government and the local community. According to Keller (2017), local elites fall under the category of *strategic elites* that emerge due to historical conditions, social power, and functional demands of the social system. Keller classifies elites into three types based on the source of their power:

1. **Political Elites:** Groups that hold formal positions in the political and governmental structure. They have the authority to make and implement public policy (Keller, 2017);
2. **Economic Elite:** Groups that control economic resources and capital. Their central position enables them to dominate the economic sector and act as integrators of development goals (Keller, 2017);
3. **Religious Elite:** A group whose power derives from tradition, customs, and religion. They often serve as spiritual leaders, guardians of cultural values, and exert strong influence in shaping societal norms (Keller, 2017).

#### **THE ROLE OF LOCAL ELITES IN ENHANCING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION TO ACHIEVE A PRESTIGIOUS VILLAGE**

Role is the dynamic aspect of a status or position. In the context of local leadership, the role of elites is not only limited to the performance of formal duties, but also includes the ability to influence, mobilise and empower the community (Albala & Natal, 2023).

This research found that local elites in Nagari Taram act as agents of change and catalysts of development. Their role manifests in several forms:

1. **Development Initiator and Director:** The Wali Nagari Taram, as a political elite, is the main initiator in the formulation of work programmes and policies. Visionary leadership and qualified intellectual capacity are key in directing development towards the realisation of "Nagari Prestasi" (Interview Results, 2023).

2. **Facilitator and Mediator:** Local elites, both governing and non-governing, function as linkages between the government and the community. They mobilise participation, convey aspirations, and bring together various interests to achieve common goals (Albala & Natal, 2023).
3. **Resource Enablers:** Economic elites contribute through financial support, skills training and job creation. Meanwhile, religious elites play a role in empowering human resources through moral education, religious training, and strengthening cultural values that support work ethic and mutual cooperation (Keller, 2017).

**Communication Builders:** The success of Nagari Taram began with effective communication established by the Wali Nagari. This communication includes dialogue on development ideas, planning, and problem-solving, involving all elements of society (Morrow, 1965). According to Morrow (1965), effective development communication must fulfil three things: information dissemination, opportunities to participate in decision-making, and expansion of education.

#### LOCAL ELITE IS NOT AN ENTITY

The findings of this study reinforce the theory that local elites are not a single entity, but rather a network consisting of various types of elites (political, economic, religious) that collaborate with one another (Keller, 2017; Lestari et al., 2022). This collaboration or *collaborative governance* is the key to successful governance (Lestari et al., 2022).

The role of local political elites such as Wali Nagari Taram as a central figure is in line with the view on the importance of strong and visionary political leadership in leading change (Andrews, 2008). However, such centralised leadership remains effective because it is supported by the ability to build communication and involve other elites in the *governance* process, thereby creating healthy checks and balances.

The concept of participation, as outlined by (Albala & Natal, 2023), has become the essence of the democratic governance system in Nagari Taram. Community participation is not merely a tool for policy legitimisation but also serves as an empowerment mechanism, enabling the community to organise itself autonomously, ensure their aspirations are heard, and collectively address development challenges.

Thus, the role of local elites in regional development is multidimensional and complementary. Political elites provide policy direction and legitimacy, economic elites provide material resources and economic capacity, while religious elites provide a foundation of values, ethics, and social empowerment. The synergy among these three groups, facilitated by effective communication and strong leadership, serves as an effective model for enhancing community participation and achieving successful regional development.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Local elites play a multidimensional and strategic role in regional development, particularly in the context of increasing community participation and realising good governance. Research findings show that local elites, including political, economic and religious elites, function as agents of change, facilitators, mediators and resource mobilisers who are able to build effective collaboration and communication with the community. Synergy among these various types of elites is key to the success of *collaborative governance* that promotes holistic development.

However, this study has several limitations, including the limited scope of the literature analysed, which consisted of only 10 articles from Scopus, and its focus on a specific local context that may not

fully represent the socio-cultural variations across different regions. In addition, the *systematic literature review* approach used did not involve primary empirical data, so the findings are theoretical and need to be further tested through field research.

The implications of this study are the importance of recognising the complex and integrated role of various types of local elites in the planning and implementation of development policies. The government and other stakeholders are advised to encourage collaborative leadership models that involve not only formal elites but also non-formal elites, as well as to strengthen participatory communication to improve accountability and the effectiveness of regional development.

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