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Impact of class configuration on political participation: Evidence from Gowa Regency, Indonesia

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This study examines political participation in rural areas, emphasizing class configurations shaped by agricultural practices and socio-economic structures. A household survey of 261 respondents was conducted and regression analysis was applied to assess rural class configuration and political participation, using Gowa Regency in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, as the focal area due to its agricultural importance and class complexity. The findings identify six class configurations—Fully-Proletariat-Farmer, Proletariat-Farmer, Semi-Proletariat-Farmer, Petty Commodity Producer, Capitalist-Farmer, and Capitalist-Landlord—based on property ownership, land relations, and employment. The findings demonstrate that landowners and capitalist farmers have greater access to formal political processes, whereas small-scale farmers and landless laborers exhibit lower levels of participation. However, informal participation, such as participation in village meetings, is more prevalent among economically vulnerable groups. Regression analysis reveals that class configuration positively correlates with formal and informal political participation, suggesting that improving socio-economic conditions can enhance civic participation. Education, age, and employment in non-agricultural sectors significantly increase political participation. To strengthen rural political participation, policies should focus on equitable land distribution, expanded political education, inclusive governance, and gender-responsive initiatives. Economic diversification should also be encouraged to reduce dependence on agriculture and increase political participation. Future research should explore long-term class transitions and their implications for democratic participation in rural communities. These efforts can contribute to a more inclusive and participatory rural governance structure.

KEYWORDS

class configuration, class analysis, agrarian class, political participation, participation, rural, Indonesia

1 Introduction

The research examining political participation in rural areas has extended to social capital and self-identification approaches (Campbell, 2013; Hao and Ke, 2024; Pei et al., 2018). However, there remains a lack of knowledge regarding class analysis. This study employs class theory to examine political participation in rural communities, recognizing that ongoing class dynamics significantly shape political participation and decision-making in rural areas (Kaufman, 2019; Song et al., 2022). Furthermore, this study investigates the influence of agricultural class configuration and political participation in rural areas. The influence of class configuration on political participation could be an alternative explanation that is closely related to agricultural dynamics in improving the class welfare of farmers (Sidik and Habibi, 2023; Zhang, 2015; Zhang and Zeng, 2021). This research topic is of utmost importance as it delves into a less-explored aspect of rural political dynamics, offering a fresh perspective and

potential solutions for enhancing democratic engagement in these areas.

The rural environment consists of several social classes – which are then referred to as class configurations – including farmers, agricultural laborers, landowners, and traders (Banerjee, 2009). These classes display significant differences in access to economic resources, education, and political power (Zhang, 2015). For example, farmers frequently encounter restricted resource availability and obstacles in political participation due to their primary focus on agricultural pursuits (Sidik and Habibi, 2023; Zhang, 2015). On the other hand, landowners or traders may have enhanced economic and political benefits, enabling them to engage in local political processes actively and exert significant influence in decision-making (Sidik and Habibi, 2023; Zhang, 2015). Mulyanto (2018) emphasized that these class differences are influenced by historical agricultural patterns, land ownership structures, and government policies, which can either strengthen or reduce social and economic inequalities. Rural classes sometimes reflect discrepancies in the accessibility of economic and political influence, thereby affecting political participation and the distribution of power (Ahlquist, 2017). Furthermore, transformations in the structure of the rural economy in recent years—particularly the shift of some agricultural jobs to non-agricultural ones and the rapid conversion of land to non-agricultural sectors like construction—have affected the political dynamics of the rural areas (Binswanger-Mkhize, 2012; Majumdar, 2020). These adjustments may impact political participation, the balance of power, and class relations in rural areas. However, the global literature has yet to fully address how these class shifts interact with broader socio-economic policies and political reforms, leaving a significant gap in understanding the evolving nature of rural political participation (Kraus, 2015; Levien, 2018).

In Indonesia, studies on rural political economy, especially those employing a class approach, have primarily concentrated on specific areas and have been restricted to describing class configurations. These studies have not examined the impact of these configurations on rural politics. For instance, Habibi (2021) studied solely in the western part of Indonesia, specifically the islands of Java and Sumatra, and was limited to describing the classes. In addition, Ambarwati et al. (2016) have also endeavored to broaden their research scope to include rural areas in Sulawesi, Java, and Sumatra. However, their study solely focuses on elucidating land ownership and class configuration within small-scale food production regions. Furthermore, examining the class approach and its correlation with political participation remains inconclusive, as prior research has solely focused on political participation in rural regions using social capital and self-identification theories.

Given these gaps in the literature, this study addresses the research questions: (1) How do different class configurations in rural areas influence political participation? and (2) What are the mechanisms through which class configuration shape political participation and decision-making processes?

To answer these questions, this study has three primary objectives. First, it aims to analyze the class configurations within rural Indonesia, particularly in eastern Indonesia. This region is a significant contributor to Indonesia's food supply, particularly in terms of rice production, ranking fourth nationally with a production of 4 million tons (Khasanah et al., 2023). Second, it seeks to investigate the impact of these class configuration on political participation. Finally, it aims to explore how changes in agricultural class configurations influence the broader political economy of rural regions. Importantly, this research extends beyond the Indonesian context by situating rural class dynamics within the larger framework of global political economy transformations. Comparative studies in other regions have demonstrated how class restructuring, driven by agrarian transitions and economic liberalization, influences political representation and governance structures (Borras and Franco, 2012; Edelman, 2019). By integrating this perspective, the study contributes to the broader discourse on rural class struggles, democratic participation, and policy-making at both national and international levels.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending class theory to the context of rural political participation, which has been largely overlooked in previous research. By integrating class dynamics into the study of rural political participation, this research offers a novel framework for understanding the intersection between social class and democratic participation. In practical terms, the findings provide insights for policymakers in designing inclusive rural political strategies, ensuring that marginalized groups—such as small-scale farmers and agricultural laborers—are not excluded from decision-making processes.

2 Literature review and conceptual framework

2.1 Class approach in rural areas

Rural communities are commonly perceived as homogenous groups engaged in agricultural activities or as farmers (Li et al., 2019). Recent developments indicate that class differentiation has occurred in rural areas (Bernstein, 2010b, 2017). These findings highlight that a class is determined by its social relations of production, meaning that it can only be identified in relation to other classes (Bernstein, 2010a). The existence of social classes in rural areas is attributed to the expansion of capitalism, which leads to new social relationships and structural positions within these relationships (Zhang, 2015). Therefore, while classes in rural areas may differ from those in urban surroundings (Escher, 2020; Fibæk, 2021), the concept of class remains applicable but with certain modifications to suit the rural situation.

In rural areas, the configuration of social classes can be understood by examining two interconnected processes: the increase and deepening of economic relationships based on the exchange of goods, mainly labor and land, which leads to changes in the ownership of property and the incorporation of traditional producers into the capitalist system, the result being market-dependent, driven by competitive pressures, and the need to increase productivity through technological advancements (Bernstein, 2010a; Brenner, 1976; Harrison, 2023; Wood, 2002). Patnaik (1987) identified three class-based approaches in rural regions. First, a perspective that considers farmers as uniform creatures encountering identical production circumstances and is examined using a production function. Patnaik accurately observes that the uneven allocation of production resources hinders the formation of a uniform peasantry. Second, the approach acknowledges variations within the peasantry, although it neglects to investigate the social dynamics among distinct groups of peasants thoroughly. Third, the comprehension of rural areas necessitates utilizing Marxist class analysis.

The final approach determines that two primary factors define a class: ownership of the means of production and exploitation of labor, and it raises the questions of the third class criteria, which includes individuals who possess enough means of production for their family's livelihood but are not employed or do not employ others. This category is called Petty Commodity Production (PCP) (Bernstein, 2010a). The PCP class is influenced by their integration into other commodity connections, as farmers often encounter insufficient agricultural supplies for family needs, particularly during years of low harvests (Bernstein, 2010a). Habibi (2021) argues that this situation leads to a new social class in rural areas, the non-agricultural class. This class consists of former farmers who have sold their agricultural land and shifted toward non-agricultural production sources for various reasons.

Furthermore, the class configuration in rural areas can be determined by its position in the market situation (Zhang, 2015). This includes purchasing modern means of production in the input market, renting out or leasing land in the land rental market, employing or selling labor in the labor market, and selling the produced output in the product market. The collective position of rural households in these four markets is used as the foundation for determining their social class. It is a reliable tool for empirically establishing their class position.

This section has analyzed three main class methods in rural areas: property ownership relations (Bernstein, 2010a, 2017; Brenner, 1976; Harrison, 2023; Wood, 2002), labor exploitation (Patnaik, 1987), and market participation (Zhang, 2015). These three approaches facilitate mutual integration and consolidation.

2.2 Political participation in rural areas

The level of political participation is regarded as a fundamental component of representative democracy in general, as well as democratic procedures at the local and regional levels (Čmejrek, 2007). Political participation refers to activities individuals engage in to influence political decisions and policies. It can occur offline, such as attending political events, fundraising, voting, or working for a party or candidate. It can also take place online, including signing petitions, gathering political information on social media, messaging political figures, and commenting on political websites (Halim et al., 2021). Studies have indicated that political participation in rural areas varies across different regions of the world. For example, in the Czech Republic, rural areas make up 75 percent of the country, and 80 percent of Czech municipalities in rural areas exhibit higher political participation levels than urban areas, although the overall trend shows a decline in both areas (Čmejrek, 2007). In contrast, Kaufman (2019) demonstrates that historically, political participation among rural residents in the United States has consistently been lower when compared to suburban and urban residents. While generally, the level of participation in general elections is lower in rural areas (Meesuwan and Onpratum, 2024), voters tend to have more favorable attitudes toward voting and stronger democratic principles than urban residents.

Various factors influence the level of political participation in rural areas, including religion (Kanu and Ugwu, 2017; Shupe, 1977), gender (Geetha and Indira, 2010; Grabe and Dutt, 2020; Pape, 2008), education (Kuenzi, 2006), social factors (Carreras and Bowler, 2019; Eubank et al., 2021; Hou et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2010), economic (Cicatiello et al., 2015), and technological factors (Klafft and Naumann, 2023; Rezki, 2023; Sylvester and McGlynn, 2010). Thananithichot (2012) reveals that the diversity of these factors depends on the type of political activity, and it also unfolds in a dynamic manner for us. For instance, Shupe (1977) indicated religion and theological factors did not have a connection to political participation in rural areas during formal activities like voting, but a recent study discovered that individuals who engage in religious activities in rural areas are less likely to participate in general elections (i.e., not voting), or religiosity is negatively correlated with political participation in rural areas (Kanu and Ugwu, 2017).

In the context of gender and electoral participation in rural areas, it was previously believed that women's involvement in political parties hindered their inclusion in village communal institutions (Pape, 2008). However, Grabe and Dutt (2020) have demonstrated that this intervention actually enhances women's decision-making and leadership roles in rural areas. In addition, the involvement of women in civic groups contributes to their participation in broader political decision-making processes (Geetha and Indira, 2010). Regarding education, both non-formal and formal education have an impact on political participation in rural areas, with non-formal education having a more significant influence (Kuenzi, 2006). Non-formal education promotes the engagement of village residents not just in official political processes such as elections but also in village meetings and organizations related to village politics. Social factors are crucial in literature, particularly in broad political participation research. Studies indicate that the state of the neighborhood or the social capital in rural areas can be used to forecast the level of local political participation, specifically in terms of voting in elections (Carreras and Bowler, 2019; Hou et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2010). Eubank et al. (2021) stated that a strong correlation exists between the village network structure and the total number of voters at the village level.

Furthermore, technology is recognized as a catalyst for encouraging political participation in rural regions. Klafft and Naumann (2023) conducted preliminary testing on a web application designed to enhance the political participation of youth residing in rural areas, yielding promising outcomes. Priorly, it was elucidated that heightened utilization of the Internet at one's residence is linked to a greater likelihood of engaging in diverse forms of communication with the government (Sylvester and McGlynn, 2010) and an augmentation in the likelihood of engaging in political participation (Rezki, 2023).

To summarize, two valid justifications exist for including this component in the review: The study of political participation in rural areas has not yet reached a definitive conclusion. There are variations in research findings across different countries, including emerging and industrialized nations and those in the East and West. Secondly, the factors that impact political participation in rural areas are primarily related to broad variables, including religion, gender, education, social status, economic conditions, and technology. The unexplored inequality variables in rural areas, such as class configuration, have not been thoroughly investigated.

2.3 Class configuration and political participation in rural areas

Studies reveal that political participation in rural areas is approached by social capital and self-identification theory (Campbell,

2013; Hao and Ke, 2024; Pei et al., 2018). There are also older approaches that are still believed to be socio-economic because this approach finds a correlation between per capita income and education level and overall indicators of political participation (Brady et al., 1995; Klesner, 2009; Merouani and Jawad, 2022; Nie et al., 1969). Furthermore, Thananithichot (2012) shows that the level of political participation is significantly influenced by political participation, including how much interest the inhabitants has in elections (interest), the extent of belief in political efficacy when participating (efficacy), and the extent to which inhabitants are mobilized by party groups (group mobilization).

In Indonesia, studies widely recognize the determinants of political participation referring to two organizational movements. Political participation is encouraged by political contestants or political parties through clientelism politics (Aspinall et al., 2020; Berenschot, 2018; Hendrawan and Musshoff, 2024; Hicken et al., 2022), which emphasizes the practice of providing personal assistance to the community (voters). This assistance can take the form of providing jobs, contracts, welfare support, money, and so on (Berenschot, 2018). Furthermore, political participation is encouraged by the Indonesian General Election Commission, which is the general election organizer and implements political education programs at various levels, from the national to the village level. The primary objective of these programs is to enhance political participation in rural areas.

These approaches focus on political, social, and economic aspects while neglecting other approaches, such as the class analysis approach, that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of political participation in rural areas. This study is theorized based on class and political participation in rural areas. Class configurations in rural areas might differ based on the specific social, economic, and cultural context of each region. Household classes in rural areas are categorized based on property ownership, land relations, and employment ties. These classes include landlords, rich farmers, middle farmers, small farmers, poor farmers, and rural laborers (Banerjee, 2009). Rural labor and landlord classes occupy the two opposing ends of classification spectrum. These two classes do not work hard in their fields. The rural labor market is characterized by a significant presence of laborers who do not own the means of production. Landlords, on the other hand, engage a substantial number of laborers for agricultural activities inside their property or lease out land to tenants in exchange for rent. The lower peasantry consists of impoverished and small farmers who comprise the employed working class. On the other hand, the upper class of the peasantry includes middle and rich farmers who belong to the labor-exploiting class.

Zhang (2015) analyzed class positions based on market situations and identified five social classes in four market situations. First, capitalist employers, are those who purchase modern means of production in the input market, acquire land through leasing in the land market, employ workers throughout the year in the labor market, and, finally, sell all products in the product market. Examples in this class are corporate farm managers and entrepreneurial farmers. Second, the petty bourgeoisie, specifically commercial farmers, purchase modern means of production, may lease in land, employ seasonal labor, and sell most of their products. Third, dual-employment households, are those who purchase modern means of production, may lease (in/out) land, may employ seasonal labor while selling their labor and some products. Fourth, wage workers, are those who do not buy modern means of production, do not engage in land leasing or ownership, sell their labor throughout the year, and have no output to sell. Examples include wage workers who have been somewhat proletarianized and fully proletarianized. Fifth, subsistence peasants, are those who have no access to modern means of production, do not engage in land leasing, do not employ and sell labor, and have limited product sales.

The determining factors for class classification are property ownership, land relations, and employment relations. As Habibi (2021) examines the agricultural class in Indonesia, focusing on production relations, means of production, and non-agricultural occupations. As a result, the household class classification consists of a fully-proletariat-farmer, proletariat-farmer, semi-proletariat farmer, petty commodity producer, capitalist-farmer, and capitalist-landlord. Fully-proletariat-farmer and proletariat-farmer refer to the class who sell their labor power to others and work as construction workers, casual laborers, or petty self-employment. Capitalist farmer and landlord refer to classes that hire labor and work as professionals such as teachers, nurses, doctors, local political leaders, bureaucrats, state civil servants, and substantial traders. Petty producer commodities are recognized as a transition class between the working class and the capitalist class, engaging in occupations such as small-time entrepreneurs, masonry, and lower-ranking village officials.

This study integrates existing concepts in class analysis–property ownership relationships (Bernstein, 2010a; Brenner, 1976; Harrison, 2023; Wood, 2002), labor exploitation (Patnaik, 1987), and market and labor market participation (Habibi, 2021; Zhang, 2015)–by developing a quantitative measurement tool. This study employs two simultaneous conceptions of political participation: formal (Kaufman, 2019) and informal participation (Teorell, 2006). Furthermore, Campbell (2013) proposes that possessing the resources required for production is crucial in comprehending the complexities of political participation in rural areas. The ownership of productive resources, such as agricultural land or equipment, can influence the dynamics of political authorities within rural communities (Pei et al., 2018). Landowners and farm equipment owners may possess distinct interests in agricultural or land policy, which can drive their engagement in the political process. Therefore, in a theoretical sense, this study seeks to examine the relationship between class configuration and political participation in rural areas (Figure 1), emphasizing how production relations and labor exploitation intersect formal and informal political participation mechanisms. This approach clarifies the methodological implications of class theory in explaining rural political behavior and provides a structured framework for analyzing empirical findings.

3 Methods

3.1 Study area

This study utilized a household survey in the Gowa Regency, Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, as a representation of a complex agricultural community. The study area selection was analyzed in stages using quantitative and qualitative considerations. The selection of South Sulawesi province was based on the consideration that, despite not having the largest land area or most significant population in Indonesia (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2023), it presents relevant characteristics for the study and it is the sole province outside Java that

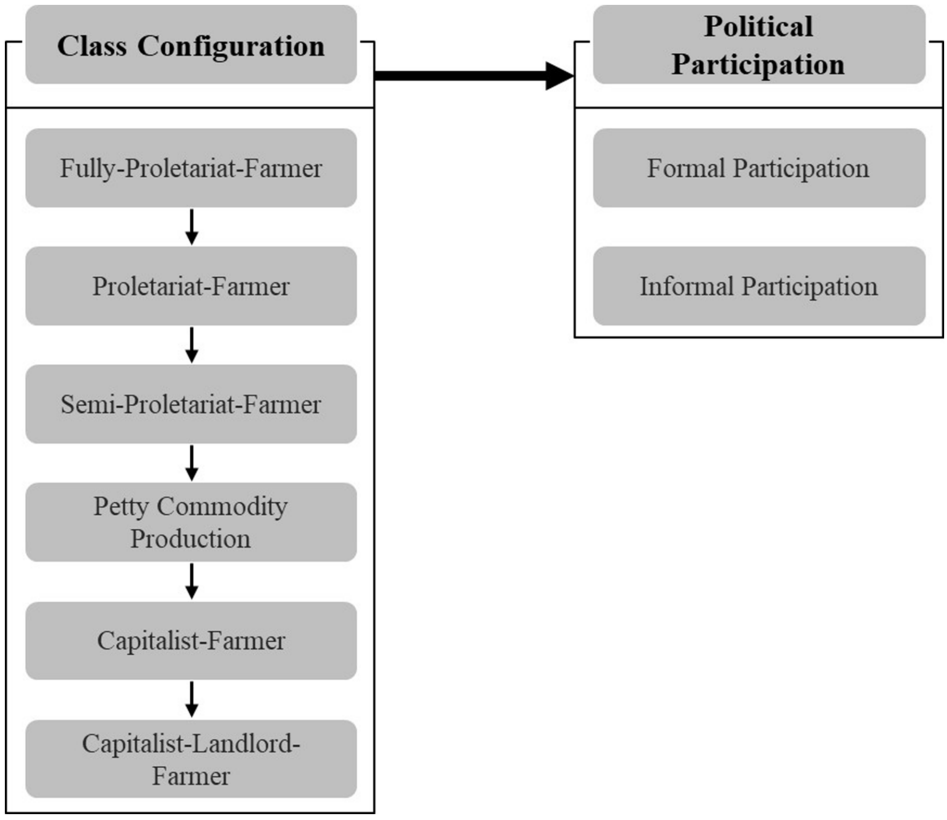

FIGURE 1
Conceptual framework of class configuration and political participation.

boasts the highest rice production (Khasanah et al., 2023). In addition, the level of formal participation, specifically through voting in local or village general elections, yields moderate outcomes. Similar findings have been observed in other studies, which have also demonstrated higher levels of election participation in rural areas compared to urban areas (Tzeng, 2020; Wu et al., 2023). Furthermore, at the regency level, Gowa stands out as the sole city satellite region with the highest rice harvest area (Kamase, 2023) and it ranks second in terms of population and has agriculture as its main occupation in South Sulawesi (Rahim et al., 2024). Third, our analysis focused on the Bajeng district in Gowa, which has the highest planting area, harvest area, and rice output (Ashri and Izudin, 2024). After considering the agricultural political conditions, three villages were chosen to facilitate representative political participation: Pabentengan, Maradekaya, and Panyangkalang villages. These three villages also have the largest number of farmer groups in Bajeng district (Ashri and Izudin, 2024).

3.2 Measurement

This study measures two main aspects that are central to the analysis: social class configuration and political participation of rural communities (Table 1). The social class configuration refers to the structure of land ownership and utilization, as well as respondents' participation in agricultural activities (adopted from Habibi, 2021). This aspect reflects household economic dynamics and access to productive resources, which are key determinants of rural welfare. This study assessed land ownership by examining respondents' private land and their involvement in its cultivation. It also looked at whether land is farmed on by others, rented, or leased out, providing insight into land use in the community. Additionally, employment and labor serve as key indicators in analyzing social class. To assess agricultural dependence and labor distribution, respondents were asked if they work year-round, hire workers, or work on others' land. Rural economic activity is further examined through questions regarding the sale of agriculture products, the quantity sold, and the tools or methods used in production.

Political participation refers to ensure that residents have a say in decision-making and community development (Halim et al., 2021; Hao and Ke, 2024; Kaufman, 2019). To measure this, the study assessed voting behavior in past elections, including village head elections and the frequency of participation. Attendance at formal and informal village meetings is also considered to evaluate involvement in local governance.

Beyond voting, the study explores respondents' roles in organizations and local policy-making. Respondents were asked whether they belong to any organization, have proposed programs in formal meetings, and whether these proposals were accepted and implemented. These factors help assess individuals' perceived influence in decision-making processes. Additionally, interactions with village officials were examined to understand access to public services. The study includes questions about whether respondents have sought help from village officials, proposed ideas in informal meetings, and the level of satisfaction with the support received.

TABLE 1 Indicators and response scale of class configuration and political participation (n = 261).

Indicators	Response				
	1	2	3	4	5
Class configuration					
Do you have private land?	No	Yes			
How big is your private land?	< 10–34 are (0,1–0,34 ha)	35–84 are (0,35–0,84 ha)	84–100 are (0,84–1 ha)	100–180 are (1–1.8 ha)	> (180 are) (> 1,8 ha)
Do you have cultivated land?	No	Yes			
How big is your cultivated land?	< 10–34 are (0,1–0,34 ha)	35–84 are (0,35–0,84 ha)	84–100 are (0,84–1 ha)	100–180 are (1–1.8 ha)	> (180 are) (> 1,8 ha)
Do you cultivate other people's land?	No	Yes			
Do you rent other people's land?	Yes	No			
Do you rent your land?	No	Yes			
Do you work all year round?	Yes	No			
Do you employ other people?	No	Yes			
Do you work on other people's land?	Yes	No			
Do you sell your agricultural products?	No	Yes			
How much agricultural products do you sell?	Small	Most	All		
What are your means of production?	Conventional	Modern			
Formal political participation					
Were you involved in the previous election?	No	Yes			
How many times have you participated in the election?	Once	Two Times	Three Times	> Three Times	
Were you involved in the village head election?	No	Yes			
How many times have you participated in the village head election?	Once	Two Times	Three Times	> Three Times	
Were you involved in formal village meetings?	No	Yes			
How many times have you participated in village meetings?	Once	Two Times	Three Times	> Three Times	
Informal political participation					
Were you involved in informal village meetings?	No	Yes			
Are you involved in an organization?	No	Yes			
Have you ever proposed a program in a formal forum?	No	Yes			
Was your proposal accepted?	No	Yes			
Have you ever asked for help from village officials?	No	Yes			
Have you proposed a program in an informal forum?	No	Yes			
How satisfied are you with the assistance?	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	

Source: Adopted from Habibi (2021), Halim et al. (2021), Hao and Ke (2024), and Kaufman (2019).

10.3389/fpos.2025.1544614

3.3 Data collection

The study employed a self-selection method to collect samples from three specific villages, considering specific criteria such as being an Indonesian citizen, being 17 years or older, being engaged in agricultural activity, and expressing a willingness to participate (De Leeuw et al., 2012). To collect data on various aspects such as socio-demographics, class status, and political participation, the survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews with a semi-open questionnaire. A sample size of 261 households was deemed appropriate for the study using a margin of error of 5%. The subsample size for the three villages was then determined using the following calculations:

$$n_1 = \left(\frac{N_1}{N}\right) \times n, n_1 = \left(\frac{1{,}926}{5{,}611}\right) \times 261 = 90 \quad (1)$$

$$n_2 = \left(\frac{N_2}{N}\right) \times n, n_2 = \left(\frac{1{,}849}{5{,}611}\right) \times 261 = 86 \quad (2)$$

$$n_3 = \left(\frac{N_3}{N}\right) \times n, n_3 = \left(\frac{1{,}836}{5{,}611}\right) \times 261 = 85 \quad (3)$$

where (Equation 1) is the sample size for the population in the Panyangkalang, (Equation 2) for Pabentengan, and (Equation 3) for Maradekaya.

3.4 Data analysis

Initially, the internal consistency of the indicators was assessed by computing Cronbach's alpha coefficients. This is done to assure the reliability of the indicators for subsequent analysis (Gliem and Gliem, 2003). While Cronbach's score ranges from 0 to 1, the effective range is between 0.6 and 0.7 (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). Scores below 0.6 are not examined, whereas scores above 0.95 indicate redundancy among the indicator items (Ursachi et al., 2015). Furthermore, descriptive statistics were utilized to provide a detailed analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and to assess the configuration of social classes and the level of political participation. Finally, a multiple regression model was conducted to examine the impact of class configuration on formal political participation (Equation 4) and informal political participation (Equation 5).

$$y1 = \beta_{1.0} + \beta_{1.1}\chi_{1.1} + \beta_{1.2}\chi_{1.2} + \ldots + \beta_{1.13}\chi_{1.13} + \varepsilon \quad (4)$$

$$y2 = \beta_{2.0} + \beta_{2.1}\chi_{2.1} + \beta_{2.2}\chi_{2.2} + \ldots + \beta_{2.13}\chi_{2.13} + \varepsilon \quad (5)$$

where $y1$ and $y2$ are the formal and informal political participation indicator with a score from 8 to 34, $\beta_{1.0}$ and $\beta_{2.0}$ are the intercept terms, $\beta_{1.1}$ and $\beta_{2.1}$ are the slope coefficient for class configuration indicators. The variable $\chi_{1.1}$ and $\chi_{2.1}$ represents the composite score of class configuration indicators with scores from 11 to 28; a higher score represents a higher class, $\chi_{1.2} - \chi_{1.7}$ and $\chi_{2.2} - \chi_{2.7}$ are the categories of social class represent Fully-Proletariat-Farmer (FPF), Proletariat-Farmer (PF), Semi-Proletariat-Farmer (SPF), Petty Commodity Producer (PCP), Capitalist-Farmer (CF), and Capitalist-Landlord (CL), $\chi_{1.8} - \chi_{1.13}$ and $\chi_{2.8} - \chi_{2.13}$ are the control variables, including geographic location, age, gender, educational attainment, income, and employment in non-agricultural sectors, and ε is the random error term.

3.5 Data evaluation

Table 2 demonstrates that the sub-indicator items' internal consistency requirements have been satisfied. Specifically, the class configuration and political participation sub-indicators exhibit confidence intervals of 0.731 and 0.763, respectively.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Characteristics of respondents

Table 3 shows the characteristics of respondents in the study area. The average respondent was 48 years old, and the average monthly per capita income was IDR 2,236,973. There was a significant variation, as seen in the standard deviation, with a minimum and maximum value of 200 thousand and 150 million rupiah, respectively. The gender proportion was equal for men and women, at 54 and 46%, respectively. The majority of respondents (86%) completed their primary and secondary education, compared to went on to college (6%), the remaining were not literate or did not attend school (8%).

In terms of occupation, respondents were grouped into agricultural work and non-agricultural work. Agricultural workers are those who work in agriculture full-time, while non-agricultural workers are those who have agricultural connections and have main jobs outside of agriculture, such as public sector workers, self-employed, private employees, homeworkers, and laborers or other casual workers. Only 35% of families engage in agriculture as their primary occupation; the remaining 65% are non-agricultural workers, with the highest percentage being entrepreneurs (37%), and homeworkers and other freelancers (25%). Employees in the public and private sectors make up just 1 and 2%, respectively.

4.2 Descriptive analysis

From the assessment of agricultural class configurations, there are six classes (Table 4): (1) fully-proletariat-farmer (FPF), referring to families who primarily engage in agricultural work throughout the year, selling their labor to others, do not own private land or cultivated land, and typically lack any form of marketable production, (2) proletariat-farmer (PF) refers to a family whose main job is similar to fully-proletariat, but (may) own land cultivated by others, (3) semi-proletariat-farmer (SPF), refers to a family whose job is mainly as casual workers in the labor market, typically as construction workers and drivers in urban areas, SPF (may) own small land (< 0.1–0.34 ha) which is usually rented out to proletariat-farmers and a small portion of production is sold to the market, (4) petty commodity producer (PCP), refers to families whose main occupation is agriculture with private land and cultivated land that is larger than semi-proletariat-farmers

(0.34–0.84 ha), do not work for others or employ anyone, then, some the products are sold to the market and some are for family consumption, (5) capitalist-farmer (CF), referring to families who work outside of agriculture, such as public and private employees, own private land of 1–1.8 ha by employing others and using modern technology, where most of the production is sold to the market, and (6) capitalist-landlord (CL), refers to the family who owns the largest land in the village (exceeding 1.8 ha) by employing others and using modern technology, the entire production is sold to the market. The two dominant class categories were PCP and SPF, accounting for 56 and 34%, respectively. The remaining categories did not exceed 5%, such as FPF (1%), CF (2%), PF and CL (4% each) (Table 5).

In terms of class configuration scoring, the average respondent was included in the petty commodity producers with a score of 18, and there were large variations, as seen in the standard deviation, with a minimum and maximum value of 10 and 28, respectively. Regarding political participation, the average score for all indicators was 22.24, ranging from 8 to 34, with a standard deviation of 5. In particular, the average scores for formal and informal political participation were 14.58 and 7.66, respectively. This means that political participation in the study area is classified as medium, neither low nor high. However, it should be noted that informal participation appears to be low. In elections (local and national), almost all respondents were involved in voting in the polls (97%), although only a small portion participated in village-level meetings (30%). This may be closely related to the rejection made by the government when village communities provided program proposals or input, approximately 60% felt that the government did not accept their proposals.

TABLE 2 Cronbach alpha of sub-indicators.

Indicators	Cronbach Alpha
Class configuration	0.731
Political participation	0.763

Source: Survey data.

This study uncovers that the predominant social class in rural Gowa is PCP, which refers to families mainly engaged in agriculture with privately owned land and larger cultivated land compared to SPF (0.34–0.84 ha). These PCP do not work for others and only employ the family, then sell a portion of their production in the market while the remaining portion is consumed by the family. The results are consistent with findings in rural Nicaragua, Central America and India, South Asia, as Zalkin (1989) categorizes PCPs as middle peasants who engage in small-scale production, allocate at least 15 days of family labor time per working family member, and have minimal involvement in labor transactions. Furthermore, Bardhan (1982, 2009, 2022) refers to PCPs as Family Farmers who do not engage in the wage labor market but have personal or family land to cultivate (under 7.5 acres). However, Zalkin's study does not present data on land ownership status for this class configuration.

In contrast, the smallest social class in rural Gowa are FPF whose main occupation is farmers or working on farms all year round by selling their labor to capitalist farmers or landlord, do not own private or cultivated land, and typically do not have any produce that can be sold. This differs from Nicaragua, the least represented class consists of cooperative farmers engaged in collective production, the Sandinista Agricultural Cooperative (Zalkin, 1989). The small number of the FPF due to the conversion of agricultural land into industrial areas, housing, or infrastructure, reducing the area of cultivated land, which has an impact on reducing the demand for labor in the agricultural sector (Azadi et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2018).

FPF may also engage in other social relations of production, for example, jointly employing salaried laborers for harvesting or selling their labor to others. In rural India, the class with the smallest proportion is the CL, who fully lease land to agricultural workers, and often participate in making decisions about what crops to grow, what inputs to use, and other related manners, either alone or in collaboration with tenants (Bardhan, 2022). This class exhibits consistent growth in their land holdings each year, and possess not only economic strength but also wield sufficient political influence to complement economic dominance (Singh and Tiwana, 2020).

TABLE 3 Characteristics of the respondents (n = 261).

Variables	Mean	Median	SD	Min.	Max.
Age (years)	47.54	48	12.47	22	80
Household income (IDR/month)	2,236,973	1,000,000	9,788,261	200,000	150,000,000

Variables	Category or level	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	140	53.64
	Female	121	46.36
Education	Tertiary	15	5.75
	Secondary	143	54.79
	Primary	81	31.03
	Not School	22	8.43
Non-agriculture Occupation	Public sector workers	3	1.15
	Private employees	6	2.30
	Self-employed	96	36.78
	Others	64	24.52
	None (only agriculture)	92	35.25

Source: Survey data.

TABLE 4 The assessment of class configuration.

Social class	Property ownership	Land relations	Labor relations	Output relations	Means of production (MoP)	Non-agriculture occupation
FPF	Have no land or cultivation	-	Sell labor in round-year, does not employ laborers	Not sell agricultural output	Purchase conventional MoP	-
PF	Have no land or control a small piece of land (0.1–0.34 ha)	• Cultivate on other's land and not hire cultivators • May lease in land, not lease out	Sell labor in round-year, does not employ laborers	Not sell agricultural output (for own consumption)	Purchase conventional MoP	Construction or casual laborers, 'own business'
SPF	Have a tiny land and control a small piece of land (0.1–0.34 ha), or have no land but control a small piece of land (0.35–0.84 ha)	• Cultivate on other's land and not hire cultivators • May lease in/out land	Sell labor in round-year, does not employ laborers	Sell a small portion of agricultural output	Purchase conventional MoP	Construction or casual laborers, 'own business'
PCP	Have decent land (0.5–0.9 ha) or have no land but work on a large area (0.84–1.8 ha)	• Cultivate on other's land and not hire cultivators • May lease in/out land	• May employ laborers • May sell labor as 'choice'	Sell most of the agricultural output	Purchase conventional MoP	Construction or casual laborers, 'own business'
CP	Have large land (> 1 ha) or control vast land (> 1.8 ha)	• Hire cultivators and not cultivate on other's land • May lease in and out land	• Employ laborers in round-year • Never sell labor	Sell almost all agricultural output	Purchase conventional MoP	Professionals (in public and private sectors), political leaders, bureaucrats, 'own business assisted by laborers' (crafts, trade)
CL	Have a large area of land (> 1 ha)	• Hire cultivators and not cultivate on other's land • May lease out land but not lease in	• Not employ laborers in round-year • Never sell labor	Sell almost all agricultural output	Purchase modern MoP	Professionals (in public and private sectors), political leaders, bureaucrats, 'own business assisted by laborers' (crafts, trade)

Source: Survey data.

TABLE 5 Descriptive statistics of class configuration and political participation indicators.

Variables	Category or level	Frequency	Percentage
Class Configuration (CC)	Fully-Proletariat-Farmers	3	1.15
	Proletariat-Farmers	11	4.21
	Semi-Proletariat-Farmers	89	34.10
	Petty Commodity Production	143	54.79
	Capitalist-Farmers	5	1.92
	Capitalist-Landlord	10	3.83

Variables	Mean	Median	SD	Min.	Max.
Class Configuration (CC)	18.25	18	2.76	10	28
Political participation (PP)	22.24	22	4.92	8	34
Formal PP	14.58	14	3.60	4	22
Informal PP	7.66	7	1.82	4	12

Source: Survey data.

TABLE 6 The effects of class configuration on political participation (n = 261): Ordinary Least Squares (OLS).

Variables	Formal political participation		Informal political participation	
	Coeff.	p-value	Coeff.	p-value
Class Configuration	0.618**	0.027	0.204*	0.077
Fully-Proletariat-Farmers (1 if yes, Landlords as a reference)	6.487	0.252	2.154	0.166
Proletariat-Farmers (1 if yes, Landlords as a reference)	4.826	0.242	2.758**	0.025
Semi-Proletariat-Farmers (1 if yes, Landlords as a reference)	4.730	0.148	1.849**	0.044
Petty Commodity Production (1 if yes, Landlords as a reference)	2.621	0.281	2.041*	0.092
Capitalist-Farmers (1 if yes, Landlords as a reference)	1.568	0.625	2.419	0.256
Panyangkalang (1 if yes. Pabentengan as a reference)	−0.157	0.841	−0.245	0.411
Maradekaya (1 if yes. Pabentengan as a reference)	−0.422	0.589	−0.351	0.234
Age	0.088***	0.002	0.006	0.524
Gender	−0.950	0.193	−0.151	0.581
Education	4.062**	0.024	1.381**	0.044
Income	0.001	0.282	0.001	0.506
NAO-Public sector workers (1 if yes. Only agriculture as reference)	−3.467	0.349	1.652	0.237
NAO-Private employees (1 if yes. Only agriculture as reference)	−6.168**	0.031	1.898*	0.078
NAO-Self-employed (1 if yes. Only agriculture as reference)	−4.655	0.107	1.404	0.197
NAO-Homeworkers (1 if yes. Only agriculture as reference)	−5.533**	0.054	1.617	0.136
NAO-Others (1 if yes. Only agriculture as reference)	−6.727**	0.024	2.423**	0.032
Constant	15.454***	0.005	3.301	0.317
F-statistic	2.067 (20,240)		1.529 (21,239)	
p-value	0.005		0.068	
R^2	0.075		0.041	

NAO is non-agricultural occupations. ***, **, and * indicate $p < 0.01$, 0.05, and 0.10, respectively. Source: Survey Data.

It is noteworthy that while there was a high level of political participation in terms of voting in elections, there seems to be a low level of informal participation, such as contacting village authorities or engaging in village organizations. This issue is strongly linked to the high rate of government rejection when village communities submit program plans or provide input. This condition is associated with the leadership style prevalent in many villages, which tends to be dominant. Therefore, it is imperative to cultivate transformational leadership that prioritizes supportive and inclusive environments in rural areas (Avant et al., 2013). The Southeastern States have demonstrated a high level of community political participation. This can be attributed to the firm belief among leaders that a "sense of community" exists in the region, and these leaders also prioritize service to the community and emphasize the significance of community participation, which means heavily rely on relationships as the foundation of society (Ricketts and Ladewig, 2008). Chen (2012) with his ethnographic study in China confirms that household economic conditions are a significant factor in increasing the possibility of farming households in informal participation, such as being involved in collective petitions. Consequently, an increase in average household income will lead to the emergence of new issues in rural areas.

4.3 Regression analysis

Table 6 shows the regression results of the influence of class configuration on formal and informal political participation in the study area.

4.3.1 Formal political participation

The results indicate that class configuration has a significant effect on formal political participation ($\beta = 0.618$, $p = 0.027$). This suggests that social class configuration plays a role in shaping rural households' participation in formal political activities. Changing class from a low to a high score is associated with an average increase in the political participation score of 0.618 points, assuming other variables remain constant. This shows that a class change from FPF to PF or at the upper level can significantly encourage political participation in rural areas. These findings align with prior research emphasizing that class stratification influences political behavior and participation patterns (Brady et al., 1995; Dalton, 2017; Thananithichot, 2012). Among the various farmer class categories, none exhibit a statistically significant relationship with formal political participation. For instance, the FPF class has a coefficient of 6.487 with a p-value of 0.252, while SPF class has a coefficient of 4.730 ($p = 0.148$). This indicates that, compared to landlords, these farmer categories do not show significantly different levels of political participation.

These findings suggest that economic stratification within the agricultural sector does not directly influence political participation (Bernstein, 2010a). However, the widening class gap will substantially affect political participation, as proven in Indonesia where politicians filled by the wealthier class (Warburton et al., 2021), which in this study is categorized as the capitalist farmer (CF) and capitalist landlord (CL). Consequently, this supports arguments that land redistribution, often termed agrarian reform, can serve as a mechanism to integrate

impoverished rural communities into political processes (Riedinger, 2018). A more radical interpretation from Brazilian rural movements sees land ownership not just as an economic asset but as a fundamental human right (Wittman, 2009), highlighting the intrinsic link between socioeconomic rights and political agency. The study also situates its findings within broader global debates on the effects of land ownership on political participation. Evidence from China shows that shifting from collective to state ownership weakens political participation (Sargeson, 2018). Similarly, in India, improvements in rural economic conditions, including land ownership, correlate positively with enhanced political participation and women's empowerment (Khanna et al., 2015). Chang et al. (2018) acknowledge that the more secure land rights, the more likely both women and men are to participate in paid work. These findings emphasize that the structural conditions of land ownership and economic stability critically shape democratic participation in rural contexts.

Conversely, age and education exhibit statistically significant relationships with formal political participation. The coefficient for age is 0.088 ($p = 0.002$), indicating that older individuals are more likely to engage in formal political activities. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that political participation tends to increase with age due to accumulated political experience and stronger attachments to political institutions (Campbell and Binstock, 2011; Dim and Schafer, 2024; Goerres, 2007). However, the relationship between age and formal political participation is not linear, those aged 70 years and older are more likely to be uninvolved in formal politics, such as voting, because they feel that have less influence on politics (Purdam and Taylor, 2024), or in Tambe and Kopacheva (2024), the relations follow a curved pattern, with younger and older age groups less likely to participate. Likewise, education has a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 4.062$, $p = 0.024$), suggesting that higher educational attainment enhances political participation. Parinduri (2019) similarly argue that education is a crucial determinant of political participation, as it fosters civic awareness and political efficacy.

Furthermore, certain non-agricultural occupations (NAO) exhibit a negative and significant relationship with formal political participation. For example, private employees have a coefficient of −6.168 ($p = 0.031$), while homeworkers have a coefficient of −5.533 ($p = 0.054$). These results suggest that rural households working in non-agricultural sectors, particularly as private-sector employees or homeworkers, tend to participate less in formal political activities than those engaged in agriculture. This could be attributed to labor market fragmentation, where flexible or informal employment structures limit individuals' political participation (Duman, 2025; Kalleberg et al., 2021).

4.3.2 Informal political participation

In terms of informal political participation, this study revealed that class configuration has a significant impact on informal political participation. Economically vulnerable farming classes tend to participate more in informal political activities compared to landlords, who serve as the reference category. The estimation results show that the class configuration variable has a positive coefficient (0.204) and is significant at the 10% level ($p = 0.077$), suggesting that class configuration influences informal political participation, based on the personal social networks measures (Cebula, 2024). More specifically, having contact with officials or higher prestige is affected by social class.

The PF class has a positive coefficient of 2.758, significant at the 5% level ($p = 0.025$), while the SPF has a coefficient of 1.849, also significant at the 5% level ($p = 0.044$). These findings indicate that landless or smallholder farmers are more likely to engage in informal political activities than landlords, aligning with previous studies emphasizing economic factors in political mobilization (Bernstein, 2010a; Dalton, 2017, 2022). Additionally, the PCP has a coefficient of 2.041, significant at the 10% level ($p = 0.092$), suggesting that those engaged in small-scale production are also more inclined toward informal political participation than landlords. However, the CF and FPF classes do not show significant relationships with informal political participation, with p-values of 0.256 and 0.166, respectively, indicating that not all class groups exhibit the same participation patterns. These findings indicate that farmers with limited land ownership are more active in informal political participation. This phenomenon arises because PF and SPF face economic instability, both in terms of access to land and uncertain income. While the small farmer class is more politically active, CF and FPF do not show a similar tendency, because large landowners and commercial farmers are more likely to have economic stability and access to policies that benefit them. In a nutshell, this situation is due to differences in motivation and political interests, the upper class tends to support policies that protect economic interests, while the working or lower class focuses more on social welfare issues.

Among other socio-economic factors, education has a significant effect on informal political participation, with a coefficient of 1.381, significant at the 5% level ($p = 0.044$). This suggests that individuals with higher education levels are more likely to engage in informal political activities, such as protests or political discussions (Sawyer and Korotayev, 2022). On the other hand, age, gender, and income did not show significant relationships with informal political participation, with p-values of 0.524, 0.581, and 0.506, respectively.

Non-agricultural occupations also have varied effects on informal political participation. The private employees' group has a coefficient of 1.898, significant at the 10% level ($p = 0.078$), while the others group has a coefficient of 2.423, significant at the 5% level ($p = 0.032$). This indicates that workers in certain non-agricultural sectors, particularly those in private employment or other occupational categories, are more active in informal political activities than those working solely in agriculture. Inhabitants with non-agricultural sectors occupation work in more urban environments, with greater access to media, political information, and discussion groups. Furthermore, the non-agricultural sector, especially private workers and those in other categories, may have more flexibility of time or economic resources that allow them to engage in informal political activities such as discussions, campaigns, or rallies.

5 Limitations and recommendations

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged to provide a comprehensive understanding of its findings. The geographical scope is limited to Gowa Regency, Sulawesi, Indonesia, which, although representative of rural agricultural communities, may not fully capture the diversity of rural political participation across different regions of Indonesia or other developing countries. The measurement of class configuration relies primarily on economic indicators such as land ownership and labor relations. While these factors offer insights into economic class structures, they may not fully encapsulate sociocultural and political dimensions, which also play a crucial role in shaping political participation. Moreover, political participation indicators in this study are primarily based on

self-reported data, making them susceptible to recall bias or social desirability bias, which may affect the accuracy of the findings.

To address these limitations, future research should expand its geographical coverage to include a wider range of rural communities to better account for regional variations in class structures and political dynamics. Qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, should be integrated to complement quantitative data and provide richer insights into the lived experiences of different class groups regarding political participation. Furthermore, improving political participation measures by incorporating behavioral data, such as voting records or documented instances of political participation, would enhance the reliability of findings and provide a clearer picture of how rural communities engage in political processes. Longitudinal and experimental studies should also be considered to establish causality between class structure and political participation, allowing researchers to observe trends and transitions over time.

This would not only contribute to academic discourse but also provide policymakers with the necessary tools to design inclusive and effective political strategies that ensure equitable participation in rural governance. Examining the role of government programs, participatory governance models, and civil society initiatives could provide valuable insights into effective strategies for increasing political participation among marginalized groups. Ultimately, enhancing our understanding of these dynamics can lead to more informed policy decisions that strengthen democratic engagement in rural areas.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has examined the influence of class configuration on political participation in rural areas, focusing on social relations of production and formal and informal political participation of villagers in an agricultural setting in Indonesia. The research results show that the social class has a significant influence on the level of political participation in rural areas. In terms of descriptive analysis, the class configuration is divided into six classes: Fully-Proletariat-Farmer, Proletariat-Farmer, Semi-Proletariat-Farmer, Petty Commodity Producer, Capitalist-Farmer, and Landlord. Petty commodity producers and semi-proletariat-farmers constitute the majority class proportion, followed by proletariat-farmers, capitalist-landlords, capitalist-farmers, and fully-proletariat-farmers. Political participation is considered to be moderate, although informal participation seems to be low.

Regarding regression analysis, class changes from lower to higher scores are associated with an increase in the average political participation score, meaning that certain social class changes can encourage political participation among rural households in Gowa, Indonesia. Changing the fully-proletariat-farmers class to landlords can statistically increase political participation. It has been verified that changing from non-agricultural occupations to year-round agricultural employment (such as farming) has a negative significant effect on political participation. On the control variables, age and education have a significant positive effect, a one-year increase in age or education tends to increase household political participation. This study emphasizes the importance of encouraging class change in rural areas. In other words, it suggests that achieving equal political participation is contingent upon the equitable distribution of ownership and power among households in these locations. Therefore, further studies are needed that focus on political participation and changes in social class in rural areas by asking what mechanisms of political participation can encourage agrarian class change.

Data availability statement

Data and materials are available by request from the corresponding author or from relevant organizations.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Fakultas Kesehatan Masyarakat, Hasanuddin University. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

SS: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. MA: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. Nurlinah: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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