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The Influence of Corporate Political Activity (CPA) and Public Private Relations on Investment Performance in the Manufacturing Sector

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ABSTRACT: *Manufacturing firms operate where regulatory approval, licensing, tax incentives, and infrastructure access are often government-controlled, making political capital an increasingly key complement to economic capital. This paper examines how Corporate Political Activity (CPA) and public-private relations affect manufacturing firms' investment performance, and under what conditions these strategies enhance rather than erode investment efficiency. Using a systematic literature review, this study analyzed 15 peer-reviewed Scopus- and Sinta-indexed articles (2004-2025) via a search-screening-synthesis protocol on CPA, political connection, and public-private partnership research. The review finds CPA's effect on investment performance is conditional: benefits emerge where firms have sufficient absorptive and diversification capacity to convert political access into productive investment, whereas in weakly governed settings CPA often produces inefficiency and overinvestment. Formal public-private relations particularly PPPs and transparent subsidy schemes improve investment efficiency by reducing information asymmetry and cash-flow sensitivity, while informal personal or bureaucratic connections more often raise agency costs and rent-seeking. The interaction between CPA and governance quality determines whether political capital becomes productive investment or extractive rent. The study contributes a conceptual framework linking resource dependence and agency theory to explain this dual-edged firm government relationship, with implications for managers and policymakers designing more transparent, accountable public-private engagement.*
Keywords: *Corporate Political Activity; Public-Private Relations; Investment Performance; Manufacturing Sector; Political Connection*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Manufacturing remains one of the most heavily regulated productive sectors in most economies. Firms in this sector depend on government-issued permits, environmental licenses, import-export quotas, energy tariffs, tax holidays, and industrial estate access, all of which are subject to bureaucratic and political discretion. Because these resources are frequently allocated outside pure market mechanisms, firms have strong incentives to invest not only in production technology and human capital but also in relationships with the state. This is the essence of what the management literature terms Corporate Political Activity (CPA): corporate attempts to shape government policy and secure favorable treatment through lobbying, campaign contributions, board appointments of former officials, and other forms of political engagement (Hillman, Keim, & Schuler, 2004). Alongside CPA, firms also cultivate more structural forms of public-private relations, such as public-private partnerships (PPPs), government subsidy programs, and joint infrastructure ventures, which formalize the interdependence between the state and private capital.

The relationship between CPA and firm performance has attracted decades of scholarly attention, yet findings remain persistently mixed. Some studies report that political connectedness provides firms with preferential access to credit, tax relief, and regulatory forbearance, translating into higher profitability and firm value. Others find that political ties crowd out managerial attention, entrench underperforming executives, and are associated with weaker investment discipline, particularly in emerging markets with fragile governance institutions (Trinugroho, 2017). This ambiguity is especially consequential for the manufacturing sector, where investment decisions are capital-intensive, long-horizon, and highly sensitive to policy stability. An efficient allocation of investment in manufacturing directly affects industrial competitiveness, employment absorption, and export capacity, while investment inefficiency, whether in the form of overinvestment in politically favored but low-return projects or underinvestment due to blocked access to finance, imposes real costs on firms and on the broader economy.

Theoretically, two complementary lenses help explain why firms engage with political and public actors. Resource dependence theory (RDT) frames the firm as an open system that depends on external actors, including government, for critical resources, and predicts that firms will actively manage this dependence through political action, board composition, and negotiated relationships in order to reduce environmental uncertainty (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009). From this perspective, CPA and public-private relations are rational strategic responses to resource scarcity and regulatory dependence, and should, in principle, improve a firm's ability to secure and deploy investment capital. Agency theory offers a complementary, more cautionary

lens: because political relationships are often cultivated and controlled by managers or controlling shareholders rather than by dispersed investors, the benefits of political capital can be diverted toward managerial entrenchment, empire-building, or rent extraction rather than value-maximizing investment, particularly where monitoring and disclosure are weak (Shirodkar, Rajwani, Stadler, Hautz, & Mayer, 2022). The tension between these two theoretical accounts is central to understanding why CPA sometimes enhances and sometimes damages investment performance.

Empirical evidence from emerging economies illustrates this tension directly in the domain of investment behavior. Government intervention and political connection through top executives with government backgrounds have been shown to reduce the sensitivity of investment to genuine investment opportunities, particularly among state-influenced firms, indicating that political connection can distort capital allocation away from efficient use (Chen, Sun, Tang, & Wu, 2011). Similarly, political connections have been found to worsen labor investment efficiency by aggravating agency conflicts and information asymmetry in private firms (Zhou, 2023), while government subsidies, one of the most tangible forms of public-private financial relations, have been documented to reduce investment efficiency when they encourage overinvestment among already well-resourced recipients (Hu, Jiang, & Holmes, 2019). At the same time, other evidence points toward a more constructive channel: politically connected manufacturing firms in China have shown faster dynamic adjustment of research and development investment toward optimal targets relative to non-connected peers (Zou & He, 2025), and formal public-private partnerships have been found to reduce investment cash flow sensitivity and improve post-partnership operating performance among private firms in emerging markets by mitigating information asymmetry (Chauhan & Marisetty, 2019). These seemingly contradictory findings suggest that the effect of firm government relations on investment performance is not uniform, but conditional on the form of relationship (informal connection versus formal partnership), the institutional context, and the internal governance capacity of the firm.

In the Indonesian manufacturing context specifically, political connection has been associated with both higher firm value under certain governance configurations (Bandiyono, 2019) and with reduced investment efficiency when former politicians are absent from oversight structures, a gap that machine learning based analysis of Indonesian listed firms has shown can be partially mitigated by placing former politicians in commissioner (supervisory board) roles rather than executive roles (Harianto, Guney, Khalil, & Andrikopoulos, 2025). This suggests that the governance architecture surrounding political connection, not merely its presence, is a key determinant of whether CPA translates into productive investment or rent-seeking. Complementary evidence from Indonesian accounting and finance journals also shows that

political connection interacts with earnings quality, firm value, and disclosure practices in ways that are sensitive to corporate governance quality (Angelia & Munandar, 2024).

Despite this accumulating body of research, three gaps remain salient. First, much of the empirical literature is concentrated on China and other large emerging economies, with comparatively fewer syntheses that connect CPA research with the specific investment-performance concerns of manufacturing firms in middle-income economies such as Indonesia. Second, the CPA literature and the public-private partnership (PPP) literature have largely developed as separate research streams, even though both describe firm government interdependence and both are theoretically explainable through resource dependence logic; an integrated treatment of informal political connection alongside formal public-private relations is comparatively rare. Third, existing reviews of CPA and firm performance (Rajwani & Liedong, 2015; Najaf & Najaf, 2021) tend to focus on firm value or profitability broadly, rather than on investment performance and investment efficiency specifically, which is arguably the most policy-relevant outcome for a capital-intensive sector such as manufacturing.

This paper addresses these gaps by systematically reviewing and synthesizing the literature on CPA, political connection, and public-private relations as they pertain to investment performance in manufacturing. The research questions guiding this review are: (1) How does Corporate Political Activity influence the investment performance of manufacturing firms? and (2) How do formal public-private relations influence investment performance, and under what conditions do CPA and public-private relations complement or substitute for one another in shaping investment outcomes? By answering these questions, the study aims to develop an integrated conceptual understanding of when firm government relations function as a productive resource-dependence-reducing mechanism and when they instead function as an agency-cost-increasing channel, and to draw out implications for manufacturing firm managers and for policymakers designing public-private engagement frameworks.

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative systematic literature review (SLR) method, following a structured search screening synthesis protocol adapted from established practice in management and business literature reviews. A systematic review method was selected, rather than a primary quantitative firm level design, because the objective of this paper is to synthesize and reconcile the currently fragmented and mixed empirical evidence on CPA, political connection, and public private relations across multiple institutional contexts, before such synthesis can meaningfully inform a future primary empirical design specific to Indonesian manufacturing firms.

Search strategy. Literature was identified through structured searches of Scopus-indexed publisher databases (Elsevier ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals, Wiley Online Library, Emerald Insight, Taylor & Francis) and the Indonesian Science and Technology Index (Sinta) journal directory, using combinations of the keywords “corporate political activity,” “political connection,” “political ties,” “public–private partnership,” “government intervention,” “government subsidies,” “investment efficiency,” and “manufacturing firms.” The search was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2004 and 2025 to capture both foundational theoretical contributions and recent empirical evidence.

Screening and eligibility. Articles were included if they (a) were published in a Scopus-indexed or Sinta-accredited peer-reviewed journal; (b) empirically or theoretically examined the relationship between corporate political activity, political connection, or public-private partnership and a firm-level performance or investment-related outcome; and (c) provided sufficiently detailed findings (sample, method, and result direction) to support qualitative synthesis. Articles were excluded if they addressed political activity at the macroeconomic or national policy level without firm-level implications, or if they were non-peer-reviewed working papers without a subsequent published version. Following title-abstract screening and full-text assessment, 15 articles met the inclusion criteria and form the evidentiary basis of this review, spanning general management (Journal of Management), international business (Journal of International Management, Journal of World Business), corporate finance (Journal of Corporate Finance, Research in International Business and Finance, Emerging Markets Review), and Indonesian accounting/management journals (*Jurnal Akuntansi, Jurnal Dinamika Manajemen*, Scientific Journal of Reflection).

Analytical approach. The included studies were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Each article was coded according to (i) the type of firm government relationship examined (informal political connection/CPA versus formal public-private partnership or subsidy), (ii) the investment-related outcome measured (investment efficiency, investment cash flow sensitivity, R&D investment adjustment, firm value), (iii) the institutional context (country, sector, governance environment), and (iv) the direction and boundary conditions of the reported effect. These codes were then synthesized narratively around the two research questions, drawing on resource dependence theory and agency theory as the guiding interpretive lenses, in order to identify convergent patterns, contradictions, and the conditions under which each theoretical mechanism appears to dominate. This narrative-synthesis approach is consistent with prior systematic reviews in the CPA literature (Rajwani & Liedong, 2015; Najaf & Najaf, 2021), which similarly relied on qualitative synthesis of published empirical findings rather than meta-analytic effect-size pooling, given the heterogeneity of investment-performance measures used across studies.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of the 15 reviewed studies is organized around two focused discussion points that directly address the research questions: (1) the conditional effect of Corporate Political Activity on manufacturing investment performance, and (2) the divergent effect of formal public-private relations versus informal political connection on investment efficiency. A third, integrative point discusses the governance conditions that determine which theoretical mechanism, resource dependence or agency cost, dominates in a given firm government relationship.

Corporate Political Activity has a conditional, not universal, effect on manufacturing investment performance

The reviewed literature converges on the conclusion that CPA does not have a uniformly positive or negative effect on firm performance; rather, its effect on investment performance is contingent on firm-level absorptive capacity and the structure of the political engagement itself. Hillman et al. (2004) established the foundational typology of CPA, describing it as corporate attempts to shape government policy through informational, financial-incentive, and constituency-building strategies, and noted early on that the performance consequences of these strategies were far from settled in the literature. Building on this foundation, Shirodkar et al. (2022) provide direct evidence relevant to the conditionality argument: examining domestic lobbying, a core form of CPA, across 737 firms, they find that lobbying is positively associated with performance only for firms that are diversified across both international markets and product lines, whereas lobbying is counter-productive for purely domestic, undiversified firms. The explanation offered is that diversification broadens managers' exposure to socio-political issues and deepens political relationships through repeated interaction, allowing firms to convert political access into more effective, better-targeted policy influence; undiversified firms, by contrast, lack the organizational capacity to translate political access into productive strategic action, so the resources spent on CPA are effectively wasted or become a distraction from operational investment discipline.

This capacity-contingent pattern is echoed by evidence specific to investment behavior. Zou and He (2025), studying Chinese manufacturing firms between 2010 and 2019, find that politically connected firms exhibit significantly faster adjustment speed toward optimal R&D investment targets compared with non-connected firms, even though both groups fall short of the target, suggesting that political connection can ease frictions, such as financing constraints or approval delays, that otherwise slow the translation of investment intention into investment action. This is consistent with a resource-dependence interpretation in which political ties function as a mechanism for reducing environmental uncertainty and securing timely access to complementary resources (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009). However, other manufacturing-adjacent evidence

points in the opposite direction when governance oversight is weak: Chen et al. (2011) show that when political connection is proxied by the presence of top executives with a government background, investment efficiency is significantly reduced, particularly among state-influenced firms, because the sensitivity of investment to genuine investment opportunities weakens; capital is instead allocated according to political priorities rather than market signals. Zhou (2023) extends this concern to labor investment, finding that political connections in China's private firms are associated with labor over-investment, driven by aggravated agency problems and information asymmetry, and that this effect intensifies for firms already prone to overinvestment or possessing high-level political connections.

Read together, these findings resolve the apparent contradiction in the broader CPA-performance literature (as previously noted in the reviews by Rajwani & Liedong, 2015, and Najaf & Najaf, 2021) specifically for the investment-performance outcome: CPA improves investment performance when it operates through channels that reduce genuine informational or resource frictions for firms with the internal capacity to act on the resulting access (as in Shirodkar et al., 2022, and Zou & He, 2025), but it degrades investment performance when it operates through channels that substitute political preference for market discipline in capital allocation decisions, particularly when connection is concentrated in executive rather than oversight roles and governance monitoring is weak (as in Chen et al., 2011, and Zhou, 2023). For Indonesian manufacturing firms, this conditionality is directly corroborated by Harianto, Guney, Khalil, and Andrikopoulos (2025), who use machine learning algorithms on listed Indonesian firms and find that the presence of former politicians specifically on the board of commissioners, a supervisory rather than executive body under Indonesia's two-tier board structure, significantly mitigates real investment inefficiency, implying that the placement of political capital within firm governance architecture, not merely its existence, is decisive for whether CPA supports or undermines investment performance.

Formal public-private relations improve investment efficiency more consistently than informal political connection, primarily by reducing information asymmetry

The second major pattern to emerge from the review concerns the distinction between informal political connection (personal ties, executive political background, ad hoc lobbying) and formal, structured public-private relations such as public-private partnerships (PPPs) and transparent subsidy programs. Whereas informal connection frequently correlates with investment inefficiency in the studies reviewed above, formal PPP arrangements show a more consistently positive relationship with investment efficiency, largely because they operate through contractually specified obligations and monitoring mechanisms rather than discretionary relational access.

Chauhan and Marisetty (2019), examining public-private partnerships undertaken by private firms in India over a decade, find that PPP investments are associated with a significant reduction in investment cash flow sensitivity relative to matched non-PPP investments, and that operating performance improves in the post partnership period. The authors attribute this to the incentive compatible contracting structure of PPPs, which mitigates the information asymmetry that typically drives underinvestment among private firms in emerging markets: because PPP contracts specify performance obligations, revenue-sharing arrangements, and government commitments in advance, they function as a credible signal to capital markets and reduce the need for firms to rely on internally generated cash flow to fund investment. This is a materially different mechanism from informal CPA, where the terms of the political relationship are typically implicit, personalized, and unmonitored by outside stakeholders, leaving greater scope for the agency-cost dynamics documented by Chen et al. (2011) and Zhou (2023). Complementary evidence from the infrastructure delivery literature reinforces this contractual-structure argument: Liu, Clegg, and Pollack (2024), synthesizing interviews with senior PPP practitioners, find that PPP models can create an environment conducive to innovation prior to contract award, when risk allocation and contractual terms are still being negotiated, but that this innovation-supporting effect tends to be constrained after the contract is signed, as risk-averse contractual rigidity sets in; this indicates that even within formal public-private relations, the specific design and timing of the partnership structure shapes whether it enhances or constrains productive investment behavior, rather than formality alone guaranteeing efficiency gains.

Government subsidies present a more ambiguous case that nonetheless supports the broader argument about the importance of monitoring and targeting design rather than the mere presence of a public-private financial relationship. Hu, Jiang, and Holmes (2019) find that government subsidies to Chinese listed firms have a negative overall effect on investment efficiency, driven principally by subsidy-induced overinvestment among firms that are less financially constrained, that is, among firms that did not need the subsidy to correct a genuine financing gap in the first place; the same study notes that subsidies do help correct underinvestment problems among firms that were genuinely financially constrained. This finding is important because it shows that even a formal, publicly administered instrument such as a subsidy can replicate the rent-seeking dynamics associated with informal political connection when it is not well-targeted, effectively demonstrating that the informal versus formal distinction is not by itself sufficient; what matters is whether the mechanism is designed to correct a genuine market or information failure (as PPP contracting appears to do more reliably) or whether it is allocated according to political proximity independent of investment need (as appears to occur with poorly targeted subsidies and with informal executive level political connection).

For Indonesian manufacturing firms specifically, this pattern has direct relevance: Bandiyono (2019), studying manufacturing companies listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange, finds that both corporate governance quality and political connection have a positive and significant effect on firm value when examined jointly, suggesting that political connection is not intrinsically value-destroying in the Indonesian context, but that its value-enhancing potential is realized specifically in the presence of stronger governance mechanisms, a finding consistent with the governance contingency argument developed throughout this review. Angelia and Munandar (2024) similarly find that political connection interacts with earnings persistence in shaping firm value, again underscoring that the productivity of political capital in the Indonesian market is intertwined with the broader information and governance environment within which it operates, rather than being a uniformly positive or negative firm attribute.

Governance quality is the pivotal condition determining whether firm government relations function as resource dependence reduction or as agency cost extraction

Synthesizing the two discussion points above, this review identifies corporate governance quality, encompassing board oversight structure, disclosure transparency, and the placement of political actors within supervisory rather than purely executive roles, as the pivotal condition that determines which of the two theoretical mechanisms, resource dependence reduction or agency-cost extraction, dominates in a given firm's engagement with government. Resource dependence theory predicts that firms rationally cultivate political ties and public partnerships to reduce environmental uncertainty and secure critical resources (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009); the evidence reviewed here confirms this mechanism operates empirically when political capital is deployed through diversified organizational capacity (Shirodkar et al., 2022), contractually specified partnership terms (Chauhan & Marisetty, 2019), or supervisory-level oversight (Harianto et al., 2025; Bandiyono, 2019).

Agency theory, in turn, predicts that when the returns to a resource are controlled by insiders with limited external monitoring, those returns can be diverted from value-maximizing use; this mechanism is confirmed empirically when political connection resides in executive positions with concentrated discretion over investment decisions and weak accountability (Chen et al., 2011; Zhou, 2023), or when subsidy allocation is not conditioned on genuine financing need (Hu et al., 2019). The manufacturing sector's particular vulnerability to this governance-contingent divergence stems from the scale and irreversibility of its investment decisions: because manufacturing capital expenditures (plant, machinery, long-term supply contracts) are large, illiquid, and difficult to reverse, misallocation driven by unmonitored political influence carries a proportionately larger and longer-lasting efficiency cost than in sectors with more flexible, reversible investment profiles. This helps explain why the investment-efficiency literature

reviewed here, much of it set in manufacturing-intensive Chinese and Indonesian contexts, so consistently foregrounds governance structure, rather than the mere presence or absence of political connection, as the decisive explanatory variable.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine, through a systematic review of 15 Scopus and Sinta-indexed studies, how Corporate Political Activity and public private relations shape investment performance in the manufacturing sector, and under what conditions these firm government relationships are productive rather than extractive. The synthesis indicates that CPA exerts a conditional effect on investment performance: it enhances investment outcomes when firms possess sufficient organizational and diversification capacity to convert political access into productive strategic action, and when political actors occupy supervisory rather than purely executive positions, but it undermines investment efficiency when it substitutes political preference for market-based investment discipline under weak governance monitoring. Formal public-private relations, particularly well-designed PPP contracts, tend to support investment efficiency more consistently than informal political connection because contractual specification and monitoring reduce information asymmetry, though even formal instruments such as subsidies can reproduce inefficiency when poorly targeted. Across both channels, corporate governance quality emerges as the pivotal moderating condition that determines whether firm government relations function through the resource dependence reducing mechanism anticipated by resource dependence theory or through the extractive mechanism anticipated by agency theory.

These findings carry practical implications. For manufacturing firm managers, the results suggest that investment in political relationships should be paired with deliberate governance design, such as placing politically connected individuals in supervisory rather than executive roles and maintaining diversification capacity, in order to realize the resource-access benefits of CPA without incurring its agency costs. For policymakers and regulators, particularly in emerging manufacturing economies such as Indonesia, the results suggest that formalizing firm government engagement through transparent, contractually specified mechanisms, such as well-targeted subsidy criteria and carefully designed PPP frameworks, is likely to generate more efficient private investment outcomes than reliance on discretionary, relationship-based channels of access. Future research should extend this synthesis with primary, firm-level quantitative analysis of Indonesian manufacturing companies, explicitly testing the moderating role of board structure and disclosure quality on the CPA investment efficiency relationship, since the present review, being a qualitative synthesis of secondary literature, cannot itself establish causal firm level estimates for the Indonesian manufacturing population specifically. Such primary research

would also benefit from disaggregating investment performance into its component measures (capital expenditure efficiency, R&D investment efficiency, and labor investment efficiency) given that this review finds these components do not always respond to political connection in the same direction.

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