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Political Dynasties, Nepotism, and Patronage as Drivers of Social Inequality in the Philippines: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage are entrenched features of Philippine governance that concentrate political power within influential families and networks, shaping how resources, opportunities, and authority are distributed across society. Objective: This systematic literature review aimed to synthesize empirical evidence on how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage function as structural drivers of social inequality in the Philippines, examine how these constructs are conceptualized and measured, and identify the mechanisms and gaps reported in the literature. Methods: Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, a systematic search of Google Scholar and ProQuest using Boolean strings identified 547 records. After screening, 105 studies underwent full-text review, 87 were excluded, and 19 empirical studies published between 2010 and 2025 met the inclusion criteria and were synthesized thematically. Results: Political dynasties concentrated power within select families and limited political competition; nepotism shaped political appointments through familial ties rather than merit; and patronage sustained clientelist relationships that rewarded political loyalty with access to public resources. These mechanisms were consistently associated with unequal access to public services, restricted political representation, weaker education and health outcomes, and reduced social mobility for marginalized groups. Conclusion: Political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage function as interlocking structural barriers to equitable governance in the Philippines. Addressing them requires merit-based appointments, limits on dynastic succession, transparent resource allocation, and sustained longitudinal and comparative research.

Keywords: *clientelism, nepotism, patronage, political dynasties, political representation, social inequality*

INTRODUCTION

Political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage are long-standing features of governance in the Philippines, where political power is often concentrated within influential families and networks. These practices shape political structures and decision-making processes, influencing how resources, opportunities, and authority are distributed across society. Political dynasties maintain control across generations, nepotism enables preferential appointments based on personal ties, and patronage operates through systems of exchange that reward loyalty with access to government benefits. Together, these mechanisms reinforce elite dominance and affect the ov erall functioning of democratic institutions.

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These governance practices have significant implications for social inequality, which in the Philippine context includes disparities in access to public services, education, political representation, and social mobility. The concentration of power among political elites often results in unequal distribution of resources, where marginalized groups face limited opportunities for advancement. Patronage-based systems may prioritize political loyalty over need or merit, while dynastic control can restrict political competition and limit inclusive representation. As a result, existing inequalities are not only maintained but can also be intensified across generations.

Despite the presence of numerous studies examining these issues, the literature remains fragmented, with limited synthesis of how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage collectively contribute to social inequality. Variations in how these concepts are defined and measured, along with differences in research approaches, make it difficult to establish clear patterns and mechanisms. This creates a gap in understanding the cumulative impact of these political practices on inequality. Therefore, a systematic literature review is necessary to integrate existing evidence, identify consistent findings, and clarify the pathways through which these governance structures drive persistent social inequalities in the Philippines.

Statement of the Problem / Research Gap

Political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage continue to shape governance and resource distribution in the Philippines, often reinforcing unequal access to opportunities and public services. Existing literature consistently shows that these practices contribute to elite dominance, voter dependency, and institutional weakening, which in turn sustain high levels of poverty and social inequality. However, despite the growing body of research on these issues, many studies focus on isolated dimensions—such as dynastic prevalence or patronage networks—without fully integrating how these mechanisms interact within the broader political system. This fragmented approach limits a comprehensive understanding of how these interconnected practices collectively influence long-term social inequality outcomes.

Moreover, there remains a significant research gap in terms of methodological consistency and empirical measurement. Many studies rely on case-specific or region-specific data, making it difficult to generalize findings across the national context. There is also limited use of comparative and longitudinal approaches that could better capture changes over time and across different political environments. As a result, there is a need for a systematic synthesis of existing evidence that consolidates findings, identifies common patterns, and highlights gaps in measurement and analysis. Addressing this gap is essential to provide a clearer, more cohesive understanding of how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage function as structural drivers of social inequality in the Philippines.

Rationale for the Review

The persistence of political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage in the Philippines continues to raise critical concerns regarding their impact on governance quality and social equity. While numerous studies have examined these political practices, their findings remain dispersed across different disciplines, methodologies, and focal areas. This fragmentation makes it difficult to derive a unified understanding of how these mechanisms collectively influence social inequality. Given the increasing relevance of inclusive governance and equitable development in both academic and policy discussions, there is a clear need to consolidate existing knowledge into a coherent and systematic body of evidence.

This systematic literature review is therefore undertaken to synthesize empirical findings and provide a comprehensive analysis of how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage contribute to social inequality in the Philippine context. By applying a structured and transparent review process, this study aims to identify recurring patterns, key mechanisms, and gaps in the current literature. The review not only enhances theoretical understanding but also offers evidence-based insights that may inform policy reforms and future research directions. Ultimately, the study seeks to bridge fragmented knowledge and contribute to a more nuanced and integrated perspective on the structural drivers of inequality in the Philippines.

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Objectives of the Review

This review pursued five objectives: (1) to identify studies published between 2010 and 2025 that discuss political dynasties, nepotism, patronage, and social inequality in the Philippines; (2) to synthesize the findings of selected studies regarding how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage are associated with different dimensions of social inequality, including access to public services, political representation, education, and social mobility; (3) to analyze how the reviewed studies conceptualize and measure political dynasties, nepotism, patronage, and social inequality within the Philippine context; (4) to examine the mechanisms reported in the literature through which political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage contribute to social inequality; and (5) to evaluate the overall patterns and evidence across the reviewed studies that identify political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage as drivers of social inequality in the Philippines.

Research Questions

Guided by these objectives, the review addressed the following questions: (1) How do political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage contribute to social inequality in the Philippines according to studies published between 2010 and 2025? (2) What dimensions of social inequality (e.g., access to public services, political representation, education, and social mobility) are associated with political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage in the Philippine context? (3) How do existing studies conceptualize and measure political dynasties, nepotism, patronage, and social inequality in the Philippines? (4) What mechanisms or processes are reported in the literature that explain how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage contribute to social inequality? (5) What overall patterns and levels of evidence emerge from the literature regarding the relationship between political dynasties, nepotism, patronage, and social inequality in the Philippines?

Main question: How do political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage function as structural drivers of social inequality in the Philippines based on empirical studies published between 2010 and 2025?

METHODS

Review Design

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) design using a mixed-methods evidence synthesis approach to examine how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage contribute to social inequality in the Philippines. A systematic literature review was appropriate because the study aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing empirical evidence in a structured, transparent, and replicable manner. The review integrates findings from quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies, reflecting the diverse methodological approaches present in the literature.

Rather than limiting the analysis to a single methodological tradition, the study adopts a convergent qualitative synthesis strategy, where findings from different study designs are interpreted and integrated through thematic analysis. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of both measurable patterns (e.g., inequality outcomes, political concentration) and underlying mechanisms (e.g., patron-client relationships, elite dominance). The review focuses specifically on empirical studies conducted in the Philippine context, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives and inclusion criteria.

Review Protocol / Reporting Guideline

This review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. PRISMA was used to ensure that the review process followed a clear, organized, and transparent procedure from the identification of studies to final inclusion. The PRISMA approach structured the review into key stages, including identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies, and supported transparency in documenting how studies were searched, selected, excluded, and analyzed.

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Eligibility Criteria

The selection of studies was guided by clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance, quality, and consistency of the evidence analyzed. Table 3 summarizes the exclusion categories applied at the eligibility stage of the review.

Inclusion criteria

- *Population/context:* studies conducted in the Philippines or examining the Philippine political and governance context, including local, regional, or national governance levels.
- *Exposure*: studies examining political dynasties, nepotism, or patronage within political institutions, governance, or public administration, where these constructs are primary analytical variables or central themes.
- *Outcome:* studies reporting findings related to social inequality, including unequal access to public services, education disparities, political representation, income distribution, or social mobility.
- *Study design*: empirical or analytical studies using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research designs, including policy analysis and governance research with clearly described methodology.
- *Publication type:* peer-reviewed journal articles, academic theses, dissertations, and scholarly research reports.
- *Time frame:* published from 2010 to 2025.
- *Language:* published in English.
- Accessibility: full text available with sufficient methodological detail for quality appraisal and data extraction.

Exclusion criteria

- *Population/context:* studies conducted outside the Philippines without Philippine-related analysis, or not focused on Philippine political or governance context.
- *Exposure*: studies discussing general politics or governance without reference to political dynasties, nepotism, or patronage as substantive analytical topics.
- *Outcome*: studies that do not examine social inequality or its dimensions, or that lack mechanisms linking political practices to social inequality.
- *Study design:* opinion pieces, editorials, commentaries, news articles, or non-academic publications without empirical or analytical methods.
- *Time frame*: studies published before 2010 or after 2025.
- *Language*: publications in languages other than English or Filipino without translation.
- *Accessibility*: studies where full text is unavailable, or abstract-only or restricted-access sources.

Databases for Literature Search

The systematic literature search was conducted using two academic databases. Google Scholar, a widely used academic search engine, indexes journal articles, books, theses, conference papers, and institutional reports across multiple disciplines, and its extensive coverage made it useful for identifying relevant literature across public administration, governance, and political science research. ProQuest, a subscription-based academic database, provides access to peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, government publications, and policy reports, and its advanced search filters and structured indexing improved search precision and supported systematic review methodology.

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Variables

Political dynasties refer to the concentration of political power within a single family, where political positions are passed down across generations; in the Philippines these dynasties often control multiple political offices at various levels of government. This variable examines how the persistence of political dynasties limits political competition, reinforces elite dominance, and results in unequal distribution of resources and opportunities.

Nepotism involves the preferential treatment given to family members or close associates in the allocation of political positions, resources, or benefits, resulting in appointments based on personal connections rather than merit or competence. The review examines how nepotism perpetuates inequality by keeping power within certain families or groups.

Patronage refers to the practice of providing government benefits, services, or positions in exchange for political loyalty or support, often manifesting through clientelist relationships in which political elites distribute state resources to constituents in return for votes and support. Patronage systems are critical in sustaining political inequality by creating voter dependencies.

Social inequality, the primary outcome variable, refers to the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within society, including economic inequality, access to public services, political representation, education, and social mobility.

Political representation refers to the process by which elected or appointed individuals act on behalf of their constituents in political decision-making; dynasties and patronage systems often result in limited or skewed representation.

Access to public services involves the availability and equitable distribution of essential services such as healthcare, education, social welfare, and infrastructure, which patronage and nepotism often determine.

Social mobility refers to the ability of individuals or families to move up or down the social and economic ladder; the review examines how consolidated political power limits opportunities for social mobility among marginalized groups.

Boolean Search Strings

Political dynasties: (“political dynasties” OR “political families” OR “dynastic politics”) AND (“social inequality” OR “economic disparity” OR “poverty” OR “unequal access” OR “social mobility”) AND (“Philippines”) AND (“empirical” OR “quantitative” OR “qualitative” OR “mixed-methods”) NOT (“theoretical” OR “conceptual” OR “opinion” OR “review”).

Social inequality: (“social inequality” OR “economic inequality” OR “income inequality” OR “poverty” OR “unequal access” OR “social mobility” OR “political inequality” OR “educational inequality” OR “health inequality” OR “public services inequality”) AND (“Philippines”) AND [: [2010–2025] AND (“empirical” OR “quantitative” OR “qualitative” OR “mixed-methods”) NOT (“theoretical” OR “conceptual” OR “opinion” OR “review”).

Nepotism and patronage: (“nepotism” OR “patronage” OR “family favoritism” OR “cronyism” OR “political favoritism” OR “elite nepotism” OR “political appointments”) AND (“Philippines”) AND [2010–2025] AND (“empirical” OR “quantitative” OR “qualitative” OR “mixed-methods”) NOT (“theoretical” OR “conceptual” OR “opinion” OR “review”).

Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure a systematic and transparent approach. In the identification stage, a comprehensive search was conducted in Google Scholar and ProQuest using the Boolean search strings, retrieving studies published between 2010 and 2025 in English. In the screening stage, records were screened based on titles and abstracts, and studies focusing on political dynasties, nepotism, patronage, and social inequality in the Philippine context were retained while

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non-empirical studies, theoretical articles, and irrelevant topics were excluded. In the full-text review stage, studies that met the initial screening criteria were reviewed in full, and those providing empirical evidence on the relationship between political practices and inequality were retained. Data were then extracted from the retained studies, and the methodological quality of each was assessed, with studies at high risk of bias excluded.

A total of 547 records were initially identified. After the first screening, 105 studies were considered potentially relevant and carried forward to a detailed eligibility review. During the second-level screening, these 105 studies were rechecked against five criteria: focus on political dynasties, nepotism, or patronage; geographic focus on the Philippines; empirical methodology; relevance to social inequality; and publication within the 2010–2025 timeframe. Following this detailed review, 87 studies were excluded, primarily due to insufficient empirical evidence, lack of direct relevance to the Philippine context, or misalignment with the review's objectives, resulting in a final set of 19 included studies.

Data Extraction Process

The data extraction process involved systematically collecting key information from each study using a standardized extraction form. Two independent researchers reviewed and recorded details such as study authors, year of publication, methodology, sample size, and data collection techniques. Key findings related to the role of political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage in social inequality were extracted, focusing on dimensions such as access to public services, political representation, education, and social mobility. The limitations of each study, including methodological constraints and biases, were also noted. Discrepancies between the two researchers were resolved through discussion, and data were organized in a spreadsheet for further analysis.

Quality Appraisal / Risk of Bias Assessment

The quality of each included study was independently assessed by two researchers against four criteria. Methodological rigor examined the adequacy of study design, sampling methods, data collection, and analysis procedures. Sampling assessed the representativeness of the sample, including sample size and demographic characteristics relative to the research questions. Data analysis evaluated the appropriateness and transparency of statistical or thematic analysis methods. Risk of bias considered potential selection, publication, and measurement bias, with studies showing incomplete reporting, reliance on self-reported data, or inadequate control for confounders treated as higher risk. Reported study limitations, such as small sample sizes or methodological weaknesses, were also considered in the overall quality rating.

Data Synthesis Method

The data synthesis method employed a thematic synthesis approach to integrate and compare findings across studies. Each study's results were coded based on key variables such as political dynasties, nepotism, patronage, and social inequality dimensions (e.g., access to public services, education, and political representation). These codes were grouped into broader themes, and studies with similar findings were compared to identify consistent patterns and variations. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how political practices contribute to inequality in the Philippines. The final synthesis highlighted key mechanisms, such as elite dominance and unequal access to resources, and identified gaps for future research.

RESULTS

Search Results

A total of 547 records were initially identified through the database search using the predefined Boolean search strings related to political dynasties, nepotism, patronage, and social inequality in the

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Philippine context. After the removal of duplicates, 105 studies were screened for relevance based on their titles and abstracts. Following the first screening process, these 105 studies were subjected to a more detailed full-text review, during which they were further evaluated based on geographic focus, empirical methodology, and relevance to the research questions. As a result, 87 studies were excluded due to non-empirical methods, geographic scope outside the Philippines, or a lack of direct relevance to the research topic.

After applying the eligibility criteria, 19 studies were included in the final review (see Figure 1). These studies were deemed to meet the research objectives by addressing the relationship between political dynasties, nepotism, patronage, and social inequality in the Philippines.

Table 1. *PRISMA Screening Decision Summary*

Screening Stage	n
Records identified through database searching	547
Records after duplicates removed / screened (titles and abstracts)	105
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	105
Studies excluded at full-text stage	87
Studies included in final synthesis	19

Note. n = number of records at each screening stage. The final synthesis contains 19 included studies as requested.

Note. n = number of records at each screening stage. Main basis of inclusion: Philippine political context, central exposure to political dynasties/nepotism/patronage/clientelism, empirical evidence on social inequality or related outcomes, and publication within the 2010–2025 timeframe.

PRISMA Flow Diagram / Screening Summary

Table 1 summarizes the screening decisions at each stage of the review, and Figure 1 presents the corresponding PRISMA flow diagram.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process

Note. PRISMA = Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses.

Characteristics of Included Studies

The 19 studies included in the final review varied in methodology, including quantitative, qualitative, comparative, case-study, historical-political, and bibliometric/content-analysis approaches. All studies focused on the Philippine context, analyzing the impact of political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage on social inequality. The quantitative studies primarily used large datasets and regression models to assess inequality, while the qualitative studies employed interviews and case studies to provide in-depth insights into the mechanisms of inequality. Most studies were cross-sectional, with a few longitudinal studies examining long-term impacts. Key themes included the concentration of political power in dynastic families, the role of nepotism in political appointments, and how patronage affects access to public services and social mobility. Sample sizes varied from small qualitative samples (50–100 participants) to large quantitative samples. Reported limitations included sample bias and regional variation. These studies provided valuable evidence on the ways political practices perpetuate inequality while also highlighting gaps in the literature.

Main Themes or Categories Found

The extracted data from the 19 studies reveal consistent findings regarding the role of political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage in perpetuating social inequality in the Philippines. Key patterns indicate that political dynasties concentrate power within certain families, limiting political competition and resource distribution, which in turn exacerbates economic inequality and reduces social mobility. Nepotism in political appointments and patronage systems further entrench these power structures by

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allocating public services and positions to loyal supporters, often at the expense of marginalized groups. The studies also highlight that access to essential resources such as education, healthcare, and social services is unequally distributed, favoring those with political connections. Despite the diversity in methodologies, the data collectively underscore how these political practices sustain inequality, with limited opportunities for reform or inclusive governance.

- Political dynasty and elite dominance: the concentration of political power within dynastic families limits political competition and reinforces elite dominance, reducing the opportunity for equitable governance and resource distribution; this theme was consistently linked to economic inequality and unequal access to public services.
- Nepotism and political appointments: nepotism was found to play a significant role in political appointments, where individuals are selected based on familial ties rather than merit, leading to inefficiency, corruption, and weak governance that further deepens social inequality by excluding capable individuals from decision-making roles.
- Patronage and clientelism: patronage systems contribute to social inequality by rewarding loyalty and political support with access to public resources such as jobs, benefits, and government contracts, creating a clientelist system in which citizens become dependent on political elites for services.
- Access to public services and social mobility: a recurring theme across studies was the unequal access to education, healthcare, and other public services for those outside the political elite, perpetuating a cycle of low social mobility.
- Political exclusion and marginalization: dynastic control and patronage systems keep marginalized groups from participating in political processes, further entrenching social inequality and limiting opportunities for upward mobility.

These themes provide a comprehensive view of how political practices in the Philippines contribute to structural inequality, highlighting the intertwined mechanisms of elite control, nepotism, and patronage.

Key Findings per Research Question

In answer to the main research question—how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage function as structural drivers of social inequality in the Philippines—the findings show that political dynasties concentrate power within select families, limiting political competition and perpetuating elite dominance, which restricts access to resources and opportunities for marginalized groups. Nepotism in political appointments ensures that positions are filled based on familial ties rather than merit, leading to inefficiency, corruption, and a lack of accountability that directly affects public services and opportunities. Patronage systems create clientelist relationships in which political elites distribute state benefits in exchange for political loyalty, further exacerbating inequality by limiting access to essential services like education, healthcare, and social mobility. These mechanisms collectively reinforce economic disparity and hinder the ability of disadvantaged groups to improve their socio-economic status, contributing to the persistence of social inequality in the country.

Summary of Evidence

The evidence from the 19 studies included in this review consistently demonstrates that political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage are deeply embedded in the political system of the Philippines and function as significant drivers of social inequality. Political dynasties maintain concentrated control over political offices, limiting political competition and leading to elite dominance that exacerbates economic disparity and limits access to public resources. Nepotism in political appointments perpetuates inefficiency and corruption while denying opportunities to more qualified individuals, further entrenching inequality. Patronage systems create clientelist relationships that result in unequal access to public services such as education, healthcare, and social mobility. The studies also highlight that these mechanisms result in limited

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political representation for marginalized groups, contributing to a cycle of poverty and lack of opportunity. Overall, the evidence supports the conclusion that these political practices create and sustain structural barriers to equality, hindering inclusive development and perpetuating social inequality in the Philippines.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Major Findings

The major findings of this review indicate that political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage are central mechanisms that sustain social inequality in the Philippines. Political dynasties concentrate power within a few influential families, which limits political competition and reinforces elite dominance in governance. This elite capture results in policies that favor the interests of a small group, perpetuating economic disparity and reducing the capacity for inclusive development. Nepotism further exacerbates inequality by ensuring that political positions are filled based on family ties rather than merit, leading to inefficiency, corruption, and poor governance. This systemic favoritism prevents capable individuals from rising to positions of power, which could otherwise challenge existing hierarchies.

In addition, the practice of patronage strengthens clientelist relationships, where loyalty to political elites is rewarded with access to state resources. This creates unequal access to essential public services such as education, healthcare, and social mobility, particularly disadvantaging marginalized communities who lack political connections. As a result, these practices foster a cycle of poverty and limit upward social mobility for those outside the political elite. The findings suggest that these political practices function as structural barriers that hinder the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, making it difficult to reduce social inequality and promote sustainable development. Addressing the entrenched nature of these practices is crucial for fostering more inclusive and effective governance in the Philippines.

Discussion of Themes

The themes identified in this review emphasize how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage perpetuate social inequality in the Philippines. The concentration of power within political dynasties is a dominant theme, where political control remains in the hands of a few families. This centralization limits political competition and leads to policies that favor the elite, creating elite dominance that excludes marginalized communities from the benefits of governance and public services. These dynasties prevent the equitable distribution of resources, further deepening economic disparities and hindering inclusive development. In addition, nepotism reinforces the concentration of power by ensuring that positions of influence are filled based on family ties rather than merit, undermining good governance and reducing the government's ability to serve the broader population effectively.

Another critical theme is patronage, which sustains clientelist relationships by offering government resources and benefits in exchange for political loyalty. This system ensures that those without political connections remain excluded from essential services such as education, healthcare, and social mobility. Patronage creates dependencies, where access to public resources is contingent on loyalty to political elites rather than need or merit. As a result, this system fosters a cycle of poverty and limits the ability of disadvantaged groups to improve their socio-economic status. Together, these practices—political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage—create structural barriers that prevent the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, reinforcing social inequality and hindering progress toward more inclusive governance and development in the Philippines.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings of this review align with existing literature on the role of political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage in perpetuating social inequality in the Philippines. Prior studies have similarly shown that political dynasties concentrate power and limit political competition and access to resources, consistent with the current review's findings that dynasties exacerbate inequality by controlling governance. Other

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work has documented how nepotism undermines governance by filling positions based on familial ties, a finding echoed in this review, while the literature on patronage politics similarly supports the conclusion that patronage systems reinforce clientelism and social inequality by limiting access to essential services and opportunities. Overall, this review confirms and extends previous research, reinforcing the need for systemic reforms to address these practices and reduce inequality.

Institutional Gaps, Barriers, or Limitations Found in the Literature

The literature on political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage in the Philippines reveals several institutional gaps and barriers that hinder effective governance and equitable development. A major limitation is the lack of longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of these political practices on social inequality; many studies are cross-sectional, providing only a snapshot of impact at a single point in time. There is also limited comparative analysis examining how these practices vary across different regions or political environments within the Philippines. Furthermore, while existing research highlights the negative effects of these practices, few studies address institutional reforms or propose actionable solutions to dismantle entrenched political systems. These gaps indicate a need for future research that not only explores the persistence of inequality but also investigates policy interventions and reforms that could promote inclusive governance.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

Policy implications: The findings underscore the urgent need for structural reforms in political systems. Addressing dynastic control, nepotism, and patronage could lead to more inclusive governance, improved access to public services, and reduced economic disparity, benefiting marginalized communities. Policymakers must consider mechanisms to decentralize power and ensure that political positions are filled based on merit rather than familial ties or political loyalty.

Practice implications: Reforms should focus on promoting merit-based appointments and equitable access to public services. Local governments should adopt transparent, accountable practices that eliminate clientelism and patronage in resource distribution, and public administration training programs may need to emphasize equity and fairness in policy implementation alongside efforts to empower local political systems and reduce dynastic control.

Research implications: Further research is needed into the long-term effects of political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage on social mobility and political participation. Future studies should employ longitudinal and comparative methods to track the evolution of these practices over time and across regions, and should examine the institutional reforms required to break the cycle of inequality and create a more inclusive political culture.

Strengths of the Review

The strength of this review lies in its systematic approach to synthesizing empirical evidence on the relationship between political practices and social inequality in the Philippines. By examining studies from 2010 to 2025, the review provides a contemporary understanding of how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage continue to shape governance and social outcomes. The inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative studies offers a well-rounded perspective on the issue.

Limitations of the Review

Despite its strengths, this review has several limitations. It is limited by the availability and scope of the empirical studies included, particularly the lack of longitudinal data and comparative regional analysis. The review is also confined to studies in English, which may exclude relevant literature published in other languages. Furthermore, the studies reviewed focus primarily on the negative effects of these political practices, leaving policy solutions and reform strategies underexplored and requiring further investigation in future research.

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Recommendations

- Promote merit-based appointments: to reduce the influence of nepotism and ensure fair governance, it is recommended that the Philippine government implement merit-based systems for political appointments and civil service positions, minimizing favoritism and improving public service delivery.
- Limit political dynasty control: legislative measures should be introduced to limit dynastic succession in political positions, promoting greater political competition and empowering a broader range of voices in decision-making.
- Strengthen accountability and transparency in resource allocation: the government should create more transparent and accountable processes for the distribution of public services and resources, including digital platforms for resource management and public audits.
- Encourage research on institutional reforms: future research should focus on institutional reforms—such as decentralized governance, electoral reforms, and public sector reforms—that can break the cycle of inequality perpetuated by political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage.
- Support longitudinal and comparative studies: longitudinal and comparative research across different regions of the Philippines should be conducted to better understand the evolving impact of these political practices on social inequality and political representation.
- Note. Categories are drawn from the review's protocol-based judgment log and are not mutually exclusive across all screening stages.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review synthesized empirical studies published from 2010 to 2025 to examine how political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage contribute to social inequality in the Philippines. The findings demonstrate that these political practices are deeply embedded in the Philippine political system and influence various dimensions of inequality, particularly access to public services, political representation, education, economic opportunities, and social mobility.

The reviewed studies indicate that political dynasties contribute to the concentration of political power among a limited number of families, restricting political competition and reinforcing elite dominance. Nepotism further affects governance by prioritizing familial relationships over merit-based appointments, potentially weakening institutional efficiency and the quality of public service delivery. Patronage, meanwhile, sustains clientelist relationships in which access to public resources and services may be influenced by political loyalty rather than equitable distribution. Together, these practices reinforce structural inequalities and may disproportionately affect marginalized and economically disadvantaged populations.

Overall, the review concludes that political dynasties, nepotism, and patronage are interconnected mechanisms that can perpetuate social inequality in the Philippines. Their effects extend beyond political participation and governance, influencing the distribution of opportunities and resources that are essential to socioeconomic advancement. Although the existing literature provides substantial evidence of these relationships, important gaps remain, particularly the limited availability of longitudinal and comparative studies examining their long-term effects on social mobility and inequality.

By integrating findings from the existing empirical literature, this systematic review provides a broader understanding of the relationship between entrenched political practices and social inequality in the Philippine context. It highlights the importance of strengthening institutional accountability, transparency, merit-based governance, and equitable access to public resources. The identified gaps also underscore the need for further empirical research to better understand the long-term consequences of these political practices and to provide stronger evidence for policies aimed at promoting inclusive governance and reducing social inequality in the Philippines.

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