

# Power Networks of Political Families in Southeast Asia: The Enduring Dynastic Influence in Democratic Contexts

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## Abstract

This research systematically analyzed the dynamics of political dynasties in Southeast Asia by uncovering their prevalence, influence, and evolution over the 2009 to 2024 period. Using bibliometric mapping and content analysis, it explored 74 documents across 47 sources, including journals, books, and conference papers, obtained from the Scopus database. The primary objective was to identify thematic trends, blind spots, and the implications of these findings for understanding political stability, governance, and democratic processes in the region. The results highlighted a remarkable concentration of research in Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines and Indonesia, where entrenched political dynasties shape governance and democratic processes. These countries dominate the literature, reflecting their unique political landscapes and the pervasive influence of familial power structures. In contrast, the lack of research on other Southeast Asian nations such as Brunei, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Timor Leste, and Vietnam highlights a critical gap that leaves the dynamics of political dynasties in these less-studied contexts. The geographic imbalance underscores the need for broader investigations to develop a more inclusive understanding of Southeast Asian political dynasties.

**Keywords:** bibliometrix, dynasty, family, power, Southeast Asia

## Introduction

Political dynasties have long been integral to political history in various parts of the world, including Southeast Asia. In this region, political dynasties often control political power and profoundly influence social, economic, and cultural aspects. In democratic contexts, the term refers to the practice of inheriting political power from one generation to the next within a family (Teehankee et al., 2023), even within a political system that is

supposed to be based on free and fair elections. Political leadership should be produced through a competitive electoral process open to all eligible citizens. However, dynastic politics can arise when certain family members use their power networks, social influence, and economic resources to maintain and extend their political power from one generation to the next (Dal Bó et al., 2009). It can take various forms, such as a father passing his office to his son, siblings taking turns holding important positions, or multiple family members executing office at different levels of government.

The Philippines and Indonesia are prominent examples of how political dynasties operate within Southeast Asian republics. Dynastic families in the Philippines leverage patronage networks to maintain their influence across generations, often affecting governance quality and democratic processes. Similarly, Indonesia's decentralization has enabled local political families to consolidate power, reflecting a complex interplay between democracy and entrenched elites. These cases illustrate the persistence and adaptability of dynastic politics in diverse socio-political contexts (Purdey, 2016b). Monarchies, such as those in Cambodia and Thailand, also represent dynastic governance through hereditary succession rather than electoral processes. While monarchies provide a contrasting backdrop, this article primarily focuses on republics where dynastic politics coexist with democratic institutions. The persistence of dynastic politics in democratic settings often sparks controversy, as it can undermine democratic principles, diminish healthy political competition, and exacerbate social and economic inequality (Schafferer, 2023). By concentrating power within families, political dynasties challenge the equitable representation of society and highlight critical issues in the intersection of tradition, governance, and modern democracy (Purdey, 2016b; Schafferer, 2023).

In recent decades, Southeast Asian political dynasties have become an increasingly popular research subject among academics. Bibliometric trends reveal a notable increase in publications, with the number rising sharply from two articles in 2013 to 14 in 2016 and maintaining consistent growth through 2024. The surge in interest reflects the expanding evidence of dynasties' impact on governance and society. Prior research has shown that in the Philippines, provinces dominated by political dynasties experience higher corruption levels and fragile governance quality (Davis et al., 2024; Mendoza, 2023; Mendoza et al., 2012; Tusalem & Pe-Aguirre, 2013). These findings highlight the dynasties' critical role in shaping political landscapes and underscore the need for further in-depth research into their mechanisms and impacts.

Political dynasties in Southeast Asia are a unique phenomenon that significantly influences governance, democratic processes, and economic development. Despite the growing body of literature, a comprehensive understanding of how these dynasties operate across different countries remains limited. The authors seek to address such a research gap through a bibliometric review and content analysis that offers a systematic overview of academic discourse from 2009 to 2024. Seventy-four papers are taken from the Scopus database, which includes scientific publications from various disciplines, including political science, sociology, economics, and history. By focusing on trends, thematic evolutions, and

blind spots, the research provides novel insights into the mechanisms, persistence, and impacts of political dynasties in Southeast Asia.

Political dynasties in Southeast Asia considerably affect political stability, quality of governance, and democratic processes (Purdey, 2016b; Ufen, 2017). In the Philippines, political dynasties are often associated with increased corruption, weakened governance, and widespread social inequality (Bulaong et al., 2024; Davis et al., 2024; Mendoza et al., 2012, 2016; Mendoza & Banaag, 2020; Rodan, 2021; Purdey, Tadem, & Tadem, 2016). In Indonesia, decentralization has strengthened the influence of local political families while creating dynastic patterns that are adaptive to regional political opportunities (Purdey, Aspinall & As'ad, 2016; Kenawas, 2023; Kimura & Anugrah, 2024; Maharani et al., 2024; Noak, 2024). Patronage networks, cultural legitimacy, and exploitation of state resources are the primary mechanisms to maintain power across generations. While the research of political dynasties shows an upward trend over the past two decades, this research also reveals significant gaps, particularly in the context of other Southeast Asian countries such as Brunei, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Timor Leste, and Vietnam, which have not been widely explored. These findings highlight the need for further research to comprehend the complexities of political dynasties in various social, economic, and cultural contexts in the region.

The research discusses two prominent aspects of political dynasties in Southeast Asia: their impact on democracy and governance and how power networks sustain them. Family dominance in politics often limits fair electoral competition, narrows the space for leadership regeneration, and weakens government accountability. In the Philippines and Indonesia, political dynasties maintain power through control over state resources, electoral rules that favor incumbents, and strong patronage networks. Instead of promoting a more inclusive democracy, political dynasties deepen corruption, nepotism, and patronage politics, creating barriers for new political actors to compete fairly. In addition to controlling public office, political dynasties build networks of power involving economic elites, the military, and political parties to nourish their dominance. In Thailand and Cambodia, military support has been a crucial factor in the stability of political dynasties, while in Singapore, strict political regulation ensures the continued rule of certain families. Thus, the sustainability of political dynasties depends not only on the popularity of individuals but also on their ability to adjust to political change through extensive patronage networks. Understanding these dynamics is key to analyzing how political dynasties continue to survive and influence democratic governance in Southeast Asia.

## Methods

The research applies bibliometric review and content analysis using data from the Scopus database, focusing on publications related to Southeast Asian political dynasties from December 2009 to July 2024. To identify relevant publications, the research initially searched using the keywords 'political dynasty' and 'Southeast Asia,' with restrictions on the categories 'political science' and 'sociology.' This search yielded 74 relevant publications, including journal articles, books, book chapters, conference papers, notes, and reviews published

between 2009 and 2024. Moreover, the research uses one leading software, Bibliometrix RStudio, as a software package that runs on the RStudio platform and provides various bibliometric and scientometric analysis tools. It allows for a more in-depth and complex analysis of bibliometric data and integration with other data analysis software in RStudio (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

The selection of Scopus as the primary data source is based on the extensive coverage of the database in the global scientific literature (Adilansyah et al., 2024; Firmansyah & Hidayat, 2024; Hidayat, 2024a, 2024b; Rifai et al., 2024). However, the authors recognize the limitations of representation caused by the dominance of English-language publications in Scopus. To mitigate such a potential bias, the scope of the Scopus database is carefully considered, with a recommendation to use additional databases such as Web of Science in the future to complete the analysis. In addition, omitting non-English publications or relevant regional studies is recognized as a limitation, emphasizing the need for a broader dataset in future research.

Data obtained from Scopus is exported in a compatible format for further analysis using Bibliometrix RStudio. The pre-processing process included data cleaning and standardization to ensure consistency and accuracy. Duplicate or irrelevant publications are excluded, while keywords such as 'Keywords Plus' and 'Author's Keywords' are crossed out to improve data reliability. Additionally, non-relevant publications in the context of Southeast Asian political dynasties are manually reviewed to ensure that only necessary documents are included. The findings produced by Bibliometrix are compared with previous research on political dynasties in Southeast Asia to ensure the validity of the analysis. This step aims to test the consistency of the findings within the context of existing academic discourse. Such a validation provides a more credible framework for interpreting the bibliometric analysis results.

In the thematic analysis, keyword co-occurrence networks are mapped to identify significant clusters, while citation analysis was used to determine influential authors and seminal works. To complement this quantitative analysis, selected documents are qualitatively reviewed to provide additional context to key themes, such as the impact of political dynasties on governance and economic development. These steps ensure that the analysis thoroughly covers the academic discourse on political dynasties in Southeast Asia, provides insights into an under-explored area, and builds a foundation for further research.

## **Results**

### **Core Details of the Dataset**

The dataset, as shown in Table 1, contains 74 documents from 47 sources which confirms a considerable annual growth rate of 14.87%, with an average age of documents of 5.68 years. Each document has received an average of 7.541 citations, and the authors of all papers used 3,490 references. Regarding document content, 63 keywords are added by researchers (Keywords Plus), and the authors themselves determined 215 keywords (Author's

Keywords). Prior research involves 114 authors, 27 of whom wrote the documents individually. It depicts the high individual contribution to the research on Southeast Asian political dynasties, although collaboration is also significant. There are 34 documents written by one author and an average of 2.09 authors per document, reflecting collaboration in some studies. The percentage of international collaboration is relatively high, at 14.86%, indicating the involvement of researchers from various countries in those studies. The documents comprise 56 articles, 2 books, 4 book chapters, 1 conference paper, 1 note, and 10 reviews. The dominant documents focus on scientific journal publications as the primary medium for disseminating research results on Southeast Asian political dynasties.

Table 1 Core Details of the Dataset

Description	Results
Timespan	December 2009–July 2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	47
Documents	74
Annual Growth Rate %	14.87
Document Average Age	5.68
Average citations per document	7.541
References	3490
Keywords Plus	63
Author's Keywords	215
Authors	114
Authors of single-authored documents	27
Single-authored documents	34
Co-Authors per documents	2.09
International co-authorships %	14.86

Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio

### Annual Scientific Output

The trend of annual scientific production, as depicted in Figure 1, is based on the number of articles published yearly from 2009 to 2024. At the beginning of the observation period (2009–2012), the number of articles published per year was deficient and stable, with only 1 article each in 2009, 2011, and 2012. The topic of Southeast Asian political dynasties was still relatively unnoticed at the beginning of this period. However, there was a considerable spike in 2013, with 2 articles published indicating increased interest and attention to research on political dynasties in Southeast Asia.

The article fluctuated slightly, with 1 in 2014 and 0 in 2015. The decrease describes variability in research focus or data availability. Nevertheless, in 2016, the number of articles increased dramatically to 14. Such an increase marks a period when the topic of Southeast Asian political dynasties began to receive greater attention from the academic community.

After the peak in 2016, the number of articles published decreased slightly but remained high, with 5 articles in 2017, 5 papers in 2018, 5 documents in 2019, and 4 works in 2020. This fluctuation depicts dynamics in research that may be influenced by external factors such as the availability of new data or changes in research focus. In 2021–2024, there has been a consistent and steady increase in articles published. The years 2021 and 2022 had 11 and 7 articles, respectively, while 2023 peaked with 9. The year 2024 continues the trend with 8 articles. This consistent increase shows that the topic of Southeast Asian political dynasties is increasingly becoming an essential focus of academic research.

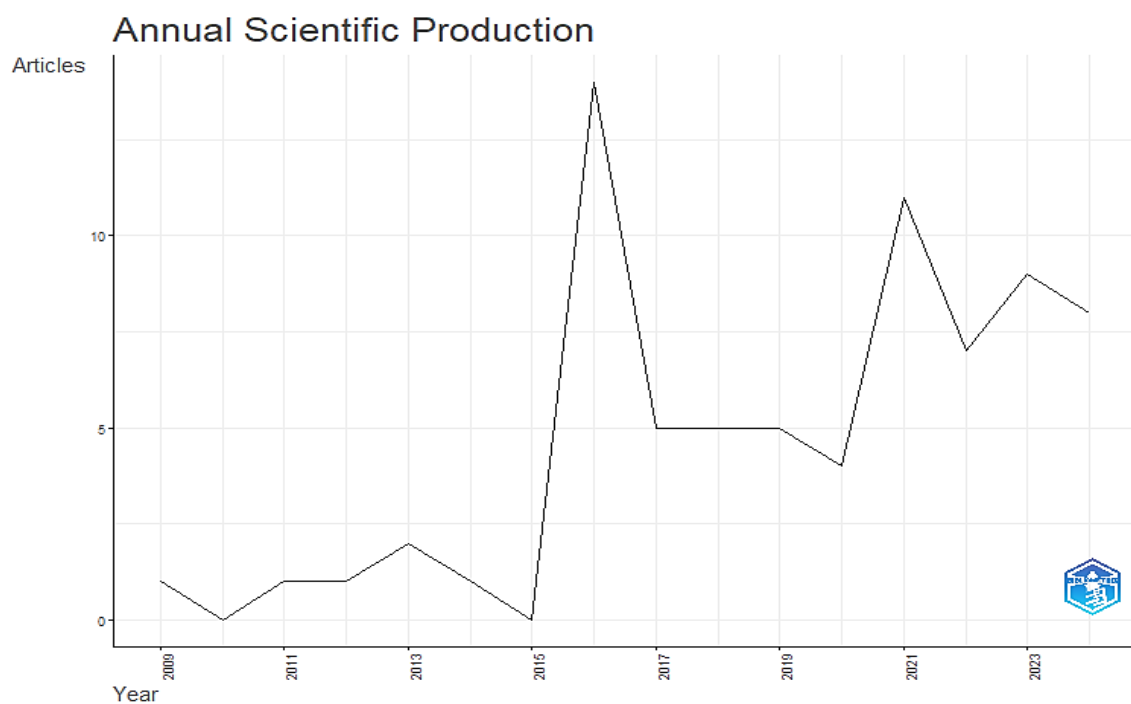


Figure 1 Annual Scientific Output (2009–2024)

Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio

### Prominent Journals

Between 2009 and 2024, research on Southeast Asian political dynasties produced much literature published in various scientific journals and books. It shows how the topic has been explored from multiple perspectives and disciplines—Figure 2 highlights only the ten most productive journals during the analysis period.

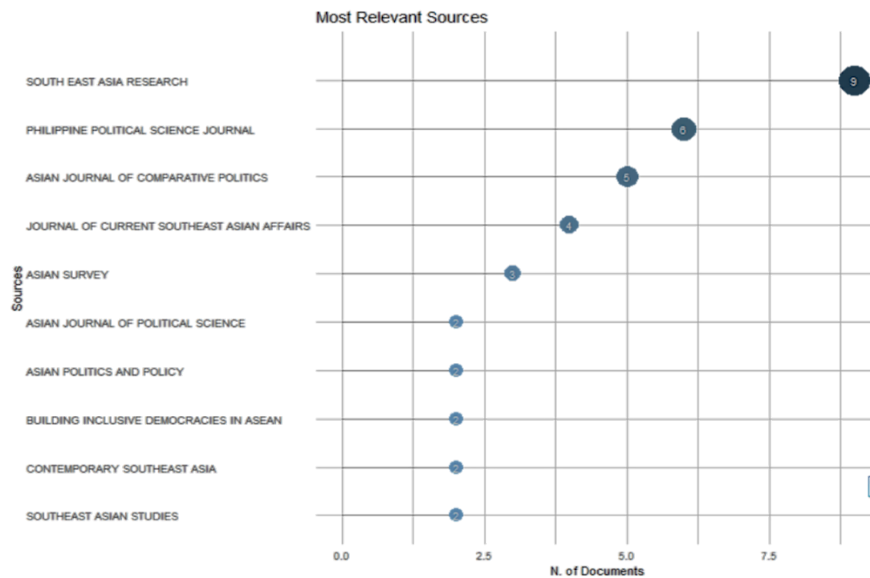


Figure 2 Top Ten Most Productive Journals (2009–2024)

Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio

"South East Asia Research" took the top spot with nine articles. This journal focuses on interdisciplinary research on the Southeast Asian region, covering various political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of political dynasties. The "Philippine Political Science Journal" came in second with six articles focusing on politics in the Philippines, including the dynamics of political dynasties in the country. In the third place, the "Asian Journal of Comparative Politics" contributed five articles that examine comparative politics in Asia, including an analysis of how political dynasties play a role in diverse political systems on the continent. "Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs" contributed four articles. This journal explores current issues in Southeast Asia, particularly concerning the structure and sustainability of political dynasties. Asian Survey ranked in fifth place with three articles. The journal explores political and economic issues across Asia, encompassing the dynamics of political dynasties.

Next, several journals and books contribute two articles, including the Asian Journal of Political Science, Asian Politics and Policy, Building Inclusive Democracies in ASEAN, Contemporary Southeast Asia, and Southeast Asian Studies. These journals cover various aspects of Southeast Asian politics, ranging from studies on political parties and public policy to issues of gender and inclusivity in politics. In addition, several journals contributed one article, indicating that the topic of political dynasties in Southeast Asia is also recognized and analyzed in a broader range of academic contexts. These journals include but are not limited to, Asia Maior, Asia-Pacific Social Science Review, Asian Affairs (UK), Asian Journal of Peacebuilding, Asian Journal of Women's Studies, Asian Studies Review, Austrian Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Cogent Social Sciences, Comparative Political Studies, Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies, Critical Asian Studies, Journal of Asian Studies, Journal of Democracy, New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies, Oxford Development Studies, Parliamentary Affairs, and Quarterly Journal of Political Science.

The diversity of these publication sources reflects that political dynasties in Southeast Asia are a complex topic that attracts attention from various disciplines, including political science, economics, social sciences, and cultural studies. These articles contribute to a deeper understanding of how political dynasties operate, develop, and influence political dynamics in Southeast Asian countries. In addition, the involvement of journals with different geographical focuses also emphasizes the significance of a country-based perspective in studying the phenomenon of political dynasties across the Southeast Asian region.

### Thematic Map

Thematic mapping of author keywords, based on centrality and density rankings in a strategic diagram, is illustrated in Figure 3. Centrality measures the degree of connectedness between keywords, while density indicates the strength of internal relationships within the network. Using these research fields, the themes were mapped onto the dimensional strategic diagram and grouped into four categories: motor, niche, emerging or declining, and basic themes (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Lucey et al., 2023). There are six foremost clusters labeled according to their respective dominant themes in Southeast Asian political dynasties-related research. Each cluster reflects keyword relatedness and thematic relevance based on centrality metrics such as betweenness centrality, closeness centrality, and PageRank centrality.

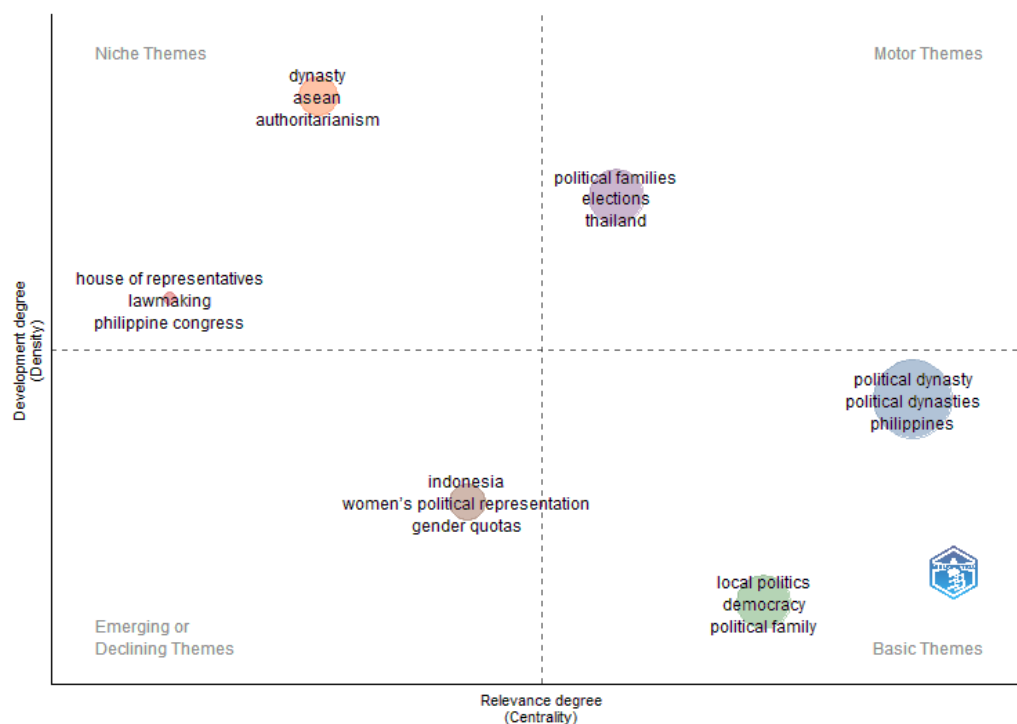


Figure 3 Thematic Map (2009–2024)

Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio



*Motor Themes (Quadrant Q1):* The motor themes have a strong centrality and high density, making them significant for advancing research on Southeast Asian political dynasties. Cluster 4, "political families," is the motor theme containing several primary keywords: political families, elections, Thailand, and democratization. This theme highlights the relationship between political families and the electoral process. The keyword "Thailand" underscores the influence of political families in the country. The centrality value shows that the topic is important but less dominant than other clusters.

*Niche Themes (Quadrant Q2):* Niche themes are highly developed, have strong connections, and are highly specialized. However, these themes do not have a sufficient connection to the primary context of the field. Cluster 1, "House of Representatives," consists of several main keywords: house of representatives, lawmaking, and Philippine congress, categorized as a niche theme. This cluster focuses on legislative functions, particularly on representative bodies such as the Philippine Congress. The keyword Philippine congress shows a direct link to the political context in the Philippines. Cluster 5, "Dynasty," is also categorized under a niche theme containing the prominent keywords: dynasty, ASEAN, and authoritarianism. This cluster reflects the issue of political dynasties in the context of Southeast Asia (ASEAN). The link with authoritarianism emphasizes that political dynasties are often connected to authoritarian systems, while politics and society highlight their impact on social structures.

*Emerging or Declining Themes (Quadrant Q3):* Emerging or declining themes tend to have low density and centrality, so they are considered weak because they represent topics that are just developing at an early stage or issues that are losing relevance. This theme contains Cluster 6, "Indonesia," which consists of the main keywords: Indonesia, women's political representation, and gender quotas. The cluster focuses on the issue of women's representation in Indonesian politics. The high betweenness centrality value for Indonesia (3539) indicates the significance of this theme in the network. The association with gender quotas confirms the efforts to encourage women's political participation.

*Basic and Transversal Themes (Quadrant Q4):* The basic themes have high relevance due to their high centrality but low density. Although the themes are important to the research field, their development is still sub-optimal. Cluster 2, "Political Dynasty," reflects the substance and scope of the basic theme. It contains several keywords: political dynasty, political dynasties, philippines, oligarchy, corruption, and poverty. Cluster 2 is the central theme in the data, with the highest betweenness centrality value (political dynasties: 4048), and shows that the issue of political dynasties is highly influential in the keyword network. Associations with corruption and poverty reflect the negative impact of political dynasties, while connections to economic development and incumbency highlight their influence on economic development and power. Cluster 3, "Local Politics," is also included, consisting of the main keywords: local politics, democracy, inequality, and rent-seeking. This cluster focuses on the dynamics of local politics. The association with keywords such as democracy and inequality shows the interaction between democratization efforts and inequality challenges. The highest PageRank centrality value is found for the keyword local politics (0.0148), confirming that local politics plays a significant role in the overall network.

## Thematic Evolution

Research on Southeast Asian political dynasties has undergone a thematic evolution that confirms the changing focus of the study over time, from 2009 to 2024, as shown in Figure 4. The analysis focuses on how these topics changed and developed during two different periods, namely 2009–2020 and 2021–2024, relying on various metrics such as weighted increase, increase index, occurrence, and stability.



Figure 4 Thematic Evolution (2009–2024)

Source: Biblioshiny using RStudio

*From Corruption to Political Dynasties and Political Parties (2009–2020 to 2021–2024):* In 2009–2020, corruption was a dominant theme in the study of political dynasties in Southeast Asia. This topic then focused on "dynasties" and "political parties" in 2021–2024. The theme of corruption, often associated with dynastic politics, suggests that political dynasties often engage in corruption to maintain their power. However, over time, attention has shifted to how political dynasties interact with political parties and the structure of the dynasty, highlighting the role of political parties in supporting or opposing political dynasties.

*Focus on Indonesia (2009–2020 to 2021–2024):* Indonesia as a theme has seen a significant increase in academic attention. In the early period, there were fewer studies on Indonesia, but in 2021–2024, it has become one of the main focuses. It reflects the growing interest in how political dynasties operate in Indonesia and how they affect political and democratic processes.

*Stability of Dynasty Theme (2009–2020 to 2021–2024):* The theme of "dynasty" remained stable from 2009–2020 to 2021–2024. This theme encompasses studies on the continuity and

ways political dynasties maintain power from generation to generation. Despite changes in context and case studies, the focus on dynasties as stable political entities remains consistent.

*Democratization and Elections (2009–2020 to 2021–2024):* The topics of “democratization” and “elections” have undergone significant development. From an initial focus on dynasties, academic attention has shifted to how democratization and electoral processes are affected by the existence of political dynasties. It depicts a growing interest in understanding the impact of political dynasties on democratic institutions and electoral processes, as well as the challenges they face in changing contexts.

*Oligarchy and Local Politics (2009–2020 to 2021–2024):* The themes of “oligarchy” and “local politics” have emerged as new focuses in research on political dynasties. Political dynasties often function in oligarchic contexts where power is concentrated in the hands of a few families or individuals. In addition, local politics has become essential for understanding how political dynasties operate and maintain their power at a more micro-level.

*Changes in Political Dynasties and Political Families (2009–2020 to 2021–2024):* The topics of “political dynasties” and “political families” have undergone considerable changes in research. “Political families” has become a more detailed theme, describing how political families strategize and adapt to changing political environments. Political dynasties continue to be a central theme but with a deeper focus on family dynamics and the strategies they use to maintain power.

The thematic evolution confirms a shift in focus from corruption issues to a deeper exploration of dynastic structures, the role of political parties, and the impact on democratization and elections. The growing interest in Indonesia as a case study highlights the country's significance in the context of Southeast Asian political dynasties. Meanwhile, the themes of oligarchy and local politics represent an attempt to understand power dynamics at a more granular level. The research of political dynasties continues to grow, reflecting the complexity and changes in the political landscape in the region.

## **Discussion**

### **Reflective Reading on Bibliometric Dataset**

The dataset provides an overview of the development of political dynasty literature in Southeast Asia, reflecting the issue's complexity and sustainability in the regional political landscape. With an annual publication growth of 14.87%, academic attention to the issue has increased over the past 15 years. It indicates that political dynasties are not just a static historical topic but a dynamic entity that continue transforming as a challenge to contemporary democracy and modern governance.

The geographical distribution of prior research confirms the dominance of the Philippines and Indonesia as the central locus of research. This dominance reflects the political realities of both countries, where political dynasties play a crucial role in directing policy,

influencing democratic processes, and deepening social inequality. However, such an uneven distribution is also a reminder of the research gaps in other countries such as Brunei, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Timor Leste, and Vietnam, although having unique political systems, have not received adequate attention from academics. It points to the need to develop more inclusive literature so that the understanding of political dynasties in Southeast Asia can portray more diverse dynamics. With only a 14.86% international collaboration rate, prior studies tend to be local or regional. It confirms the nature of deeply rooted political dynasties in local contexts, thus requiring an in-depth perspective of political, cultural, and social dynamics in every country in the region. However, the lack of international collaboration is an opportunity to expand research horizons through cross-country cooperation, which can provide new insights into how political dynasties operate in various governance systems in Southeast Asia.

Reflection on the thematic clusters also affirms the significance of issues such as corruption, inequality, and oligarchy as dominant themes. The underlying theme of the "Political Dynasty" cluster highlights the relevance of these issues to governance and democracy in the region. Meanwhile, the "Local Politics" and "Dynasty" clusters show how political dynasty is often closely linked to local political dynamics, where patronage networks and inequality play a prominent role. Thus, political dynasties are not only a national problem but also directly impact political structures and processes at the local level. Nonetheless, the reflection reveals significant blind spots. The disparity in the representation of certain countries suggests that the narrative of political dynasties in Southeast Asia remains biased, with an overly large focus on electoral democracies such as the Philippines and Indonesia. There is a need to comprehend how political dynasties interact with authoritarian or hybrid political contexts, such as Cambodia and Vietnam. As such, it invites researchers to expand the geographical reach of research and consider more diverse methodological approaches, such as social network analysis or phenomenological exploration, to uncover new dimensions of political dynasties.

Overall, the dataset provides an influential platform for understanding Southeast Asia's political dynasties' complexities and dynamics. However, these data also call for deeper reflection on how these studies can go beyond existing boundaries to address critical questions about the sustainability of democracy, social justice, and institutional reform in the region.

### **Formation Mechanisms of Southeast Asian Political Dynasties**

The phenomenon of political dynasties across Southeast Asia depicts a complex interplay of mechanisms through which these powerful families establish and maintain their political dominance. Dynasty formation operates through three interconnected pathways that collectively create resilient political structures capable of sustaining power across generations. The first crucial mechanism emerges from strategically exploiting initial electoral victories to serve as foundational moments for establishing dynastic power. This pattern is particularly evident in the Philippines, where candidates who secure their first election by a narrow

margin become approximately five times more likely to establish political dynasties than those who narrowly lose (Querubin, 2016). It illuminates how access to public office becomes a critical catalyst for dynasty formation as successful candidates leverage their positions to create lasting political infrastructure. The pattern extends across the region, with Indonesian data showing how direct regional head elections create enhanced opportunities for incumbents to establish and strengthen dynastic power bases (Purwaningsih & Widodo, 2020).

The second formation mechanism involves the sophisticated utilization of cultural, religious, and traditional authority structures, which proves particularly effective in societies where traditional social hierarchies retain remarkable influence. The case of Indonesia's Bima regency provides a compelling example of how the royal family maintains political control by strategically deploying the sultan's image as a source of cultural legitimacy. Such an approach proves especially powerful in communities where traditional beliefs remain strong to facilitate consistent electoral support (Yuliadi et al., 2021). These findings demonstrate how successful dynasties skillfully blend traditional authority with modern political structures, creating a hybrid form of legitimacy that resonates across different segments of society.

The third and most intricate mechanism involves the development of extensive patronage networks that artfully combine elite interests with grassroots support. Prior studies reveal how these networks operate as sophisticated ecosystems of power, incorporating various societal elements. In Indonesia, such networks extend to religious institutions, with Islamic boarding schools receiving state facilities in exchange for supporting dynasty agendas (Azizah et al., 2021). The sustainability of these patronage networks relies heavily on sophisticated resource distribution strategies. Governors in the Philippines from political clans strategically increase economic spending when facing competition (Solon et al., 2009), while the Arroyo administration exemplified how patronage networks could simultaneously maintain political stability and influence economic governance (Abinales, 2011). These findings underscore how successful dynasties maintain control over both formal political institutions and informal power structures, creating comprehensive systems of influence that adapt to changing political contexts.

Particularly noteworthy is how these three mechanisms—electoral exploitation, cultural authority, and patronage networks—operate not in isolation but in dynamic interaction. When initial electoral victories provide access to state resources, these resources can be channeled through patronage networks, reinforcing cultural authority. This cyclical reinforcement creates resilient political structures capable of withstanding prominent social and political changes. Dynasty formation is not simply a matter of inherited privilege but involves sophisticated mechanisms combining traditional authority, modern political structures, and complex social networks. Understanding these formation mechanisms proves crucial for analyzing the persistence of political dynasties and their profound implications for democratic development in the region.

## Distinct Regional Patterns of Political Dynasties in Southeast Asia

The phenomenon of political dynasties in Southeast Asia reflects the region's distinctive historical backgrounds, cultures, and diverse political systems. These family-based power dynamics involve the inheritance of political positions and show how social values and patronage networks are deeply rooted in governance structures. These family often influence democratic processes and political participation, shaping patterns of power that prioritize family continuity in public roles and maintaining a status quo that benefits specific groups. The phenomenon poses challenges in creating a political system that is more inclusive and open to potential new figures.

Southeast Asia has unique political dynamics, especially related to the formation and operation of political dynasties. Although the region consists of 11 countries, previous research has focused on only five: Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand. The Philippines dominates, with 37 reflecting the high academic attention paid to political dynasties in the country. Due to the entrenched existence and significant influence of political dynasties in Philippine local and national politics, it has become a deep and ongoing political phenomenon. Past research has often explored the mechanisms of dynastic politics, its impact on democracy, and its link to poverty and inequality in the country (Buendia, 2021; Bulaong et al., 2024; Dulay & Go, 2022; Mendoza et al., 2012, 2016, 2023; Querubin, 2016; Reyes et al., 2018; Rodan, 2021; Purdey, Tadem, & Tadem, 2016; Tuaño & Cruz, 2019; Tusalem & Pe-Aguirre, 2013). Indonesia, with 24 studies, ranks second in the amount of literature. The research focuses on the dynamics of local politics, especially at the regional level, where political dynasties often emerge in the context of regional head elections. Research in Indonesia also highlights the transparency, accountability, and corruption aspects of political dynasties (Purdey, Aspinall & As'ad, 2016; Fauzanafi, 2016; Kenawas, 2023; Kimura & Anugrah, 2024; Purwaningsih & Widodo, 2020).

Thailand has nine studies, most of which focus on the influence of political dynasties in its parliamentary system and local politics (Purdey & Kongkirati, 2016; Nethipo, 2024; Nethipo et al., 2023; Nishizaki, 2013, 2018, 2019, 2023, 2024; Thananithichot & Satidporn, 2016). Political dynasties in Thailand are often associated with political conflicts between traditional and modern elites and their impact on the country's political stability. Meanwhile, research in Cambodia is relatively limited, with only one study detected. The research explores the dominance of a particular family in Cambodian politics, reflecting how power is centralized in one elite group (Bennett, 2023). Like Cambodia, there is only one research on dynastic politics in Singapore (Barr, 2016). It examines how Singapore is governed by a family-centered network of former Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew's close associates and relatives, despite official claims that the country is led by its most talented individuals and is grounded in professionalism.

Political dynasties in the Philippines have been a persistent feature of the country's political landscape. The phenomenon illustrates how certain families dominate political positions and retain power from generation to generation. Their formation often begins with a narrow first election victory, allowing other family members to occupy political positions in

the future. Political dynasties employ various adaptive strategies to maintain their dominance and enable multiple members of a political family to hold different political offices simultaneously, influencing policymaking (Dulay & Go, 2022; Reyes et al., 2018; Teehankee, 2018). However, social and economic issues will significantly determine the outcome of future inter-dynastic political contests as tensions between the Marcos-Romualdez dynasty and Duterte's coalition emerge in 2023 (Zialcita, 2024).

Indonesia also has a long history of political dynasties that have influenced various aspects of political and social life in the country. Political dynasties reflect the continuity of power within one family and show how that power is maintained and developed amidst remarkable political and social changes. The structure of political opportunities and the weaknesses of the state and political parties greatly influence the formation of political dynasties. Many regents in Central Kalimantan tried to build political dynasties, but only a few succeeded. Intergenerational stability in political dynasties still requires further discovery (Purdey, Aspinall, & As'ad, 2016). Decentralization and electoral democracy in Indonesia have facilitated the emergence of new elites and their families as political dynasties in Pekalongan, Central Java. Local political families were highly adaptable to external opportunities, threats, and internal family dynamics (Savirani, 2016). Furthermore, at the village scale, the adaptability and resilience of political dynasties to consistently win village head elections are influenced by unclear legal rules, undemocratic village institutions, and the strength of formal and informal social networks (Noak, 2024).

The operation of political dynasties often involves patronage networks and political resources to maintain power, as done by the Djoghadikusumo political dynasty, which has held positions of power for four generations. This dynasty adapts to changing political structures and the external and internal factors influencing its sustainability (Purdey, 2016a). After the rapid transition from an authoritarian system to a democracy, the old elite tried to regain power through various strategies. One is employing great nostalgia and past successful leadership images, such as Suharto, as part of the regime's restoration strategy to maintain relevance in contemporary political situations (Tyson & Nawawi, 2022). Political dynasty operations often use pragmatic tactics to ensure election victory, including single-candidate arrangements. Political parties and internal party structures influence the placement of dynasty women on committees, indicating the vital role of dynasties in politics so that political dynasty operations involve internal party arrangements to maintain their power and influence (Prihatini & Halimatusa'diyah, 2024).

In Cambodia, the transformation into a dynastic autocracy was influenced by economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic, human rights restrictions, and regional political relations. The future of Hun Manet's government remains uncertain, but it is expected to follow the pattern set by his father (Bennett, 2023). Political dynasties also play a prominent role in Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew was central to a significant power network from the early 1980s until his son, Lee Hsien Loong, consolidated power in 2011. Despite official rhetoric that the best talents run the country, the reality is that a group of families and relatives control the government. Political dynasties depend on individual ability and the networks of strong families, making it impossible for others to rise to the highest positions of power (Barr, 2016).

Thailand also experiences a unique political dynasty phenomenon. King Bhumibol Adulyadej mobilized his national patronage network to shape contemporary politics. Monarchy built a symbiotic relationship with Banharn Silpa-Archa, a rural politician considered dishonest, for their political interests. It describes how political dynasties often involve collaboration between the monarchy elite and local politicians to maintain power (Nishizaki, 2013). However, given the history and pattern of wealth accumulation and political power, many political dynasties only lasted two legislative terms because frequent military coups disrupted parliamentary institutions and the electoral process. Ideological conflicts and mass movements after the 2006 military coup further weakened the power of the old political dynasties. Political stability is heavily influenced by military dynamics and internal conflicts, which impact the sustainability of political dynasties (Purdey & Kongkirati, 2016). Being part of a political dynasty can provide electoral advantages. However, the most influential factor is being a member of the Pheu Thai Party or the Democrat Party. One of the best ways to avoid the monopoly of political families in Thailand is to empower and support qualified party members and voters to get involved in party affairs and activities (Thananithichot & Satidporn, 2016).

In summary, in the region's various political systems, political dynasties can maintain a particular family's dominance in public office and shape policy patterns and resource distribution. Political dynasties in the Philippines and Indonesia demonstrate how controlling democratic institutions can be used to maintain power through electoral mechanisms that favor incumbents. In these countries, political patronage and the exploitation of state resources have become key instruments in securing the political position of powerful families, often at the expense of transparency and accountability. The impact extends to various aspects of governance, from more closed decision-making to unequal access to political power for new actors.

Moreover, the networks of power that sustain political dynasties in Southeast Asia show complex patterns and vary by country. Some dynasties survive through alliances with economic and military elites, such as in Thailand and Cambodia, where the relationship between political power and the armed forces is crucial in maintaining power stability. Meanwhile, in Singapore, strict political regulations effectively preserve the dominance of certain families in the government system. By using extensive patronage networks, political dynasties can adapt to changes in the political and economic environment without losing control of power.

### **Impacts of Political Dynasties in Southeast Asia**

Political dynasties significantly impact governance quality, economic development, voter behavior, and the sustainability of political parties and democratic institutions across Southeast Asia. Dynasties often influence governance by intertwining family interests with public office. This fusion can lead to nepotism, corruption, and the prioritization of personal wealth accumulation over effective policymaking. Such practices challenge the development of transparent and accountable governance structures.



Political dynasties in the Philippines have a detrimental effect on good governance, with provinces dominated by them tending to experience less effective governance regarding infrastructure development, health spending, crime prevalence, and quality of government (Tusalem & Pe-Aguirre, 2013). The dominance of political dynasties in the 2013 midterm elections, where 74% of elected members of the House of Representatives came from dynasty groups, led to patronage politics and corruption (Purdey, Tadem, & Tadem, 2016), so there is a positive relationship between the concentration of dynastic political power and the risk of corruption in the Philippines when viewed from the perspective of public procurement contracts (Davis et al., 2024). Moreover, in Indonesia, political dynasties represent each vested interest in the form of the elite's need to remain in power, supported by political freedom that can fulfill their rights without limits (Marwiyah et al., 2017). Political dynasties in several regions directly impact society and government bureaucracy, which often ends in acts of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (Muslikhah et al., 2019).

Economic impacts present a complex picture. While some regions show positive correlations between dynasty presence and poverty reduction, as seen in parts of Indonesia during regional autonomy (Guritno et al., 2019), income inequality and social exclusion typically increase in dynasty-dominated areas. The Philippines demonstrates how political dynasties and family conglomerates hamper non-elites capacity to implement progressive policies, leading to persistent inequality and low social mobility (Tuaño & Cruz, 2019). Areas dominated by political dynasties have lower living standards and levels of human development and higher levels of deprivation and inequality (Mendoza et al., 2012). They have a weak relationship with overall economic performance. However, higher economic spending is accompanied by lower economic development in areas where mayors, governors, and congress members come from the same clan (Garces et al., 2021).

Democratic institution development faces noteworthy challenges from dynasty dominance. The consolidation of political power within influential families often curtails the democratization process. By limiting access to political office for individuals outside dynastic circles, political dynasties hinder the representation of diverse societal interests. This power consolidation perpetuates a form of "elite democracy," where competition remains confined to a small pool of interconnected families. It then undermines broader political inclusivity. As a result, electoral policies in dynastic contexts frequently sustain unequal competition. The reliance on name recognition and familial networks skews electoral outcomes, favoring dynastic candidates. For instance, institutional reforms in Thailand paradoxically allowed political families to strengthen their parliamentary hold (Nishizaki, 2018). The concentration of power in the hands of political dynasties results in increased political violence, with such concentrated power fueling weak governance and poor development outcomes, which in turn provoke political violence (Mendoza et al., 2022).

Political dynasties also significantly shape voter behavior, leveraging cultural norms, patron-client relationships, and historical legacies. In many Southeast Asian societies, familial loyalty and respect for traditional hierarchies translate into voter preferences for candidates with recognizable family names. For example, voters in Indonesia often perceive dynastic politicians as stable and trustworthy due to their established networks and historical presence

(Kenawas, 2023). However, their perceptions are not uniformly favorable. Increasing voter awareness, particularly among younger generations and urban populations, has led to growing resistance against dynastic politics (Fauzanafi, 2016).

The sustainability of political parties in Southeast Asia is closely intertwined with the influence of dynasties. Dynastic leadership often prioritizes personal loyalty over institutional development, weakening party structures (Mufti, 2015). Conversely, political dynasties can ensure party continuity by providing stable leadership and mobilizing resources during electoral campaigns (Amundsen, 2016). This duality underscores the complex relationship between dynasties and party resilience.

Addressing such severe implications of dynastic politics requires a combination of legal reforms, electoral transparency, voter education, and institutional strengthening. Anti-dynasty legislation initiated in Indonesia can limit family dominance in politics or restrict simultaneous office-holding among relatives (Kenawas, 2023). Electoral reforms, including tighter regulations on campaign financing, will ensure fair competition and reduce the advantages of dynastic wealth (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Voter education campaigns can shift voter focus toward merit rather than familial ties (David & Legara, 2017). The rise of digital platforms has further disrupted traditional voter patterns where social media can amplify reformist voices and challenge dynastic dominance (Gurri, 2018). Furthermore, strengthening intra-party democracy will allow non-dynastic leaders to emerge and diversify political representation (Chandra, 2016). By integrating these strategies, Southeast Asian democracies can foster accountability, inclusivity, and equitable political representation to mitigate the entrenched power of political dynasties.

### **Emerging Trends and Challenges**

There are several prominent emerging trends and challenges in Southeast Asian political dynasties. Digital resistance emerges as a powerful new force, particularly in Indonesia, where citizens increasingly use online platforms to challenge corrupt dynasty regimes (Fauzanafi, 2016). This digital transformation of citizenship practices represents a significant shift in how populations engage with and resist dynastic power. It could pressure dynastic regimes to reform or risk losing legitimacy. The proliferation of social media analytics and digital tools also enables more precise targeting of corrupt practices, accelerating judicial and public scrutiny (Hidayat, 2019; Kamaluddin et al., 2022).

Women's political participation presents complex dynamics. While dynasties facilitate women's entry into politics, as seen in Indonesia's parliament, where 44% of female legislators come from political families (Wardani & Subekti, 2021), this pattern often reinforces rather than challenges traditional power structures. Dynasty women's success does not necessarily translate to broader female political empowerment. Within a decade, systemic reforms—such as gender quotas unlinked to dynasties—could emerge, driven by public advocacy for more representative political participation.

Voter behavior shows evolving patterns across the region. In the Philippines, there is growing voter skepticism toward dynastic politicians, with voters increasingly perceiving them as less qualified and less supportive of universal policies than non-dynastic candidates (David & Legara, 2017). Similar trends appear in other countries, suggesting a potential shift in public attitudes toward political dynasties. This disillusionment could weaken dynastic strongholds over the next 5–10 years, especially as younger, digitally-savvy voters demand more meritocratic governance. This trend might lead to a surge in support for non-dynastic, reform-oriented candidates, ultimately transforming electoral dynamics and reducing the influence of entrenched elites.

The rise of reform-oriented local politics represents another emerging trend. Some local politicians have begun challenging political dynasties in the Philippines by implementing programmatic governance, as demonstrated in Dinagat Island (Hara, 2021). It suggests potential pathways for democratic reform even within dynasty-dominated political systems. As these local successes gain visibility, they may inspire broader movements for systemic reforms, encouraging replication in other regions. This shift could lead to the gradual dismantling of dynastic systems, replaced by governance structures prioritizing transparency and accountability.

### **Blind Spots**

Regarding the distribution of research loci, the Philippines and Indonesia dominate the literature. At the same time, other countries such as Brunei, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Timor Leste, and Vietnam have not been represented through any research. It confirms a noteworthy research gap that needs to be bridged, especially to understand the phenomenon of political dynasties in countries that have not been detected as the locus of previous research. This geographic neglect has broader implications for the field. Without examining other countries, current scholarship risks offering an incomplete narrative about political dynasties in Southeast Asia. The unique governance systems in these countries—from authoritarian regimes to hybrid democracies—can provide critical insights into the adaptability and resilience of political dynasties under different political conditions. Furthermore, studying these countries could uncover patterns of dynastic entrenchment that differ from those observed in democracies like the Philippines or hybrid systems like Thailand. The lack of comprehensive studies on these jurisdictions limits comprehension of how political dynasties interact with varying degrees of authoritarianism, historical legacies, and cultural frameworks.

Another crevice is the lack of research on the relationship between political dynasties and Southeast Asian democratic development. Political dynasties are often considered a barrier to democratic development because the power concentration in a single family can inhibit broader political participation and reduce government accountability. However, in-depth research on how political dynasties interact with democratization processes and how they influence the development of democratic institutions is still minimal. Further research is

essential to understand whether political dynasties always harm democracy or whether there are specific conditions under which they may contribute positively.

Most research on political dynasties in Southeast Asia uses a historical or case study approach focusing on specific political dynasties. While these approaches provide valuable insights, more in-depth quantitative and qualitative analyses that can identify general patterns and broader trends in the phenomenon are needed. Bibliometric analysis, social network analysis, and other statistical methods can fill this gap and provide a more comprehensive picture of Southeast Asian political dynasties.

A final cleft is investigating political dynasties' adaptation and resilience strategies in the digital era. With the advancement of digital technology and social media, there is a need to understand how political dynasties adapt and use these technologies to maintain and expand their power. Fauzanafi (2016) highlights how digital technology in Indonesia has transformed citizenship practices, but similar research in other Southeast Asian countries still needs to be conducted. Understanding the use of digital technology by political dynasties can provide important insights into contemporary power dynamics and how they can survive and adapt in a changing era.

## Conclusion

The research systematically examined the dynamics of political dynasties in Southeast Asia, focusing on their prevalence, influence, and evolution from 2009 to 2024. Political dynasties remain deeply entrenched in many Southeast Asian countries, profoundly shaping democratic governance and maintaining power through strong patronage networks. In the Philippines and Indonesia, political dynasties utilize electoral mechanisms that favor incumbents, control over state resources, and patronage practices to secure dominance, often undermining government transparency and accountability. Meanwhile, in Thailand and Cambodia, alliances with military elites are crucial in maintaining the stability of political dynasties. However, in Singapore, strict political regulations ensure the continuity of power of certain families. By adapting their strategies to political and economic changes, political dynasties in the region continue to survive, demonstrating how control over political institutions and power networks allows them to adapt without losing dominance in the governance system.

This review also underscores significant national disparities, with the Philippines and Indonesia dominating the discourse. These nations exhibit entrenched dynastic politics characterized by leveraging familial networks and alliances with political elites, influencing national governance and local development. Conversely, the article identified a critical gap in the study of political dynasties in other countries where strong executive power and limited political freedoms likely create fertile ground for dynastic persistence. The absence of scholarly attention to these areas highlights the need for expanded geographical and contextual research to develop a more holistic understanding of political dynasties in diverse socio-political environments. The interaction between political dynasties and democratization

processes presents an area ripe for exploration, including how dynasties adapt to emerging challenges such as digital resistance and voter disillusionment. Policy recommendations derived from these insights include promoting transparency in electoral processes, limiting familial succession, and fostering inclusive political participation. These steps are essential to mitigating the adverse effects of dynastic dominance and advancing democratic governance across Southeast Asia.

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