

Decentralization, Local Political Dynasties, and Governance Outcomes: A Literature Review of Causal Mechanisms, Institutional Moderators, and Local Democratic Performance

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how decentralization shapes the emergence of local political dynasties and how dynastic dominance affects governance outcomes in subnational politics. Although decentralization is often expected to deepen accountability, participation, and service responsiveness, the literature shows that it can also create strategic opportunities for elite capture when local offices become politically and materially valuable. Using a structured literature review design, this study synthesizes 12 selected journal articles focusing mainly on Indonesia, with limited comparative evidence from India and broader developing-country contexts. The analysis identifies recurring mechanisms behind dynastic emergence, including weak party institutionalization, personalistic candidate recruitment, high campaign costs, patronage networks, incumbency advantage, and permissive legal arrangements. It also evaluates dynastic effects on governance outcomes, particularly service delivery, corruption risk, bureaucratic quality, accountability, and democratic competition. The review finds that dynastic politics is generally associated with weaker governance performance, higher corruption vulnerability, reduced bureaucratic neutrality, and narrower electoral competition. However, these effects are not uniform. Their severity depends on institutional moderators such as governance quality, oversight capacity, bureaucratic strength, monitoring systems, electoral competition, and regulatory constraints. The article concludes that local political dynasties should be understood not as merely familial phenomena, but as institutionally mediated outcomes of decentralized political and electoral systems



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INTRODUCTION

Decentralization has long been championed as a paramount governance reform within developing nations and emerging democracies. It is predicated on the expectation that devolving authority will bridge the distance between the state and its citizens, fortify local accountability, and elevate the quality of public services. By transferring power from the central government to subnational entities, decentralization is normatively correlated with the mitigation of excessive power concentration, heightened responsiveness to localized needs, and the augmented legitimacy of public decision-making (Mukhlis et al., 2025). Within the Indonesian context, fiscal and administrative decentralization has been inextricably linked to the pursuit of transparent and equitable governance, theoretically achievable through enhanced efficiency and accountability in local public financial management (Pratolo & Irmawati, 2020). Nevertheless, the prevailing literature explicitly cautions that these dividends are not guaranteed; rather, weak institutional capacity and deficient oversight mechanisms frequently precipitate localized corruption, superficial civic participation, and highly disparate service outcomes (Pratolo & Irmawati, 2020).

The empirical gravity of this dynamic has intensified concurrently with the global proliferation of decentralized governance and the expansion of local electoral arenas. Indonesia is frequently characterized as one of the most decentralized unitary states globally. Following the post-Reformasi transitions and the advent of direct local elections in 2005, substantial political and fiscal authority was systematically transferred to governors, mayors, and district heads (Buehler et al., 2021; Winanti & Hanif, 2020). Empirical analyses encompassing 1,324 local elections between 2005 and 2018 reveal that the majority of these contests maintained high levels of electoral competitiveness. This suggests that decentralization did not uniformly spawn authoritarian local monopolies (Buehler et al., 2021). However, this unprecedented opening of subnational political competition has simultaneously coincided with the persistence and aggressive expansion of family-based political dominance. This phenomenon is observable not only in Indonesia but also across South Asia and Latin America, where dynastic candidates leverage inherited name recognition, entrenched network advantages, and privileged access to state resources (Ascencio & Malik, 2024).

Within this complex landscape, scholarly consensus indicates that political dynasties do not materialize solely as a byproduct of decentralization. Instead, they emerge from the volatile intersection of decentralization with weakly institutionalized political parties, hyper-personalistic candidacies, exorbitant campaign expenditures, and patronage-driven control over local state apparatuses. In Indonesia, political parties frequently operate less as genuine conduits for cadre recruitment and more as transactional gatekeepers that commodify access to candidacy. This structural deficiency compels contenders to rely heavily upon privately financed campaign networks and informal political brokers (Berenschot, 2018; Berenschot & Mulder, 2019). In jurisdictions where local executives exert monopolistic control over business licenses, public procurement contracts, bureaucratic appointments, and fiscal allocations, public office transforms into a highly lucrative asset. Consequently, this asset is fiercely preserved and transmitted within immediate families or allied oligarchic networks (Berenschot, 2018; Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020; Noak, 2024). Furthermore, comparative studies demonstrate that macro-institutional design, including term limits, candidate selection protocols, and internal party structures, definitively dictates whether such dynastic reproduction is successfully constrained or structurally entrenched (Ascencio & Malik, 2024; Brossier, 2024; Fiva & Smith, 2016).

The profound ramifications of dynastic dominance for local governance and democratic integrity constitute a central preoccupation within the literature. Contemporary studies predominantly associate entrenched political dynasties with highly clientelistic budget allocations, elevated corruption vulnerabilities, the erosion of bureaucratic professionalism, and the substantive degradation of electoral competition, even when formal electoral procedures appear ostensibly competitive. For instance, in the Philippines, horizontal dynastic expansion correlates with increased local public expenditure but fails to manifest corresponding improvements in economic growth or poverty alleviation. This disjunction indicates that augmented spending primarily serves political consolidation rather than genuine

developmental efficacy (Dulay & Go, 2021). Similarly, in Indonesia, the confluence of dynastic and clientelistic local governance has been causally linked to bureaucratic capture, systemic nepotism, constrained civic participation, and endemic corruption, as vividly documented in analyses of Banten province and localized village politics (D. Hariyati, 2024; Noak, 2024; Paranata, 2025). Corroborating research further establishes that in environments where entrenched elites and patronage networks are permitted to persist, democratic accountability inevitably atrophies, rendering sustained political opposition virtually impossible (Boas et al., 2018; Martinez-Bravo et al., 2017).

Despite this rapidly expanding body of scholarship, the academic field remains problematically fragmented. The conceptual definitions and typological classifications of political dynasties lack consistency across comparative cases. Moreover, the mediating mechanisms that conceptually bridge dynastic rule to specific governance outcomes remain inadequately synthesized. There is also a pronounced deficit in comparative attention devoted to crucial institutional moderators, such as party institutionalization, systemic oversight capacity, and specific electoral designs (Abimbola et al., 2019; Dulay & Go, 2021; Faguet & Shami, 2021; Fiva & Smith, 2016). Consequently, the extant literature has yet to formulate a comprehensive, integrated explanatory framework capable of delineating the precise conditions under which dynastic dominance proves acutely detrimental, the specific contexts where its impacts are conditional, and the exact mechanisms through which decentralization either amplifies or constrains these localized outcomes. The present review directly addresses this critical scholarly gap by constructing a rigorous, systematic synthesis of the causal mechanisms, institutional moderators, and ultimate governance consequences inherent in the nexus of decentralization and local political dynasties.

To address the analytical fragmentation and equivocal empirical findings characterizing current scholarship on decentralization and local political dynasties, this article systematically synthesizes the intersectional literature by disaggregating two frequently conflated dimensions. While existing studies often silo national cases and yield contradictory conclusions regarding the governance impacts of dynastic entrenchment, this review constructs a comprehensive explanatory model that disentangles the mechanisms of dynastic continuity from the institutional moderators dictating variance in outcomes. First, the article investigates the structural mechanisms catalyzing dynastic persistence, specifically deficient party institutionalization, exorbitant electoral costs, formidable incumbency advantages, and patronage-driven resource monopolization. Second, it scrutinizes the tangible governance consequences precipitated by dynastic consolidation, focusing on public service delivery, corruption vulnerabilities, bureaucratic integrity, budget allocation patterns, and democratic competition. By integrating these dual dimensions into a cohesive analytical framework, this review explicates the precise institutional and political conditions under which the effects of family-based political domination become demonstrably detrimental, structurally constrained, or highly contingent.

To systematically operationalize this inquiry, the research is guided by the following central questions:

1. How does the extant literature articulate the emergence and persistent entrenchment of local political dynasties within the context of decentralized political and electoral institutions?
2. How does current scholarship evaluate the impacts of local political dynasties on overarching governance outcomes, and which specific institutional moderators best explain the variance in their effects on service delivery, corruption risk, bureaucratic quality, and democratic competition?

The principal novelty of this study resides in its decisive shift away from purely descriptive accounts of dynastic politics toward the development of a mechanism-centric and institutionally moderated analytical framework. Rather than reductively conceptualizing local political dynasties as a uniformly deleterious byproduct of decentralization, this article provides a highly nuanced synthesis. It delineates precisely when dynastic dominance invariably subverts governance, when its impacts remain contextually contingent, and how these effects are actively mediated by specific institutional configurations. These pivotal moderators include party system robustness, campaign finance imperatives, direct electoral mechanisms, statutory term limits, bureaucratic vulnerabilities, and institutional oversight capacities. By advancing this differentiated perspective, the review substantially enriches the theoretical discourse situated at the nexus of elite capture, informal power networks, local accountability, and the structural design of decentralization. Furthermore, it establishes a more rigorous empirical foundation for targeted policy interventions concerning political candidate recruitment, comprehensive party reform, anti-nepotism regulations, and the fortification of local oversight apparatuses.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article uses a structured literature review design to examine how decentralization and local electoral institutions shape the emergence of political dynasties and how dynastic dominance affects local governance outcomes. The review is based on a final corpus of 12 journal articles that had already been selected as the most relevant evidence base for the study. These articles were chosen because they address at least one of the two central research questions, namely the mechanisms that explain the emergence and persistence of local political dynasties under decentralized political settings, and the effects of dynastic control on governance performance, corruption risk, bureaucratic quality, accountability, service delivery, and democratic competition. Most of the selected studies focus on Indonesia, which is analytically appropriate because Indonesia provides a strong empirical setting for examining decentralization, direct local elections, incumbency, and family-based political reproduction at the subnational level. To widen the comparative perspective, the review also includes evidence from India and from broader developing-country discussions where relevant.

The inclusion process followed a relevance-based and concept-driven approach rather than a purely technical database screening procedure. Articles were retained when they clearly

examined subnational or local politics in decentralized settings, discussed political dynasties or closely related forms of family-based power reproduction, and provided findings relevant to either causal mechanisms or governance consequences. The final corpus includes diverse methodological traditions, including qualitative case studies, comparative quantitative analyses, mixed-methods research, normative legal studies, and systematic literature reviews. This diversity was intentionally preserved because the topic requires attention not only to measurable governance effects but also to institutional arrangements, legal frameworks, informal networks, and political practices that cannot be captured by a single method alone. Studies were then classified according to their substantive contribution to the review, namely RQ1, RQ2, both, or peripheral, in order to clarify how each article contributed to the overall synthesis.

After the corpus was fixed, each article was examined using a common study-characteristics matrix covering author and year, title, country or context, study design and data, main focus, key findings or arguments, and relevance to the research questions. This extraction process was used to standardize cross-study comparison and to identify recurring themes across the literature. The analysis was conducted through qualitative thematic synthesis by comparing how the articles explained dynastic emergence, persistence, and governance effects. In relation to RQ1, particular attention was given to mechanisms such as incumbency advantage, party oligarchy, kinship networks, patronage, weak cadre recruitment, legal permissiveness, and weak oversight institutions. In relation to RQ2, the analysis focused on patterns linked to corruption risk, declining accountability, weak transparency, bureaucratic deterioration, reduced democratic competition, and uneven local government performance. The review also considered institutional moderators, especially governance quality, oversight capacity, electoral regulation, and broader socioeconomic conditions, in order to explain why the effects of political dynasties vary across local contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies

This subsection provides an overview of the twelve articles included in the review and establishes the empirical and analytical basis for the discussion that follows. Before moving to the thematic synthesis, it is important to clarify the composition of the evidence base in terms of country focus, research design, and substantive orientation. Overall, the reviewed studies are heavily concentrated on Indonesia, with one study from India and a small number of articles adopting broader developing-country or comparative perspectives. In methodological terms, the dataset is dominated by qualitative and descriptive research, although it also includes quantitative, mixed-methods, comparative institutional, legal, and review-based studies. Substantively, the studies cluster around two broad concerns: first, the mechanisms through which decentralization, party weakness, incumbency, patronage, and permissive legal arrangements facilitate the emergence and persistence of local political dynasties; and second,

the consequences of dynastic dominance for democratic competition, bureaucratic quality, corruption risk, transparency, and local government performance.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies

No	Study & Context	Design/Data	Main Focus	Key Findings
1	Das (2025) – West Bengal, India; village local elections	Mixed methods; ±3,000 units & 60 interviews	Violence and non-contestation	Pre-election violence helps incumbents deter challengers and weaken electoral competition.
2	Setyawibawa et al. (2024) – Samosir, Indonesia; local elections	Qualitative; documents, interviews, observation	Family rivalry in political dynasties	Clan rivalry sustains dynastic power but reduces transparency, accountability, and participation.
3	Hariyati et al. (2025) – Developing countries/Indonesia	Systematic literature review (PRISMA)	Dynasties, governance, and inequality	Dynasties worsen governance, corruption, inequality, and democratic participation.
4	Purwaningsih & Widodo (2020) – Indonesia; decentralized local elections	Descriptive qualitative; secondary data	Incumbency, dynasties, and corruption	Incumbency facilitates dynastic succession, while institutional oversight remains crucial.
5	Pratiwi & Widyantara (2025) – Indonesia; regional elections	Qualitative & empirical legal research	Emergence of political dynasties	Dynasties expand through family succession, limiting competition and accountability.
6	Buehler et al. (2021) – Indonesia; comparative local elections	Quantitative & institutional analysis; >1,600 elections	Limits of local authoritarianism	Indonesian local politics remains competitive due to voter autonomy, regulations, and party fragmentation.
7	Romli et al. (2023) – Banten, Indonesia	Qualitative case study	Persistence of political dynasties	Decentralization and direct elections enabled dynastic dominance supported by weak oversight and paternalistic culture.
8	Muksin et al. (2024/2025) –	Qualitative; secondary data & NVivo	Democratic impact of dynasties	Weak party recruitment and monitoring foster

	Indonesia; local democracy			dynasties, corruption, and poor bureaucracy.
9	Permatasari et al. (2025) – Indonesia; regional governance	Literature review & meta-analysis	Dynasties and transparency	Dynasties weaken bureaucratic neutrality, transparency, and public trust; e-governance may improve oversight.
10	Setyaningrum & Saragih (2019) – Indonesia; local governments 2010–2015	Quantitative regression analysis	Dynasties and local performance	Dynasties reduce local government performance, though good governance moderates the effect.
11	Prianto (2016) – Indonesia post-Reformasi	Qualitative; Kompas documentation	Parties and dynastic politics	Party oligarchy and transactional politics drive dynasties and weaken competition and governance.
12	Agung (2022) – Indonesia; local democracy	Normative legal research	Dynasties and democratic sustainability	Permissive laws and weak political education sustain dynasties and undermine accountability.

As shown in Table 1, the reviewed literature reveals a clear concentration on subnational politics under decentralization, particularly in the Indonesian context, where local elections, regional autonomy, and dynastic succession are most extensively examined. The table also shows that the evidence base is methodologically uneven, with qualitative case studies and descriptive analyses forming the majority, while quantitative and mixed-methods studies remain comparatively limited. At the same time, the studies display a strong thematic convergence: most identify dynastic politics as being linked to weak party institutionalization, incumbency advantage, family-based succession, and limited oversight, while also associating dynastic dominance with weaker accountability, reduced electoral competition, and poorer governance performance. This mapping is important because it clarifies both the strengths and the limits of the current evidence base, and it provides the foundation for the more focused discussion of causal mechanisms and governance consequences in the next subsections.

B. Decentralized Political Institutions and the Emergence of Local Political Dynasties

The reviewed literature explains the emergence of local political dynasties not as a purely cultural extension of kinship norms, but as a political outcome generated within decentralized institutional settings. Across the corpus, decentralization is treated as a restructuring of power

that creates strategically valuable subnational arenas in which elected office becomes worth capturing, defending, and reproducing across family lines. In the Indonesian case especially, regional autonomy and direct local executive elections increased the political and material significance of local offices by giving governors, regents, and mayors greater authority, visibility, and control within their jurisdictions (Prianto, 2016; Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025; Romli et al., 2023). Under these conditions, family-based succession becomes a rational mechanism of political continuity. Rather than leaving office to uncertain partisan competition, incumbents and their surrounding elites have incentives to preserve influence by transferring candidacies to spouses, children, siblings, or other close relatives (Purwaningsih & Widodo, 2020; Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025). The literature therefore suggests that dynastic reproduction is best understood as a response to the increased value of local power under decentralization.

This institutional explanation becomes stronger when the literature is read together with studies on governance and administrative control. Local office is valuable not only because it confers symbolic authority, but also because it offers influence over bureaucratic appointments, access to public budgets, and leverage over distributive decisions that shape local patronage networks. Several studies argue that dynastic politics persists because local political control is closely linked to the management of bureaucratic careers, public resources, and financial transparency, all of which can be mobilized to reinforce political loyalty and reproduce family dominance (Purwaningsih & Widodo, 2020; Permatasari et al., 2025; Setyaningrum & Saragih, 2019). In this reading, dynasties are not merely electoral phenomena. They are embedded in broader local power structures where control over government institutions can be converted into political survival. This helps explain why decentralization does not simply democratize local politics. It can also raise the stakes of local office to the point that elite families actively organize succession in order to maintain access to state-linked resources and insulation from challengers (Prianto, 2016; Muksin et al., 2024; Agung, 2022).

A second recurring mechanism concerns the weakness of political parties. The reviewed studies consistently show that dynastic expansion is facilitated by party organizations that are weakly institutionalized, personalistic in recruitment, and highly pragmatic in candidate selection. Rather than functioning as programmatic gatekeepers, parties often serve as vehicles through which electable elites, especially incumbent families, can secure nomination through their resources, popularity, or bargaining strength (Prianto, 2016; Agung, 2022; Muksin et al., 2024). This condition lowers barriers to family-based succession because candidate recruitment is not primarily structured by ideology, cadre development, or internal meritocratic competition. Instead, it is shaped by oligarchic calculation, transactional politics, and the search for candidates who can win under costly electoral conditions (Prianto, 2016; Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025). The literature thus presents dynastic politics as closely tied to party weakness: when parties fail to cultivate autonomous local leadership, elite families become the most reliable suppliers of viable candidates.

Campaign finance pressures intensify this pattern. Although the reviewed studies vary in emphasis, they converge on the argument that high campaign costs deepen dependence on

patronage networks and alliances with local oligarchic actors. Under decentralized direct elections, candidates require funding, organizational reach, and mobilizational capacity. Families already embedded in local office possess advantages in all three respects. They are more likely to command established networks, enjoy access to influential intermediaries, and benefit from reputational capital accumulated through prior officeholding (Purwaningsih & Widodo, 2020; Romli et al., 2023; Prianto, 2016). In settings where electoral competition is expensive and party institutionalization is weak, these inherited networks reduce uncertainty and make dynastic succession especially attractive. Banten is illustrative in this regard, where dynastic persistence is linked to party support, weak counter-elites, weak media and civil society oversight, and a broader paternalistic political culture that normalizes patronage and family-based leadership (Romli et al., 2023). Even when the language of kinship is visible, the causal force identified by the literature lies in the political utility of those networks within decentralized competition.

Incumbency advantage is another central mechanism. Multiple studies argue that dynasties persist because incumbents can convert officeholding into electoral inheritance. Family members benefit from name recognition, established political machinery, access to supporters, and the public visibility associated with office, which together reduce entry barriers and raise the probability of successful succession (Purwaningsih & Widodo, 2020; Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025; Setyawibawa et al., 2024). This mechanism is particularly important because it links institutional design and personal power. Direct local elections do not automatically produce open competition when incumbents can use political legacies and local influence to sponsor relatives as successor candidates. The Samosir study shows that even intra-family rivalry can occur within this broader logic of dynastic reproduction, indicating that the core issue is not simply family harmony but the continued circulation of power within bounded kinship networks (Setyawibawa et al., 2024). The literature therefore does not portray dynastic persistence as accidental. It emerges from the strategic use of incumbency to preserve political position beyond formal term limits.

At the same time, the literature does not claim that decentralization always produces durable local monopolies. The comparative study by Buehler et al. (2021) is important because it identifies institutional and socioeconomic constraints that can limit the consolidation of entrenched subnational dominance. Their findings suggest that voter economic autonomy, weak concentration of local resources, centralized regulation of key institutions, term limits, and fragmented party systems can prevent local executives from monopolizing power in a fully authoritarian manner. This does not contradict the broader dynastic argument. Rather, it clarifies that dynastic emergence and persistence are conditional outcomes shaped by the interaction between decentralized authority and the extent of institutional constraint. In other words, decentralization creates opportunity structures for dynastic politics, but the durability of those dynasties depends on whether party competition, oversight mechanisms, and socioeconomic conditions constrain or reinforce family-based control.

Taken together, the reviewed literature shows that local political dynasties are products of institutional and political mechanisms operating within decentralized systems. They emerge where valuable local offices are coupled with weak party recruitment, expensive electoral competition, patronage-based networks, and incumbency advantages that allow political resources to be transferred across family lines. Local dynasties, therefore, should be understood less as residual expressions of kinship culture and more as structured outcomes of how decentralized political institutions distribute opportunity, authority, and competitive advantage (Prianto, 2016; Romli et al., 2023; Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025; Muksin et al., 2024).

C. Dynastic Dominance and Governance Outcomes: Service Delivery, Corruption Risk, and Democratic Competition

The literature reviewed in this article generally assesses dynastic dominance as detrimental to local governance, although the severity and form of its effects vary across institutional contexts. Across the corpus, dynastic politics is associated with weaker accountability, higher corruption risk, declining bureaucratic quality, and narrower democratic competition, rather than with improved developmental governance. This pattern appears repeatedly in studies that examine governance performance, local democracy, corruption, and bureaucratic functioning in decentralized settings (Hariyati et al., 2025; Muksin et al., 2024; Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025; Prianto, 2016). The common analytical logic is that when political power becomes concentrated within families, public office is more likely to be used to preserve control, reward loyalists, and manage succession than to sustain impartial administration or inclusive competition. In this sense, dynastic dominance is treated not simply as a descriptive feature of local politics, but as a mode of rule that reshapes how public resources, bureaucratic authority, and electoral access are organized.

The evidence on budget allocation and public spending is more limited than the evidence on corruption and democratic competition, but the reviewed studies still suggest an important pattern. They do not support a strong claim that dynastic control systematically improves service delivery through more effective or development-oriented spending. Instead, the literature indicates that fiscal authority under dynastic rule often creates incentives for distributive politics oriented toward patronage maintenance rather than broad public benefit. Studies that discuss local budgets and financial governance point to risks related to pork-barrel allocation, weak transparency, and the politicization of resource distribution (Purwaningsih & Widodo, 2020; Permatasari et al., 2025). In the same direction, broader review evidence suggests that dynastic concentration of power deepens inequality and weakens governance performance, implying that public spending under dynastic conditions may reproduce selective advantage rather than developmental inclusion (Hariyati et al., 2025). Even when dynastic actors may claim continuity of programs, the literature reviewed here offers little evidence that such continuity reliably translates into better service outcomes. The dominant concern is that public resources become embedded in networks of political loyalty, making expenditure patterns more vulnerable to patronage logic than to programmatic service delivery.

This interpretation is reinforced by the literature on local government performance and administrative quality. The strongest quantitative evidence in the reviewed corpus shows that political dynasties have a significant negative effect on local government performance (Setyaningrum & Saragih, 2019). This finding is consistent with qualitative and review-based studies that associate dynastic politics with weakened bureaucratic professionalism, poor supervision, and declining administrative neutrality (Muksin et al., 2024; Permatasari et al., 2025). The mechanism implied across these studies is that dynastic dominance does not only affect elections; it also reorganizes the internal logic of government by making bureaucratic authority more responsive to political loyalty and kinship-based networks. Once this occurs, the quality of public administration is likely to deteriorate because appointments, oversight, and implementation are no longer insulated from familial or oligarchic interests. As a result, service delivery problems should be understood not as isolated administrative failures, but as downstream consequences of political capture.

The relationship between dynasties and corruption is one of the most consistent themes in the reviewed literature, although the studies do not treat it as mechanically deterministic. Several articles explicitly connect dynastic politics to corruption, collusion, nepotism, abuse of power, and patrimonial governance (Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025; Muksin et al., 2024; Prianto, 2016; Agung, 2022). Hariyati et al. (2025) similarly argue that dynastic control weakens institutional accountability and intensifies corruption risks by concentrating authority and reproducing patronage. At the same time, Purwaningsih and Widodo (2020) provide an important qualification by arguing that corruption in local politics is not committed exclusively by dynastic actors. In their account, dynasties are not the sole cause of local corruption, since non-dynastic leaders may also engage in similar practices. This is an important analytical caution. The literature does not justify a simplistic claim that dynasties automatically produce corruption in every case. What it does suggest, however, is that dynastic concentration of power creates favourable conditions for corruption by weakening scrutiny, strengthening incumbency-based resource control, and blurring the boundary between public authority and private political interest.

The democratic effects of dynastic rule are also assessed in largely negative terms. The reviewed studies repeatedly argue that dynasties narrow democratic competition by reducing fair access for alternative candidates, distorting elite circulation, and making electoral contests less open in substantive terms even when formal elections continue to be held (Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025; Romli et al., 2023; Prianto, 2016). Family-based control over local political resources can discourage challengers, consolidate party support behind incumbent networks, and normalize succession within a limited circle of actors. In Samosir, even internal rivalry remains confined within the broader framework of family power, suggesting that competition may persist, but without meaningful circulation beyond dynastic boundaries (Setyawibawa et al., 2024). The peripheral but relevant study by Das (2025) sharpens this point by showing how local dominance can be sustained through coercive strategies that reduce contestation itself. Conversely, Buehler et al. (2021) show that Indonesia has not uniformly developed durable

subnational authoritarian enclaves, because electoral fragmentation, term limits, and central institutional controls continue to sustain a degree of competition. Taken together, these studies suggest that dynastic politics rarely eliminates competition completely, but it often degrades the openness and quality of that competition by raising barriers to entry and privileging established family networks.

The literature also makes clear that the effects of dynastic dominance are conditioned by institutional moderators. The most explicit evidence comes from Setyaningrum and Saragih (2019), who show that good public governance weakens the negative impact of political dynasties on local government performance. This finding is crucial because it indicates that dynastic effects are not fixed outcomes, but are mediated by the quality of governance institutions. Related studies point to other moderators with similar implications. Purwaningsih and Widodo (2020) highlight the importance of recruitment supervision, bureaucratic neutrality, accountability, and budget transparency. Permatasari et al. (2025) extend this argument by suggesting that monitoring systems and e-governance tools can improve public oversight, although their effectiveness depends on administrative capacity, infrastructure, and collaboration among local stakeholders. Buehler et al. (2021) identify broader structural constraints, including term limits, fragmented party systems, centralized regulation, and socioeconomic conditions that make monopolization more difficult. Legal and regulatory frameworks also matter, since the weakening or removal of anti-dynasty restrictions lowers barriers to family-based political reproduction and can intensify the downstream governance effects associated with dynastic expansion (Agung, 2022; Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025).

Overall, the reviewed literature supports a clear but conditional conclusion. Dynastic dominance is generally associated with poorer governance outcomes, including weaker administrative quality, higher corruption risk, lower accountability, and more restricted democratic competition. However, these effects are not uniform in intensity or form. Their severity depends on the strength of public governance, the neutrality of bureaucracy, the presence of oversight and monitoring systems, the regulatory environment, and the competitiveness of local electoral and party structures. Dynastic politics, therefore, should be understood as a governance problem whose consequences are typically negative, but whose full expression is shaped by institutional conditions rather than by family rule alone.

D. Institutional Moderators, Comparative Synthesis, and Implications

The 12 reviewed studies show that dynastic politics under decentralization is not a uniform outcome of kinship culture alone, but a conditional political process shaped by institutional design and local power structure. Across the literature, the most recurrent moderators are weak party institutionalization, personalistic candidate recruitment, incumbency advantage, legal permissiveness, weak oversight, bureaucratic vulnerability, and uneven electoral competition (Prianto, 2016; Romli et al., 2023; Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025; Buehler et al., 2021). These factors shape both dynastic formation and dynastic effects. Dynasties are more likely to emerge where decentralized offices are politically and materially valuable, parties prioritize electability

over merit, and incumbents can transfer political capital and organizational resources to relatives (Purwaningsih & Widodo, 2020; Muksin et al., 2024; Agung, 2022). Under such conditions, decentralization creates not only local democratic arenas but also strategic opportunities for elite capture.

The literature also shows that these same moderators shape variation in governance outcomes. Dynastic dominance becomes strongly harmful where weak parties, permissive laws, low oversight, and politicized bureaucracies reinforce one another. In these settings, dynasties are associated with corruption risk, collusion, nepotism, declining accountability, weak bureaucratic professionalism, and narrower democratic competition (Hariyati et al., 2025; Muksin et al., 2024; Romli et al., 2023; Pratiwi & Widyantara, 2025). Public spending in such contexts is less likely to reflect broad developmental priorities than patronage-oriented distribution, especially when budget transparency and administrative neutrality are weak (Purwaningsih & Widodo, 2020; Permatasari et al., 2025). Yet the review also indicates that dynastic effects are not mechanically identical across cases. Setyaningrum and Saragih (2019) show that good public governance weakens the negative effect of dynasties on local government performance, while Buehler et al. (2021) demonstrate that fragmented competition, term limits, and central regulation can constrain the consolidation of durable local monopolies. This means that dynastic politics is best understood as institutionally mediated rather than uniformly deterministic.

This synthesis carries several broader implications. Theoretically, the review supports an understanding of dynastic politics as a form of elite capture operating through the interaction of formal decentralized institutions and informal family-based networks. It also suggests that subnational democracy cannot be assessed from electoral form alone, because direct elections may coexist with narrowed competition when party structures and oversight systems are weak (Prianto, 2016; Hariyati et al., 2025). In policy terms, the findings point to the need for stronger party recruitment reform, anti-nepotism and conflict-of-interest regulation, protection of bureaucratic neutrality, tighter oversight of incumbency advantages, and stronger transparency and monitoring systems, including e-governance where feasible (Agung, 2022; Permatasari et al., 2025). For future research, the literature indicates the need for more standardized definitions of political dynasties, richer comparative subnational datasets, and more explicit analysis of institutional moderators. Overall, the main contribution of this review is to show that the link between decentralization, dynastic politics, and governance outcomes is conditional: dynastic dominance is generally associated with poorer governance, but its severity and form depend on the institutional environment in which local power is contested and exercised.

CONCLUSION

This review shows that local political dynasties are best understood as products of institutional and political mechanisms operating within decentralized settings, rather than as simple extensions of kinship culture. Across the 12 reviewed studies, dynastic emergence is

consistently linked to the interaction of valuable local offices, weak party institutionalization, personalistic candidate recruitment, high campaign costs, patronage-based political networks, incumbency advantage, and permissive legal arrangements. Decentralization, therefore, does not automatically strengthen local democracy. Its effects depend on whether local political structures encourage open competition and accountability or instead facilitate the concentration and transmission of power within elite families. The review also demonstrates that dynastic politics is generally associated with weaker governance outcomes, including poorer local government performance, higher corruption risk, declining bureaucratic professionalism, reduced transparency, and more restricted democratic competition.

At the same time, the findings indicate that dynastic effects are conditional rather than mechanically uniform. Their severity is shaped by institutional moderators such as governance quality, oversight capacity, bureaucratic neutrality, electoral competition, term limits, regulatory design, and monitoring systems, including e-governance in some cases. This is the main contribution of the review: it shows that the relationship between decentralization, dynastic politics, and governance outcomes is institutionally mediated and context-dependent. The study therefore supports a more precise analytical framework for understanding when dynastic dominance becomes strongly harmful, when it is partially constrained, and why variation across cases occurs. In policy terms, the review points to the importance of party reform, stronger accountability mechanisms, anti-nepotism safeguards, bureaucratic protection, and more credible transparency and oversight systems for improving local democratic performance under decentralization.

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