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Unpacking Local Governance in the Philippines

Patterns, Persistence and Performance

Rogelio Alicor L. Panao, PhD

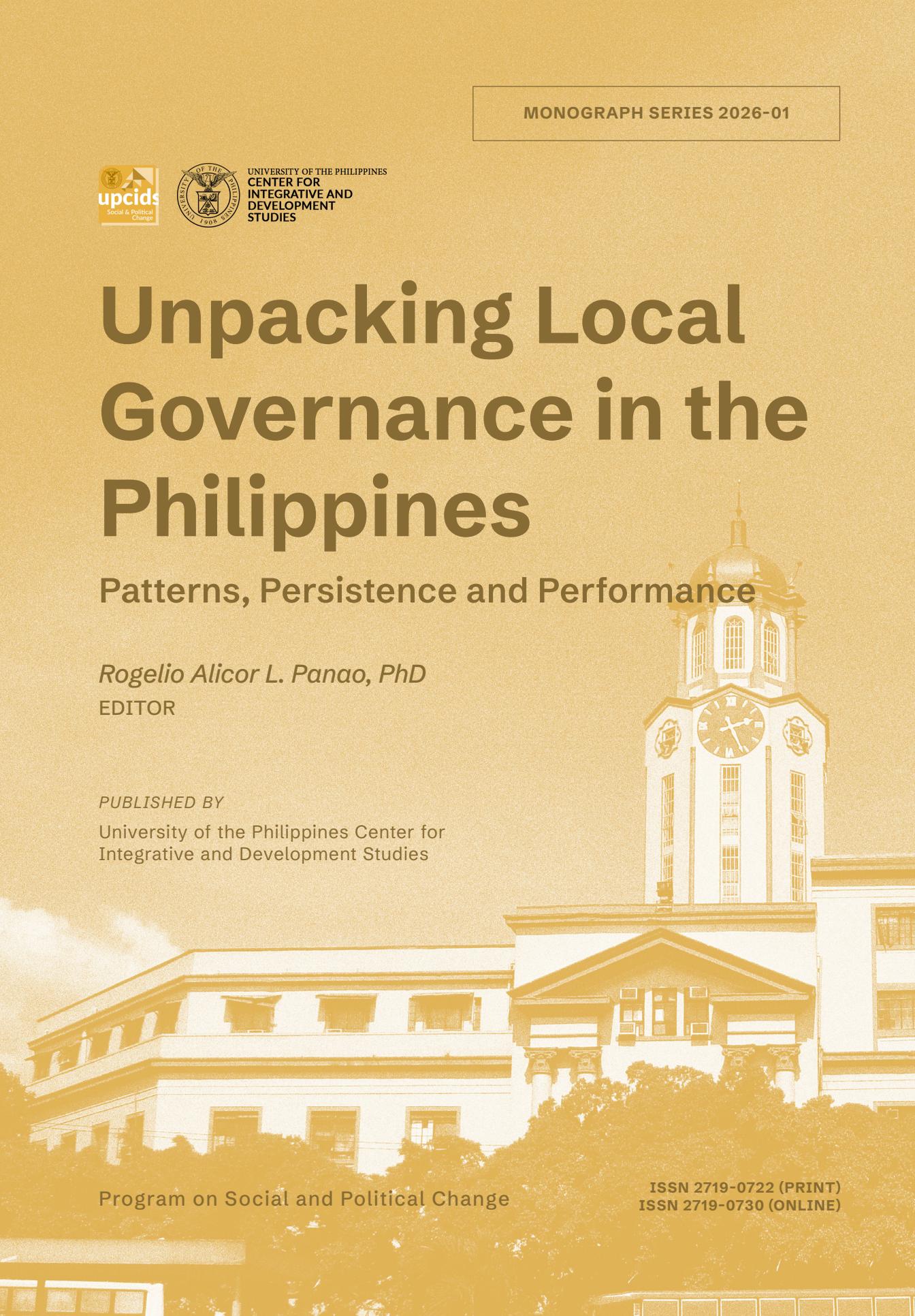
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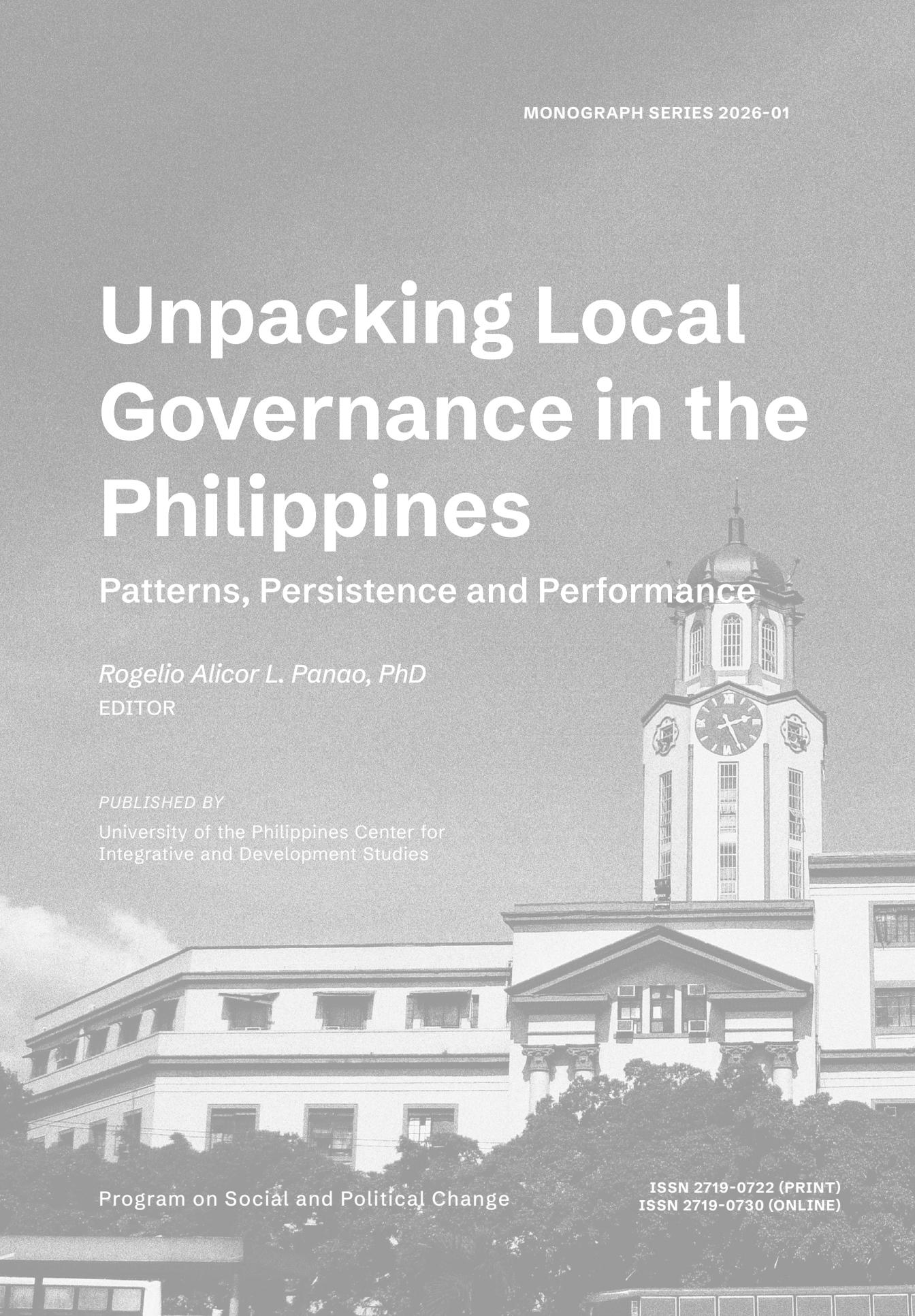
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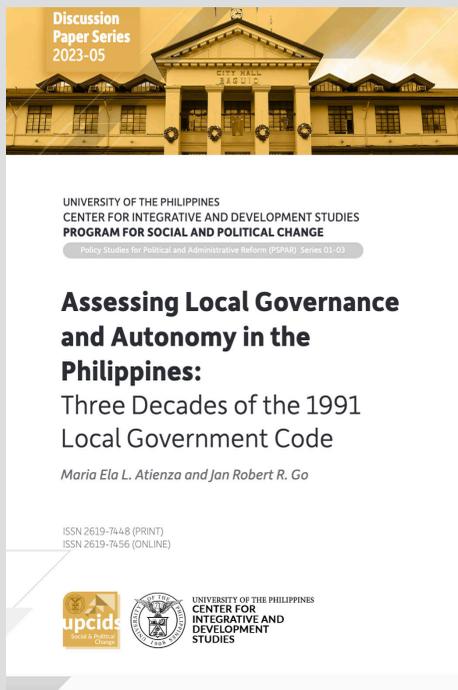
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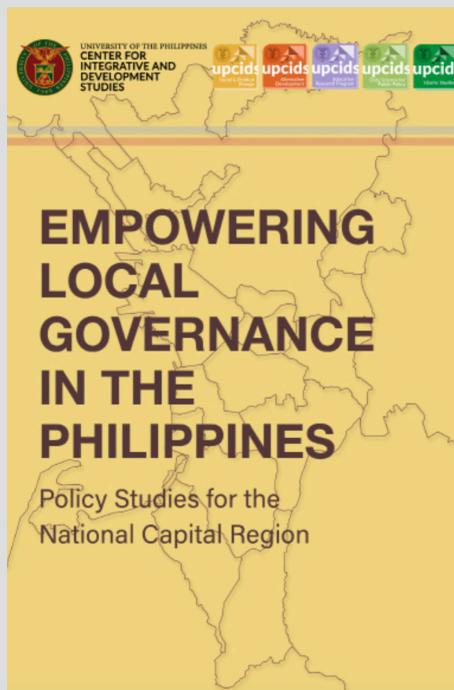
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DISCUSSION PAPER

Assessing Local Governance and Autonomy in the Philippines: Three Decades of the 1991 Local Government Code



PROCEEDINGS

Empowering Local Governance in the Philippines: Policy Studies for the National Capital Region

About the Monograph

This monograph is the culmination of two years of dedicated work by the research team of the Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC). During this period, the research team compiled and organized electoral results, fiscal records, and governance indicators covering more than three decades, from 1992 to 2022. These data became the foundation of the Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset dashboard, which, in turn, served as the empirical anchor of the four studies in this volume.

These studies examine critical dimensions of Philippine local governance: voter responsiveness and fiscal behavior, dynastic politics and electoral competition, gender and leadership, and education spending in a candidate-centric democracy. Though varying in analytical scale—from individual candidates to provincial aggregates—they converge on a common pattern. Philippine local governance is characterized by complex interactions between formal institutions and informal practices, between national frameworks and local implementation, and between electoral incentives and structural constraints. By grounding the discussion in systematic empirical analysis, this monograph is the PSPC’s contribution to ongoing discourse on Philippine local governance, offering evidence-based insights that enrich understanding of the country’s political and institutional realities.

Research Team

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Foreword

Rogelio Alicor L. Panao, PhD¹

Philippine local governance can be both ubiquitous and elusive. Across towns and cities, governors and mayors appear on billboards, tarpaulins, and local news, proclaiming new projects, programs, and achievements. Yet despite this constant visibility, many fundamental questions remain. How do local officials actually allocate public resources? Under what conditions, do voters reward or punish fiscal performance? Why do political dynasties thrive in some provinces but fail in others? Does gender influence leadership outcomes and policy priorities? How does the candidate-centric nature of Philippine politics shape public investment, say, in areas such as education and social welfare?

This monograph brings together four studies that tackle these questions directly, using rigorous, data-driven research. Each study combines quantitative methods—including panel regression, spatial analysis, and interaction models—with qualitative insights that ground the numbers in real-world dynamics. Together, the papers show that Philippine local governance is neither uniformly dysfunctional nor easily reformed. Instead, it is shaped by interactions between formal institutions and informal practices, national frameworks and local realities, and electoral incentives and structural constraints.

What sets this collection apart is its foundation in the Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset, developed by the Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC) at the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP-CIDS). This dataset represents two years of meticulous work to compile, clean, and harmonize electoral results, fiscal information, and governance indicators across hundreds of local government units. It enables the rigorous, large-scale analysis presented in this monograph and provides a resource for researchers, policymakers, journalists, civil society, and citizens alike.

Introducing the Philippine Local Government Interactive Dashboard

The Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset Dashboard is a landmark initiative that makes governance data transparent and accessible (<https://elections.>

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cids.up.edu.ph/). Launched officially in November 2024, the platform provides free, user-friendly access to electoral and fiscal information spanning 1992 to 2022.

The dataset is unusually comprehensive. It contains data on:

- a. 227 local government units (81 provinces and 146 cities)
- b. 31 fiscal years of budget and expenditure data
- c. 11 election cycles covering national and local offices
- d. 15,148 candidates across eight types of positions
- e. Detailed fiscal categories including income sources (Internal Revenue Allotment, tax collections, local revenues) and expenditures (education, health, social services, economic development, housing, labor, public welfare)

This coverage allows users to track candidates across elections, compare fiscal performance across provinces, and study how political competition shapes spending. Journalists, civil society organizations, students, and citizens can explore local government performance and hold officials accountable.

The Dashboard did not appear overnight. It grew out of a vision to make local governance data accessible, transparent, and useful. Needless to say, we at the PSPC invested considerable patience, care, and collaboration to bring that vision to life.

Work began in March 2024 with the beta version, laying the technical foundations for a platform that could handle complex electoral and fiscal data across hundreds of local government units.

From the outset, the project embraced collaboration. By July 2024, roundtable discussions with academics, government officials, journalists, and civil society representatives helped shape the platform. Their questions, suggestions, and concerns guided refinements, ensuring that the dataset would be practical, understandable, and responsive to real-world needs. This iterative process continued after the official launch in November 2024, when the platform first opened its doors to the public.

Over the following months, updates strengthened and expanded the system. In July 2025, the first major update standardized city and provincial data, making comparisons more reliable. In August, coverage was broadened to include additional election years, reflecting the ongoing commitment to improvement. By December 2025, the beta phase concluded, leaving behind a robust, accessible platform.

The journey has already connected with tens of thousands of users. Over 60,000 people have explored the dataset, with more than 2,300 monthly users engaging regularly. This demonstrates a growing hunger for clear, reliable information about how local governments operate. The platform is not perfect, but it is built thoughtfully, humbly, and openly—designed to empower anyone who wishes to understand and engage with local governance.

At its core, the Dashboard is motivated by one simple philosophy—informational citizens. We believe that governance, to be effective, needs feedback from well-informed citizens. The Dashboard is designed to have a bilingual interface, enabling it to be approachable, while its flexibility allows users to explore data in ways that matter to them. Users can select:

1. Data type: Electoral results, candidate records, or fiscal data
2. Geographic scope: Cities, provinces, or regions
3. Position: Governor, mayor, or congressional representative
4. Fiscal category: Income, expenditure, or detailed breakdowns
5. Time period: Any year from 1992 to 2022

This design invites exploration. Researchers, journalists, students, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens can investigate spending patterns, track candidates over time, monitor local government performance, and evaluate public stewardship. The platform empowers rather than overwhelms, creating space for curiosity, learning, and civic engagement.

Shared Data, Local Realities

The Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset demonstrates that even with modest resources, it is possible to build a tool that strengthens transparency, accountability, and evidence-based governance. Its development is a story of collaboration, patience, and care—a humble yet meaningful contribution to democratic life. By making complex information accessible, understandable, and usable, it offers a way for citizens to engage, scholars to study, and policymakers to reflect, helping to make local governance more visible, analyzable, and accountable.

The four studies in this monograph are all grounded in the Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset. Each paper draws from the same shared evidence

base, using it to examine different but connected questions about how local politics works in practice. Read together, the studies show how a single, transparent dataset can illuminate the everyday realities of accountability, dynastic power, gendered leadership, and policy choice in Philippine local governance.

Using electoral and fiscal records covering multiple election cycles, Victoria Therese Reyes Tsui examines whether voters reward or punish local executives for their fiscal behavior. Her analysis of more than 500 incumbents shows that accountability does exist, but it is selective. Voters tend to reward visible spending, particularly in education and social services, while other types of expenditure attract far less attention. The findings suggest that fiscal accountability is shaped not only by performance, but also by information, incentives, and local context.

Drawing on the same dataset, Miguel Enrico G. Ayson and Lara Gianina S. Reyes-De Leon turn to the puzzle of dynastic dominance. Focusing on Laguna, they show that dynasties do not succeed everywhere in the same way. Urbanization and industrialization weaken traditional patronage networks, forcing dynastic families to compete on programs and reputation rather than lineage alone. Their findings challenge the idea that dynastic control is inevitable and highlight how economic and social change can open space for electoral competition.

Kathleen Nicole M. Vivas and Luisito C. Abueg use the dataset to examine gender and leadership at the local level. They find that nearly 90 percent of female mayors come from political dynasties, underscoring that descriptive representation does not automatically translate into policy autonomy. Female leadership, they show, is shaped by the same structural and dynastic constraints that govern local politics more broadly, limiting the extent to which gender alone can drive policy change.

Finally, Timothy James L. Cipriano and Josef Vincent P. Reyes analyze provincial education spending in a highly candidate-centric political environment. Their findings reveal that education budgets are remarkably stable over time, resisting short-term political pressures. Personalistic politics matters, but only under specific fiscal conditions. This pattern points to both institutional resilience and the persistence of spatial inequalities in public investment.

These studies nuance conventional narratives on Philippine local governance. Their findings unravel, among others, a political system that is neither fully captured by dynasties nor uniformly transformed by decentralization. Accountability exists, but unevenly. Dynasties are powerful, but not invulnerable. Female leadership expands representation, yet operates within clear constraints. Policy outcomes reflect both political choice and institutional path dependence.

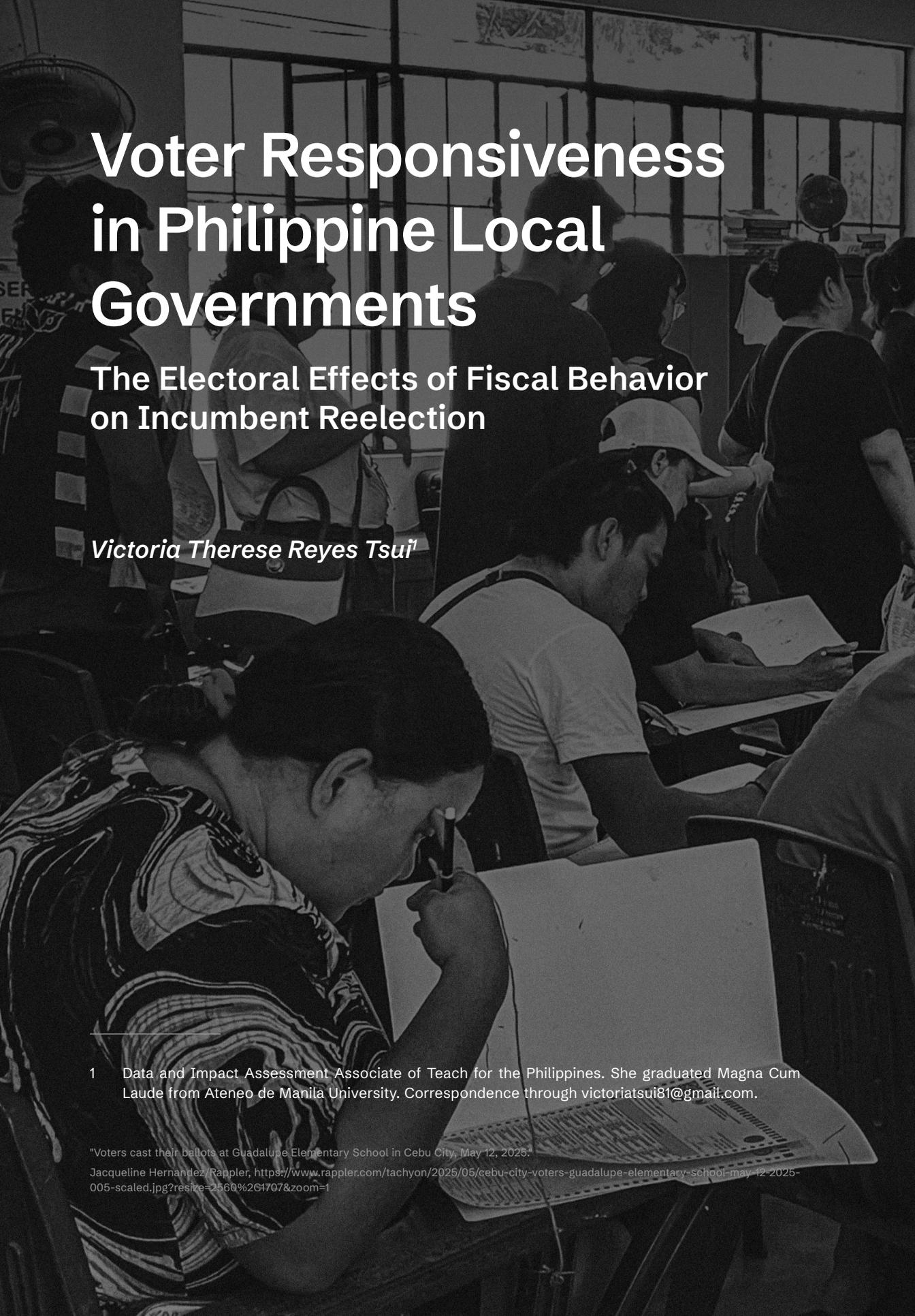
Methodologically, the studies underscore the importance of looking beyond single cases or short time horizons. Decentralization disperses authority, but it also produces uneven capacities, incentives, and outcomes. The use of panel data, spatial analysis, and interaction models allows these studies to distinguish between persistent structural patterns and short-term political effects. For administrators, this distinction matters. Policies designed on the basis of isolated successes or failures risk misdiagnosing problems that are, in fact, shaped by long-standing fiscal arrangements, institutional path dependence, or regional context.

Empirically, the findings offer several cautions relevant to ongoing decentralization debates. The evidence suggests that local accountability does operate, but selectively and under specific conditions. Fiscal autonomy, on the other hand, while it matters, does not automatically translate into improved policy outcomes. Similarly, political competition and leadership characteristics influence governance, yet their effects are mediated by underlying economic and institutional realities. These patterns point to the limits of reforms that rely solely on formal decentralization or electoral change without attending to information environments, revenue capacity, and administrative constraints.

All in all, these papers invite reflection on what systematic evidence can contribute to discussions of local governance. Drawing from a shared, publicly accessible dataset, their insights allow both discourse and scrutiny of patterns and differences across places, elections, and policy areas. But rather than definitive judgments, we invite readers to construe the studies as grounded conversations, albeit based on observed outcomes rather than assumption or anecdote.

This epistemological shift is especially relevant in the Philippine context, where local governments operate under varied social, economic, and political conditions. Persistent challenges such as inequality, entrenched political families, and uneven institutional capacity shape policy choices and outcomes. At the same time, local governance remains a site of experimentation, contestation, and reform. Understanding these dynamics in concrete terms is essential for policymakers and practitioners who must work within existing constraints while seeking incremental improvement.

The studies in this monograph do not seek to offer universal solutions or prescriptive reforms. Their value lies in presenting systematic evidence that can inform policy design, program evaluation, and institutional learning by showing where accountability functions, where it weakens, and under what conditions change becomes possible. In a decentralized setting marked by uneven capacities, entrenched political practices, and persistent institutional constraints, such evidence offers a quieter but more reliable guide for decisions that must contend with how local governance actually unfolds.



Voter Responsiveness in Philippine Local Governments

The Electoral Effects of Fiscal Behavior
on Incumbent Reelection

Victoria Therese Reyes Tsui¹

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"Voters cast their ballots at Guadalupe Elementary School in Cebu City, May 12, 2025.

Jacqueline Hernandez/Rappler, <https://www.rappler.com/tachyon/2025/05/cebu-city-voters-guadalupe-elementary-school-may-12-2025-005-scaled.jpg?resize=2560%2C1707&zoom=1>



Abstract

This study examines which types of local government fiscal behavior influence the reelection of incumbents in the Philippines and what these patterns reveal about retrospective voting in a patronage-dominated democracy. Anchored in retrospective voting theory, it argues that voters reward visible, immediately tangible investments and incumbents who manage their LGUs with high fiscal independence. Using data on 517 incumbents from 2007 to 2022, this paper employs an ordinary least squares (OLS) model with incumbent votes as the dependent variable and LGU expenditure types and fiscal independence as key independent variables. The model estimates the extent to which fiscal behaviors predict reelection success. Results indicate that expenditures on education and social services are associated with more votes, and fiscal independence is also positively related to votes. Interaction models show that the electoral payoff of education spending diminishes as fiscal independence increases. Overall, retrospective voting in the Philippine local government context is visibility-driven and selective.

Keywords: retrospective voting, local government, fiscal behavior, electoral accountability, patronage democracy

Introduction

The decentralization of governance through the 1991 Local Government Code devolved central government functions to local government units (LGUs) to provide them with greater fiscal autonomy (sec. 2[a]) and political accountability (sec. 2[b]). Since LGUs have direct control over fiscal resources, elections are expected to serve as the principal mechanism of political accountability through which voters reward incumbents who have performed well during their term, while removing those who have not (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999). The transfer of resources and responsibilities has granted an expectation on LGUs to spearhead their own local development and public service delivery. LGUs play the role of ensuring local development through the provision of basic services to their constituents, such as education, health, social welfare, and economic development. However, public service delivery is enabled by an LGU's capacity to spend its budget allocations and generate local revenues (or rely on national transfers).

To put matters into perspective for the Philippine political landscape, it is widely characterized as a patronage-dominated democracy. Patronage politics is evident within the political dynamics, especially in local governments (Anastacio and Moandarte 2023). While existing studies emphasize that patronage places constraints on public accountability of incumbents (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007), this paper argues that performance-based voting can still occur. Voters are still able to evaluate an incumbent's worthiness to return to their electoral seat based on their past performance, not merely on their future promises.

This paper anchors on the retrospective voting theory, which assumes voters as retrospective evaluators, rewarding or penalizing incumbents based on their past performance (Fiorina 1981). This paper posits that retrospective voting occurs among Filipino voters, but it is visibility-driven and selective. Voters reward incumbents for visible and immediately tangible investments. They also reward effective revenue generation, as determined by an LGU's fiscal independence. These factors are determined in this paper by examining empirical fiscal patterns of voter responsiveness.

This paper answers the question, "Which types of local government spending and revenue behavior influence the reelection of incumbents in the Philippines, and what does this reveal about the scope of retrospective voting in a patronage-dominated democracy?" Understanding how retrospective voting is shaped reveals what fiscal behavior voters value and how this influences the manner of choosing their local leaders. These findings would also encourage better governance and accountability, as incumbents would have a greater incentive to invest in useful programs that matter the most to their constituents. Politicians would anticipate the judgment of voters,

inducing them to act on policies and programs that will be positively evaluated by their voters by the next election period (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999).

The paper proceeds as follows. Section II reviews the relevant literature on theoretical foundations, political context in the Philippines, local government fiscal behavior, and gaps in existing research. Section III discusses the data sources and methodological approach. Section IV presents the empirical findings and analysis of results. Section V combines conclusions and policy recommendations.

Review of Related Literature

Retrospective Voting Theory and Economic Voting Theory

The central theory that this paper is anchored on is retrospective voting theory, which offers a lens for understanding how voters evaluate officials when deciding who to elect. Building on Fiorina (1981), citizens reward or penalize officials based on their past performance. Rather than looking forward, voters look back on previous performance and decide on their candidates based on what has previously been achieved (Camaro, Jurado, and Villacorta 2022, 184–202). This theory is presented first because it establishes the causal logic that motivates this paper’s analysis. If voters behave retrospectively, then variations in government actions (such as spending choices and revenue generation) should translate to electoral payoffs. This study examines whether differences in local government fiscal behavior are associated with differences in an incumbent’s reelection outcomes.

Economic voting theory complements this by emphasizing the role of government in delivering public goods. This theory posits that voters make decisions based on their evaluation of the government’s economic results. Voters reward incumbents for good economic performance and punish them for bad economic performance (Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000). Economic evaluations are commonly more sociotropic, focused on societal welfare, rather than egotropic, focused on personal income (Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000). In the context of local governments, fiscal behavior becomes a key sociotropic indicator of performance, as this reflects how effectively an LGU can manage the resources that support public service delivery.

Economic voting theory is necessary to introduce, as it links retrospective evaluation to the specific fiscal behaviors analyzed in this paper. It implies that local government spending patterns and revenue-generating capacity serve as performance signals, which voters may use as information shortcuts in low-information environments. Since fiscal behavior reflects a local government’s ability to mobilize resources and

deliver public goods, it serves as a proxy measure for economic performance at the local level.

Together, the retrospective voting theory and economic voting theory set up the foundations for investigating how LGU fiscal behavior influences the reelection of incumbents in the Philippines.

Visibility of Investments and Selective Retrospective Voting

Voters tend to base their retrospective evaluations on a government's performance on what they can directly see, experience, or benefit from in the short term. This is because only a small portion of voters have detailed information about government performance. The lack of knowledge occurs due to illiteracy, limited mobility, restricted media access, and a number of other factors. Without information, most voters use proxies to assess their politicians (Henning et al. 2017). These proxies are easily observable programs and policies, thereby encouraging voters to rely on tangible outputs to infer government performance. The distinction between visible and invisible investments shapes how citizens respond to government spending, and consequently, how incumbents strategize around spending. Incumbents are rewarded for completing projects in visible sectors, namely projects providing basic infrastructure and social services, but not for completing projects in other sectors (Marx 2018).

The electoral payoff from visible investments also extends to particular expenditure categories such as education. Investments in schools, student programs, and learning materials are very visible to citizens, as it is part of families' everyday lives to send their children to school. Empirical evidence supports the electoral payoff that visible education investments provide. A study in Brazil reveals that increases in education expenditures lead to a significant increase in the mayors' reelection chances (Assunção and Estevan 2022). This finding reinforces how the consequence of education spending goes beyond the provision of a public good and serves as a voter-responsive investment.

Similarly, the visibility of social protection and welfare programs also generates electoral returns. A study in Mexico reveals that voters reward their mayor's party for benefits received from their antipoverty program (Rodríguez-Chamussy 2015). This further suggests how visibility and direct benefits shape a voter's retrospective evaluation of government performance.

In contrast, long-term or less visible investments pose greater electoral risks. If benefits from government investments only unfold in the future, there is a risk of losing office before the benefits of the investment materialize (Jacques 2022). This reduces the incentives to implement less visible investments. This may explain why LGUs prioritize highly visible projects over long-term reforms, which are more difficult for voters to attribute to incumbents.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate how visibility drives selective retrospective voting. In the Philippine context, where poverty levels remain high and public service delivery gaps are evident, constituents are more responsive to government actions that directly and immediately improve their welfare. Filipino voters tend to reward the delivery of basic services due to poverty and service gaps.

Political and Electoral Context of the Philippines

The Philippine political landscape may be characterized as a mix of patronage, limited voter information, and weak accountability mechanisms. These factors all shape how citizens evaluate government officials and what kinds of government actions lead to electoral payoffs. Understanding these dynamics is critical for analyzing how local government fiscal behavior influences incumbent reelection, which is the focus of this study. These dynamics form the environment in which selective retrospective voting occurs and also explain why visible investments tend to garner stronger voter responsiveness.

Patronage politics is a defining feature of electoral competitiveness in the Philippines, especially in local governments. Clientelism thereby becomes a derivative phenomenon of this. A study conducted in Zamboanga City, Mindanao revealed that the existence of political patronage occurs in various manners. As the patron, the incumbent provides benefits that the voters (clients) receive, ranging from cash assistance (“*ayuda*”), product assistance (in forms of consumables such as rice, hogs), and even promises of new infrastructure and added opportunities for employment if the patron is elected in the upcoming year (Anastacio and Moandarte 2023). To further understand why voters succumb to this act of vote-buying, it is essential to understand the state of deprivation they are in, which is a result of poverty and lack of basic needs. This state may be attributed to the lack of support and public service delivery that should have been provided by their local governments. However, voters participate in patronage politics during the campaign period leading up to the elections, which leads to voting and incentivizing leaders who provide short-term benefits but revert to providing bare minimum public service, which keeps their constituents deprived of their basic needs post-election.

Patronage, therefore, introduces significant “noise” in electoral accountability. Instead of voters evaluating long-term performance, voters respond to immediate benefits. However, this behavior does not eliminate retrospective voting. It implies that performance signals (through visible investments during an incumbent’s three-year term) compete with clientelist incentives, indicating that retrospective voting remains relevant.

The presence of political budget cycles (PBCs) further complicates accountability. Incumbents are able to inflate visible expenditures closer to the election period to influence voter perception. PBCs occur as incumbents manipulate fiscal policy and budget allocations before or after the election period in order to maximize reelection chances or amplify their party-specific agenda. The political budget cycle arises from incumbents’ aspiration for reelection by appealing to voters (Baskaran et al. 2016 quoted in Fatmawati et al. 2025, 1) and funding more visible projects to improve public perception. During this cycle, there is information asymmetry between political leaders and voters, as the budgeting process is opaque, and voter awareness and technical capacity to evaluate budgets are low. Electoral manipulation via expenditure allocation occurs (Vergne 2008). Incumbents may act in two ways according to the PBC theory. First, the opportunistic approach assumes that incumbents are office-motivated, and they manipulate spending allocations to improve the voters’ short-term perception of government performance in order to increase popularity (Nordhaus 1975 quoted in Vergne 2008). Second, the partisan approach assumes that fiscal behavior adjusts based on party ideology, where parties act based on their ideological interests and agenda (Hibbs 1977; Alesina 1987 quoted in Vergne 2008). For example, left-leaning parties may focus on addressing high unemployment rates by opening up more opportunities for work, while right-leaning parties may implement tax cuts or provide business incentives to owners. In developing countries such as the Philippines, local governments experience the manipulation of fiscal policy as well, as budgets can easily be manipulated by partisan politicians engaging in patronage politics (Punongbayan 2025), especially before the three-year interval midterm and national elections.

These cycles persist because of information asymmetry and low citizen participation in budget processes. When voters lack full information, they rely on visible outputs as signals (Drazen 2008). Research shows that local government budgeting in the Philippines is often opaque and inaccessible to ordinary citizens (Magno 2025; Franklin and Ebdon 2020). Budget consultations with civil society also have low participation, or are only conducted for compliance. Given the limited political information, voters are unable to conduct detailed evaluations of their government’s performance. Hence, they rely on information shortcuts to recall information about their incumbent (Popkin 1993).

Lastly, there are weak fiscal accountability mechanisms in place. The implementation framework for Executive Order 138, which assumes greater fiscal responsibility for LGUs, lacks fiscal transparency and accountability safeguards that can be utilized by ordinary citizens (Juco et al. 2024).

These characteristics of the Philippine political environment create conditions where voters resort to visibility-driven, retrospective voting as the dominant behavioral pattern. Under the constraints of a patronage-dominated democracy, voters reward what they can directly benefit from.

Local Government Fiscal Behavior and Capacity

LGUs in the Philippines operate under a fiscal system that shapes their revenue capacity and expenditure behavior. LGUs draw their income from two main sources: intergovernmental fiscal transfers and locally sourced revenues. Intergovernmental fiscal transfers come in the form of the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), while locally sourced revenues are generated by the local government itself. LGU fiscal capacity influences the scope of public projects, which can, in turn, affect incumbent reelection outcomes.

Before LGUs decide on expenditures, there is a need to budget the revenues they earn from various sources. As stated in the Local Government Code of 1991, nearly all of an LGU's income comes from the IRA (secs. 284 and 285). This is a constitutionally mandated national government fiscal transfer to all localities (provinces, cities, municipalities, and barangays). The IRA is appropriated every year, with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) accountable for releasing the transfer. The law mandates that LGUs receive this transfer quarterly. In addition to IRA provision, LGUs may also increase their revenue generation through locally sourced revenues (LSR), such as collecting real property taxes, local business taxes, and other government fees. LGUs with greater fiscal independence are those that are able to generate higher proportions of their own revenue (LSR) rather than heavily relying on IRA. Fiscal independence is measured by the share of locally sourced revenues to total local government revenues, and is associated with lower poverty with LGUs (Canare and Francisco 2019).

However, inequality is present in the disbursement of the IRA. The IRA formula does not take into account the variations of LGU needs and capacities (Panao 2020), as it only bases its allocations on population, land area, and equal sharing (Local Government Code of 1991, sec. 284). This highlights the severity of income inequality across different local governments (Yeeles 2015). A substantial body of evidence also shows that heavy IRA dependence does shape local fiscal behavior,

particularly by discouraging LGUs from growing their own tax bases. Local governments use national transfers as a substitute for their locally sourced revenue (Canare 2023). Locally generated income tends to be smaller in cities and provinces that are more reliant on IRA (Panao 2023). This creates disincentives for LGUs to raise local revenues, which produces a cycle of dependency and weak fiscal capacity of local governments.

Having a level of fiscal independence for an LGU matters as this enables policy discretion and responsiveness to local needs. LGUs would have more funds to allocate for priority expenditures that would be needed by their constituents. Fiscal autonomy promotes fiscal responsibility (Manasan 2004, 2), which allows LGUs to better tailor-fit their budgets to community-specific programs. However, fiscal independence is difficult to achieve in the Philippines, especially since poorer LGUs are at a disadvantage given their high dependence on the IRA. To understand how these LGUs are at a disadvantage when attempting to increase their locally sourced revenue, there is a need to acknowledge the uneven revenue-raising power of LGUs post-decentralization.

Although there have been positive improvements in generating LSR on a cumulative level, inequalities still exist between the revenue-raising capacities of localities. As of Q1 2025, there has been a 7 percent increase in total local revenues among all localities in the Philippines (₱184 billion from ₱172 billion in Q1 2024). Top regions with the highest local revenues are the National Capital Region (₱74.9 billion), Region IV-A (₱30.7 billion), and Region III (₱18.2 billion). However, regions with the lowest allocation of LSR are BARMM (₱0.34 billion), CAR (₱1.86 billion), and Region IX (₱2.20 billion).²

Crucial to the ability of an LGU to mobilize revenues is the socioeconomic characteristics of its locality and tax base. It is expected that poorer LGUs would have difficulty in mobilizing revenues, while the converse applies for richer LGUs. It has been argued that the different LGU development can be attributed, in part, to the varied revenue-raising capacities of LGUs and the IRA formula not considering equity between its distribution for localities (Manasan and Chaterjee 2003; Manasan

2 Based on Quarter 1 FY2025 Statement of Receipts and Expenditures (SRE) Report of LGUs, published by Department of Finance, Bureau of Local Government Finance (DOF-BLGF). Department of Finance, Bureau of Local Government Finance, "Quarter 1 FY2025 Statement of Receipts and Expenditures (SRE) Report of LGUs," accessed 29 July 2025, <https://blgf.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/by-LGU-SRE-FY2025.xlsx> and <https://blgf.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Infographics-LGUs-Financial-Performance-for-Q1-FY2025.pdf>

2004 quoted in Diokno-Sicat and Madawin 2018, 18). These structural inequalities shape how LGUs can achieve fiscal independence.

In terms of local government expenditures, the DBM's Local Budget Operations Manual defines different categories of local spending, such as education and manpower development, health, labor, housing and community development, social services, and economic development. Education expenditures include public education services and scholarships, health expenditures include health projects such as immunization and hospital services, labor expenditures include livelihood programs, housing and community development expenditures include housing assistance, social services expenditures include social protection programs, and economic development expenditures include infrastructure projects, agriculture, and tourism.

Understanding revenue-raising capacity and expenditure choices affects what kind of public service delivery local governments can provide to their constituents.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite the importance of understanding voter responsiveness to local government fiscal behavior, recent literature in the Philippine context remains limited, especially on a local level. Existing research primarily relies on outdated data or focuses on national-level elections, thereby limiting its applicability to current local governance and electoral dynamics.

A previous study examining local development expenditures and their relationship to the reelection of incumbents was published in the 1990s. Using data from gubernatorial reelections in the years 1992, 1995, and 1998, it was found that incumbent governors improve their reelection chances with higher spending on economic development services if other factors are held constant (Capuno, Fabella, and Solon 2009). This found that economic development spending increased reelection chances. While this study used local-level data, its reliance on older datasets limits its current relevance.

At a national level, it was found that voters satisfied with the government's current economic status tend to reelect the current official or the incumbent to remain in office (Camaro, Jurado, and Villacorta 2022, 184–202). However, these findings focus on national elections and do not directly address local government reelection outcomes.

Taken together, these studies suggest that while voters do respond to government performance, specifically economic performance, there is a lack of current, localized

evidence on what kind of fiscal behavior leads to electoral payoffs. This gap motivates this current study. Moreover, while earlier studies suggest that voters reward incumbents for economic performance, this paper explores whether other factors, such as the visibility and tangibility of government investments, may now be more valuable to voters.

Methodology

Using the Local Government Election Dataset published by the Program on Social and Political Change of UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies, 517 incumbent and reelectionist candidates were matched with their LGU fiscal profiles from 2007 to 2022. Candidates included were the local chief executives (mayors, governors), as these are the positions with the primary responsibility for budget allocation and public service delivery for their LGUs. To estimate the spending and revenue generation of the LGU that is representative of the incumbents' past term, a three-year average was used for variables on expenditure and revenue.

Key expenditure variables include spending shares on education, health, labor, housing, social services, and economic development. The shares of these expenditures were computed as a percentage of the total expenditures variable ("totexp") found in the dataset. An indicator of fiscal independence was generated by measuring the LGUs' share of locally sourced revenue ("totlocsrc") to total income ("lgusincome").

An ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to estimate the relationships between incumbent votes and fiscal behavior. The dependent variable was the natural logarithm of the number of votes received by the incumbent, while the independent variables were expenditure shares (education, health, labor, housing, social services, and economic development) and the fiscal independence measure.

The number of votes was log-transformed to reduce skewness since vote counts are highly skewed, with incumbents receiving a larger volume of votes compared to other candidates. This also allows for a more standardized interpretation of coefficients, as they approximate the percentage change in votes for a one-unit change in the independent variable. To discuss further model specifications, the control variables account for LGU characteristics, specifically LGU type (city or province) and LGU income class, as classified by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG). These controls were used since fiscal capacity varies across these dimensions, which may influence voting outcomes.

To determine whether the electoral effect of expenditures is dependent on an LGU's capacity for revenue generation, interaction models between significant

expenditure shares and fiscal independence were estimated through OLS regressions. To interpret the interactions, marginal effects of expenditure shares were identified at representative values of fiscal independence in increments of 0.2. These were visualized using margins plots on Stata to display the change in votes associated with a one-unit increase in spending share at different levels of fiscal independence.

Findings and Analysis

Expenditures as Predictors of Reelection

After conducting OLS regression, where the natural logarithm of the number of votes is regressed against expenditure types of an LGU, it is revealed that education and social services spending are statistically significant predictors of incumbent votes ($p < 0.05$), while other types of spending do not show statistically significant associations (see table 1).

Given that expenditure shares range from 0 to 1, a 10-percentage point increase in the education spending share is associated with approximately a 25 percent increase in votes ($\beta = 2.50$, $p = 0.001$). Similarly, a 10-percentage point increase in social services spending share is associated with a 17 percent increase in incumbent votes ($\beta = 1.67$, $p = 0.007$).

Table 1. OLS Regression for Expenditure Types

Variable	β	t-value	p-value	95% C.I.
Share of Education expenditure	2.496475	3.46	0.001	[1.077656, 3.915295]
Share of Health expenditure	0.2853358	0.88	0.380	[-0.3523338, 0.9230054]
Share of Labor expenditure	7.135306	0.84	0.399	[-9.460016, 23.73063]
Share of Housing expenditure	-0.5689313	-0.61	0.540	[-2.391785, 1.253923]
Share of Social services expenditure	1.676438	2.70	0.007	[0.4573885, 2.895487]
Share of Economic development expenditure	0.1517736	0.54	0.590	[-0.4016242, 0.7051715]

The OLS model demonstrates a strong fit, with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.744 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.738, which indicates that roughly 74 percent of the variation in incumbent votes is explained by the model.

These results show that voters reward visible investments, supporting the argument that retrospective voting is visibility-driven. Investments in education and social services result in immediately tangible public service delivery that directly affects constituents' daily lives. Rather than paying attention to sectors where benefits are less directly experienced (e.g., housing, economic development), voters value an incumbent's past performance if investments in visible projects were prioritized.

Revenue Generation as a Predictor of Reelection

Results reveal that fiscal independence is a significant predictor of incumbent votes ($\beta = 0.88$, $t = 4.44$, $p < 0.001$) (see table 2). Considering that the fiscal independence variable ranges from 0 to 1, a 10-percentage point increase in fiscal independence is associated with an increase in incumbent votes of approximately 8.8 percent. The greater an LGU's capacity to generate its own revenue through local sources, the greater the votes expected for its incumbent.

Table 2. OLS Regression for Fiscal Independence

Variable	β	t-value	p-value	95% C.I.
Fiscal independence	0.8774732	4.44	0.000	[0.4891698, 1.265777]

These findings suggest that voters reward incumbents not only for visible expenditures but also for their ability to generate their own revenue. Fiscal independence may indicate effective governance led by an incumbent with effective budget management and administrative competence. These results highlight that voter responsiveness to fiscal behavior extends beyond spending to include institutional capacity and good governance.

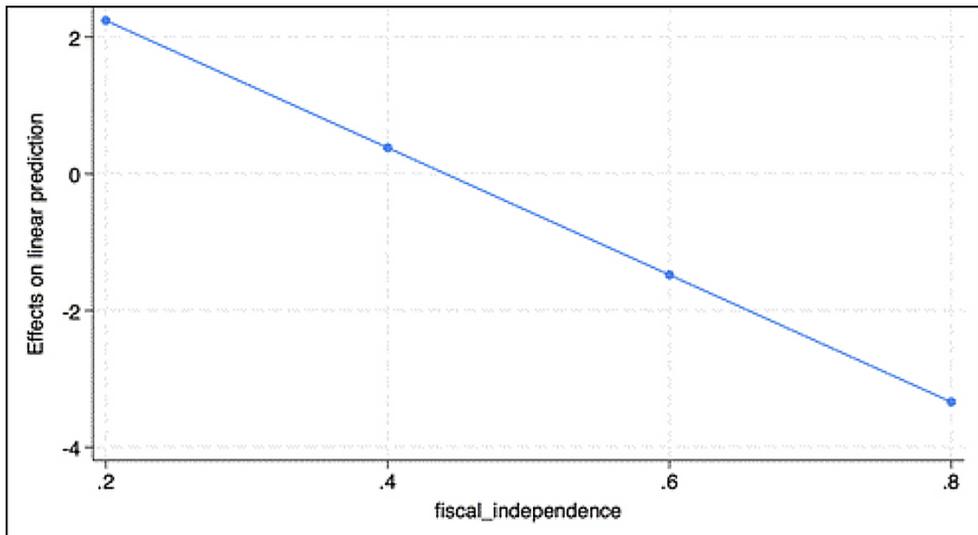
Interaction Models Between Expenditures and Fiscal Independence

The interaction term between the share of education expenditure and fiscal independence resulted in a negative and statistically significant result ($\beta = -9.30$, $p = 0.005$) (see table 3). This suggests that the more fiscally independent an LGU, the lesser the electoral payoff from education spending. While voters do reward incumbents for allocating more resources to education spending, this effect is conditional on the LGU's capacity to generate revenue.

Table 3. Interaction Model Between Education and Fiscal Independence

Variable	β	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	95% C.I.
Share of Education expenditure	4.102435	4.44	0.000	[1.745991, 6.458878]
Fiscal independence	1.386804	4.55	0.000	[0.7875208, 1.986086]
Share of Education expenditure * Fiscal independence	-9.300939	-2.82	0.005	[-15.7884, -2.813411]

To further interpret this interaction, marginal effects of education spending were also estimated at varying levels of fiscal independence (0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8). The findings reveal that electoral payoff (i.e., positive effect of education investment) is strongest in LGUs with lower fiscal independence (see figure 1), where voters may rely more on visible investments as a sign of positive incumbent performance.

Figure 1. Marginal Effect of Education Spending on Incumbent Votes Across Levels of Fiscal Independence

Additionally, the interaction term between the share of social services expenditure and fiscal independence resulted in a nonsignificant coefficient ($\beta = 0.64$, $p = 0.867$) (see table 4). This suggests that, unlike education spending, voter responsiveness to social services spending is not conditional on an LGU's capacity to generate revenue. The positive effect of social service provision in the main model holds across LGUs, regardless of fiscal independence.

Table 4. Interaction Model Between Social Services and Fiscal Independence

Variable	β	t-value	p-value	95% C.I.
Share of Social services expenditure	1.659475	1.45	0.149	[-0.595960 , 3.91491]
Fiscal independence	0.9013763	3.11	0.002	[0.3320208, 1.470732]
Share of Social services expenditure * Fiscal independence	0.642914	0.17	0.867	[-6.912506, 8.198334]

Overall, these interaction models highlight that visibility alone does not guarantee voter rewards. Even when an investment is visible, voters may not value it immediately or uniformly, since the effect of visible investments depends on LGU characteristics such as fiscal independence. These factors are relevant for education spending, while this does not matter for social services.

Therefore, retrospective voting may also be argued as selective, since votes are conditional on both expenditure types and the capacity of an LGU to generate its own revenue.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This study demonstrates how retrospective voting in the local government context is both visibility-driven and selective. Voters respond to government expenditures that they can immediately see and derive direct benefits from, such as education and social services. When evaluating an incumbent's past performance to inform their votes, visible and tangible investments are more likely to influence electoral decisions. In a patronage-dominated democracy, citizens do not merely vote based on the clientelistic incentives they receive. They can recognize performance signals through their local government's visible investments, and vote according to those observations. Performance-based voting can coexist with the dynamics of patronage politics.

Moreover, fiscal independence also emerged as a factor in determining the reelection of incumbents. LGUs that are less dependent on intergovernmental fiscal transfers and more capable of generating locally sourced revenue secure more positive voter responsiveness from their constituents. However, these effects are conditional on LGU characteristics, as electoral rewards are not uniform across all localities. It is also possible that poorer LGUs who are more reliant on national transfers may struggle to convert their fiscal capacity into voter responsiveness, as this limits their ability to produce visible programs and projects given budgetary constraints.

The findings of this study suggest two policy recommendations. First, LGUs should prioritize visible public services. Since voter responsiveness is influenced by tangible investments, local governments should focus resources on programs that produce immediate benefits. Investments in education and social services are highly valued and rewarded by voters. Strategic allocation to these sectors reinforces electoral accountability.

Second, there is a need to strengthen the fiscal autonomy of LGUs. Greater fiscal independence allows local governments to exhibit good governance, which indicates positive performance perception among voters. This enhances voter trust in elected officials. However, the inequality in fiscal capacity among LGUs must be addressed, given their varying capacities to raise their own revenues, resulting in a cycle of dependency and weak fiscal capacity. Targeted support for disadvantaged LGUs to enhance their revenue-raising capacity and public service delivery would promote more equitable governance outcomes across localities and ensure that electoral accountability is not constrained by the disadvantages of fiscal capacity.

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Three Houses

Understanding Dynastic Resilience and Vulnerabilities in Laguna Provincial Politics

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"Officers and employees welcome newly elected Laguna Governor Sol Aragones at the Provincial Capitol on Monday."

Jesse Bustos/The Philippine STAR, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1195585539271990&set=pcb.1195585992605278>



Abstract

The study investigates the puzzle of dynastic fragility in Laguna's provincial politics. The province exhibits a striking deviation from the broader CALABARZON pattern, in which political dynasties have successfully entrenched either multigenerational or prolonged gubernatorial control. Despite enjoying the traditional structural advantages of dynastic persistence, the Lazaro, Ejercito, and Hernandez clans all failed to secure a successful gubernatorial succession. This puzzle raises the study's central research question: Why do dynastic succession and return attempts repeatedly fail in Laguna, while comparable dynasties in neighboring provinces have, to varying degrees, successfully consolidated gubernatorial control?

To address this puzzle, the study employs a qualitative-driven mixed-methods research design. An initial quantitative exploration of 25 years of Laguna's electoral data establishes baseline patterns of structural advantage held by dynastic candidates. These patterns are treated as contextual background rather than causal tests. Qualitative case studies then explore Laguna's unique political environment, examining reputational shocks, legal-institutional sanctions, fragmented bailiwicks, and the province's significant market-oriented electorate. Each case is further examined using the multidimensional framework attributed to command votes (patronage networks, bailiwicks, and name recall) and market votes (candidate image and quality, programmatic or issue-based appeals, and media saturation).

As an exploratory research, the study offers preliminary insights into the limits of clientelistic politics in urbanizing provinces. It identifies Laguna as a theoretically significant deviant case, providing a foundation for future comparative and microlevel inquiry in Philippine politics.

Keywords: political dynasties, dynastic succession, electoral competition, clientelism

Introduction

Problematizing Dynastic Failure: Laguna as a Research Puzzle

The direction of Philippine politics after the EDSA People Power Revolution offers a theoretical and practical paradox. Former President Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr.'s removal in 1986 was motivated by the people's rejection of his authoritarian rule and their desire for democratic restoration. To level and expand the democratic playing field, framers of the 1987 Constitution made it a state policy to prohibit political dynasties and to reintroduce term limits for elected officials. Paradoxically, the country's post-EDSA has been defined not by the weakening of political dynasties, but by their consolidation and resilience.

There is a consensus among spectators and scholars of Philippine politics that political dynasties dominate the country's political landscape across all levels. Some estimated that close to 80% of congressmen and more than 80 percent of provincial governors are members of political dynasties (Ballerda, Yanzon, and Fonbuena 2024). This trend is observable in the CALABARZON region, comprising Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon. As the country's most populous and vote-rich region and the second-largest contributor to the Philippine economy, next to the National Capital Region (NCR), it serves as a crucial arena for the exercise and projection of local power. In this region, dynastic dominance is not an exception but a norm.

Within this regional trend, the study aims to investigate a deviant case: the province of Laguna. While provincial politics in Cavite, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon are characterized by dynastic persistence, Laguna demonstrates a consistent pattern of dynastic failure in prolonging gubernatorial control. The study focuses on three cases—the Lazaro, Ejercito, and Hernandez clans—and their attempts at dynastic succession and maintaining or regaining control of the governorship. Each attempt failed, either through electoral defeat or legal-institutional sanction.

This recurring failure presents a crucial research puzzle: it departs from the conventional view in Philippine politics that dynastic persistence is primarily driven by various factors such as incumbency advantage, access to state resources, and the power of name recall and family branding. Laguna has seen powerful incumbents with national name recognition (Ejercito) and long-time politicians with deep-seated machinery and substantial resource mobilization (Lazaro, Hernandez), who failed in either intergenerational or intragenerational power-transfer attempts at the gubernatorial level. The study, therefore, poses a central research question: Why do dynastic succession and return attempts repeatedly fail in Laguna, while comparable

dynasties in neighboring provinces have, to varying degrees, successfully consolidated gubernatorial control?

Comparative Trends in CALABARZON's Gubernatorial Politics

Establishing Laguna's deviant status first requires a survey of the pertinent regional political landscape. Virtually all provinces in the CALABARZON display parallel trends in gubernatorial politics. Specifically, Cavite, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon have all seen political dynasties hold gubernatorial posts for prolonged periods, exceeding the three consecutive term limits imposed by the 1987 Constitution for local positions (See Table 1).

Table 1. Dynastic Persistence in CALABARZON's Gubernatorial Politics

Province	Nature of Dynastic Persistence	Notable Dynastic Gubernatorial Tenure	Electoral Strategy
Cavite	Negotiated Monopoly	Revilla (1998–2001)	Strategic return (Remulla: 1988, 2010, and 2025)
		Maliksi (2001–10)	Intragenerational succession (Remulla: 2016 and 2019)
		Remulla (1988–1995; 2010–24; 2025–present)	
Laguna	Consistent Fragility	Lazaro (2001–10)	Failed consolidation (Hernandez and Lazaro: 2010, 2025)
		Ejercito (2010–14)	Failed return (Ejercito: 2016, 2019)
		Hernandez (2014–25)	
Batangas	Competitive Control	Santos-Recto (2007–16; 2025–present)	Strategic return (Santos-Recto: 2025)
Rizal	Hegemonic Control	Ynares (1992–present)	Intragenerational succession (Ynares: 2001, 2004)
			Intergenerational succession (Ynares: 2007, 2013, 2022)
Quezon	Competitive Control	Suarez (2010–2022) Tan (2022–present)	Intergenerational succession (Suarez: 2019)

Cavite, the region's most populated province, has recently been characterized by a negotiated dynastic monopoly. Although the province has elected various governors

from political dynasties,³ the Remulla clan virtually dominated the province's post-EDSA political landscape. Their patriarch, Juanito Remulla, served as governor both during the authoritarian and post-EDSA periods. Since 2010, the Remulla clan has dominated every Cavite provincial election, with different members taking turns at the gubernatorial post. Its members do not merely succeed to the governorship; they simultaneously hold provincial elective and national appointive positions. During this period, other powerful political dynasties seeking a stake in Cavite's provincial politics had to negotiate an alliance with the Remullas and settle for the vice-governorship, namely the Revilla and Tolentino clans.

Rizal presents the most extreme case, as it exhibits hegemonic dynastic control. The ruling Ynares clan has uninterruptedly held the seat of provincial power in the capital since 1992. Beginning with the patriarch, Casimiro Ynares Jr., the governorship has been passed to different family members during the post-EDSA transition. The case of Rizal exemplifies elite capture of a local government, as their control is so dominant that no credible contenders have attempted to challenge their provincial grip over several election cycles.

Batangas and Quezon exhibit a comparable case of competitive dynastic control, characterized by prolonged control over governorship alternating among established political dynasties. In Batangas, Vilma Santos-Recto, an actress-turned-politician from a "fat" political dynasty, successfully returned to the governorship in 2025 after serving three consecutive terms from 2007 to 2016. She defeated Michael Angelo Rivera, another dynastic candidate, who was the running-mate of the then-outgoing, longtime governor and now Vice-Governor Hermilando Mandanas. In Quezon, the Suarez clan secured gubernatorial succession in 2019, when term-limited David Suarez was succeeded by his father, Danilo. In 2022, Angelina Tan, another politician from a "fat" political dynasty, ended the Suarez clan's gubernatorial hold and has since consolidated her family's political stronghold. These trends illustrate the entrenched nature of dynastic power in both provinces.

Contrary to the prolonged dynastic control over the governorship exhibited in Cavite, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon, the post-EDSA history of Laguna's gubernatorial politics illustrates consistent dynastic fragility, characterized by failed succession and dynastic collapse.

3 Most notable examples were Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr., who served as governor by succession (1998-2001) and Erineo "Ayong" Maliksi (2001-2010), who maximized his full nine-year term and attempted a gubernatorial comeback in 2013 but lost to incumbent Governor Jonvic Remulla.

Laguna's Three Houses: Political History and Electoral Performance

The Lazaros, Ejercitos, and Hernandezes entered Laguna's political scene during the Philippines' post-authoritarian period. Their political origins have similar trajectories: they began by occupying various elective positions within their local bailiwicks before eventually securing the province's top elective post.

Table 2. Comparative Gubernatorial Profile of the Lazaro, Ejercito, and Hernandez clans

Gubernatorial Profile	Lazaro clan	Ejercito clan	Hernandez clan
Primary Gubernatorial Figure	Teresita "Ningning" Lazaro	Emilio Ramon "ER" Ejercito	Ramil Hernandez
Year of Entry in Laguna's Local Politics	1986	2001	1995
Primary Bailiwick	Calamba (2nd District)	Pagsanjan (4th District)	Calamba (2nd District)
Initial Accession to Governorship	Succession (from vice-governor)	Election	Succession (from vice-governor)
Gubernatorial Tenure	2001–10	2010–14	2014–25
Attempted Gubernatorial Heir	Dennis Lazaro (Son)	ER Ejercito (self-return) / Jerico Ejercito (Son)	Ruth Hernandez (Wife)
Dynastic Consolidation Failure	2010: Dennis Lazaro defeated.	2014: ER Ejercito disqualified. 2016 and 2019: ER and Jerico Ejercito comeback failed.	2025: Ruth Hernandez defeated.

Teresita "Ningning" Santiago Lazaro, a former public-school teacher and businesswoman, was appointed councilor of the then-Municipality of Calamba by former President Cory Aquino following the 1986 People Power Revolution. She first participated in the 1998 local elections, when she won as Calamba's vice mayor. In 1992, she topped the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (Provincial Board) elections. Her service as a provincial board member was cut short in the same year as she assumed the vice-governorship following the line of succession upon the death of the late governor Felicisimo Tobias San Luis. She successfully renewed her mandate as vice-governor in the 1995 and 1998 local elections, teaming up with former Governor Jose "Joey" David Lina Jr. With Lina's appointment as Secretary of the Interior and

Local Government by former President Macapagal-Arroyo after the 2001 People Power II, Lazaro assumed the governorship. She maximized her constitutional term limit as governor, winning the 2001, 2004, and 2007 elections. In the 2010 local elections, she chose her eldest son and former Laguna Provincial Administrator, Dennis Santiago Lazaro, as her successor but lost by an eight percent margin. In 2013, Ningning ran for Laguna's 2nd district representative but lost to a scion of the Chipeco political dynasty in Calamba City. In 2025, her younger son, Angelito "Totie" Santiago Lazaro, was elected the city's vice-mayor.

The Ejercitos ended the Lazaros' dominance in Laguna's provincial politics. The Ejercitos from the Municipality of Pagsanjan are closely related to the family of former President Joseph "Erap" Ejercito Estrada and have also ventured into both politics and the entertainment industry. Emilio Ramon "ER" Pelayo Ejercito III served as the town mayor from 2001 to 2010. He won the governorship in the 2010 local elections, defeating the Lazaros' attempt to maintain their hold on the position. In 2013, he was reelected as governor but was disqualified by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) barely a year later for campaign overspending.

In 2016, ER sought to reclaim the governorship. However, his decision to have his son, Jorge Antonio "Jerico" Genaro Ejercito, compete for the same position only to withdraw later split their votes and ultimately resulted in his defeat. He also made unsuccessful bids for governor in 2019 and mayor of Calamba City in 2022. His son ran for the vice-gubernatorial position in 2022 and 2025 but was unsuccessful. Like the common practice among political dynasties, the Ejercitos did not relinquish their grip on Pagsanjan's municipal politics. ER's wife, Girlie "Maita" Javier Ejercito, succeeded him as mayor from 2010 to 2019, then as vice-mayor from 2019 to 2020. In 2025, ER was again elected mayor of Pagsanjan, ending his streak of successive electoral defeats.

The Hernandezes, like the Lazaros, trace their political origins to Calamba City. Ramil Laurel Hernandez began his political career as a Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Council) chairman in 1993. He and his wife, Ruth Mariano Hernandez, served simultaneously on the Sangguniang Panlungsod (City Council) for three consecutive terms from 1995 to 2004. Constitutionally barred from seeking reelection, Ramil successfully transitioned to the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (Provincial Council) in 2004, whereas Ruth had a hiatus from elective office. Ramil won the 2007 vice-gubernatorial election, while his wife returned to the Sangguniang Panlungsod for another nine-year term. In the crowded 2010 gubernatorial election, he finished fourth. Eventually, he became governor in 2014, barely a year after reclaiming the vice-governorship due to ER Ejercito's disqualification. Ruth, meanwhile, would occupy various elective posts in the province during her husband's governorship, having been elected as a provincial board member in 2016 and Laguna's second district

representative in 2019 and 2022. The couple attempted to swap positions in the 2025 local elections, but only Ramil was elected. Like the Lazaros, the Hernandezes failed to maintain their hold on the governorship through dynastic succession.

Dynastic Persistence, Clientelism, and Vulnerability

The endurance and succession of political dynasties remain among the most examined yet persistently complex phenomena in Philippine politics. As numerous studies demonstrate, family-based political control has become a defining feature of national and local governance (Querubín 2016; Purdey et al. 2016; Mendoza et al. 2018). Querubín (2016) discusses how incumbency advantages (access to office, resources, and visibility) significantly shape the probability that relatives will enter and succeed in future elections. Purdey et al. (2016) argue that dynastic embeddedness rests on deep historical, socioeconomic, and institutional foundations, exacerbated by the absence of an enabling anti-dynasty law and the weakness of countervailing democratic forces. Mendoza et al. (2018) similarly demonstrate how dynasties leverage their accumulated human, economic, and social capital to distort political competition and dominate the selection of leaders.

Scholars generally agree that the persistence of dynastic politics is driven by the interaction of three reinforcing mechanisms: name recall, resource control, and patron-client relations. Name recall provides an electoral advantage through brand recognition and familiarity (Bancoro 2025). The control of private wealth and public resources enables dynastic politicians to dispense patronage, ranging from welfare assistance to local infrastructure, thereby cultivating loyal vote blocs (Dulay and Go 2021). Patron-client relations also allow dynasties to weaken competitors and undermine political accountability, sustaining a cycle of incumbency and dependency (Albuero 2016; Mendoza et al. 2022).

Patronage and clientelism are crucial to this system. Patronage refers to the material or nonmaterial resources that politicians distribute for political purposes, whereas clientelism denotes a reciprocal, personalistic exchange of goods or favors for political support (Hutchcroft 2014). Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) describe clientelism as a “form of particularistic exchange,” distinct from programmatic politics, which relies on policy-based appeals. In a weakly institutionalized party system like the Philippines, access to state resources substitutes for programmatic linkage (Hicken 2011). Sidel’s (2000) concept of “bossism” further illustrates how local elites fuse coercion, capital accumulation, and patronage to maintain power. These practices underpin the informal political economy that sustains local elites and shapes voter behavior.

While clientelism enables the consolidation of dynastic power, its personalistic logic also creates vulnerability. Loyalty in these relationships is vested not in the political family as an institution, but in the founding patron as an individual. Consequently, successors often inherit resource networks but not affective loyalty. This overreliance on personal ties, rather than institutional ones, renders dynasties vulnerable during leadership transitions.

However, despite the extensive literature on dynastic persistence, limited studies address dynastic vulnerability and failure. Resilient dynasties institutionalize succession, cultivate intergenerational legitimacy, and adapt to shifting political contexts. They typically combine grooming of successors, deep patronage networks, and alignment with dominant national parties. These conditions are evident in Cavite's Remullas, Rizal's Ynareses, the Santos-Recto bloc in Batangas, and the Suarez family in Quezon. Laguna, however, diverges sharply from these regional patterns as it exhibits fragmented bailiwicks and high urban mobility that prevent dynasties from consolidating province-wide patronage networks. The province, thus, represents a theoretically significant deviant case.

Conceptual Framework for Dynastic Vulnerability

To dissect this dynastic vulnerability exhibited in the Laguna case, the study adopts a multidimensional framework that distinguishes two ideal types of electoral mobilization:

1. The “command votes”: this electoral mobilization strategy encompasses the traditional, clientelistic logic. It is “command” because votes are not based on individual voting preference but are “commanded” by the patron-politician or a broker. This strategy relies on:
 - a. Patronage networks: hierarchical structures for resource mobilization, patronage dispensation, and grassroots machinery.
 - b. Bailiwicks: concentration of resources and/or influence in a particular geographic area, thereby creating a loyal voting bloc.
 - c. Name recall: candidates' individual or dynastic “brand,” signaling their clientelistic networks and reliable access to patronage. This is the primary logic of dynastic persistence in Cavite (Remullas) and Rizal (Ynareses).

2. The “market votes”: This captures the modern logic of voter preference, in which voters are persuaded in a “political marketplace.” These voters are attracted to the candidate through traditional and contemporary air and digital campaign strategies, shaping voter perceptions beyond patron-client ties. In this type of electoral mobilization strategy, voters respond to:
 - a. Candidate’s image and quality: legitimacy accrued through effective governance, perceived competence, reputation, charisma, or celebrity status. While strong performance in this dimension can elevate a dynasty’s prestige, it must be transferable and capable of being inherited symbolically or organizationally by the next generation.
 - b. Programmatic or issue-based appeals: policy platforms and governance aligning with voters’ preferences.
 - c. Media saturation: campaigns mediated by traditional and social media, where the candidate’s image is built, managed, or attacked.

This framework can be theoretically aligned with the literature on programmatic linkage, contrasting clientelistic and programmatic voter mobilization (Kitschelt 2000; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). The central premise is that dominant and effective forms of voter mobilization rest mainly on the prevailing socioeconomic conditions. In the literature review, clientelistic-driven command exchanges thrive in structures characterized by high poverty incidence and dependency on access to state resources (Mendoza et al. 2022). On the other hand, programmatic exchange, which is strongly attracting market votes, is observed to emerge in societies with a more mobile, educated, and financially capable electorate, as in those in urban and industrialized environments, rendering them less dependent on traditional patronage networks for resource distribution (Kitschelt 2000; Stokes et al. 2013).

This framework leads to the study’s central hypothesis, positing that dynastic persistence, relying heavily on command vote logic, thrives in local political-economic environments characterized by relatively high poverty, rural relations, and patronage dependency. Laguna’s structural profile challenges this model. Its economy is overwhelmingly industrial (59 percent of its GDP), and its highly urbanized cities, such as San Pedro, Binan, Santa Rosa, and Calamba, which host massive industrial parks, form an urban-industrial corridor to the NCR (Mole 2025). This economic structure provides a distinct voter profile: a substantial electoral constituency structurally disconnected from traditional clientelistic dependencies. This aligns with the literature on the varying influence of urban and rural settings on political behavior, contrasting the clientelistic, hierarchical, and command-based

structure in rural settings with a more depersonalized, mobile, and media-saturated political environment in urban settings (Schaffer 1998; Bates 1981). In the latter, traditional political machinery may have a limited impact, especially on voters sensitive to market-driven information (e.g., programmatic appeals, media scandals). This environment creates a dominant market-driven electorate, rendering electoral mobilization via a command vote strategy ineffective for facilitating a successful dynastic succession.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitatively driven mixed-methods approach, using quantitative exploration of electoral patterns primarily as contextual background for a deeper qualitative analysis of dynastic succession in Laguna.

The quantitative component involves an exploration of 25 years of gubernatorial election results (2001–25) to establish the electoral landscape within which dynastic attempts emerged, recurred, and ultimately failed. This longitudinal overview helps situate the three significant succession efforts within broader trends in vote shares, candidate competition, and shifts in voter support across election cycles. Electoral data were downloaded from the Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset (2024), while other coded variables (i.e., reelection, election to a government post within the past six years, dynastic relations) were obtained from multiple independent sources, including official election results, news reports, government documents, and public legal records.

The study's focus is on its qualitative case studies of the three political families that attempted to consolidate power in Laguna's gubernatorial post: the Lazaros, Ejercitos, and Hernandezes. The timeline of analysis corresponds to the three major moments of attempted dynastic succession: (1) Ningning Lazaro's effort to pass the governorship to her son in 2010; (2) ER Ejercito's 2016 attempt at a multigenerational comeback with his son, Jerico Ejercito; and (3) Ruth Hernandez's 2025 bid to succeed her husband, then Governor Ramil Hernandez.

These cases were analyzed using the multidimensional framework established in the previous section. A wide range of qualitative sources, including national and local media reports, official government documents, public statements, campaign materials, and archived records, supplemented the analysis. This multisource approach provides contextual detail on each dynasty's political strategies, succession plans, and governance trajectories.

By foregrounding qualitative inquiry and using electoral data trends as context, the study uncovers the mechanisms behind Laguna’s repeated dynastic failures, offering broader theoretical insights into the limits of clientelistic politics.

Structural Advantages in Laguna’s Gubernatorial Contests

To test the abovementioned hypothesis, the study first utilized quantitative data from Laguna’s gubernatorial elections for the past 25 years (from 2001 to the recently concluded 2025 midterm elections). This regression model is presented as an exploratory baseline that helps frame the study’s qualitative puzzle. The model is atheoretical and methodologically limited, as it rests on a small number of cases. Its function, thus, is not to provide a definitive causal explanation but to establish the structural advantages that should, as highlighted in the study’s literature review, have favored successful dynastic succession.

Given the study’s exploratory nature, a multiple linear regression model was employed to observe whether a candidate’s vote share is significantly influenced by: reelectionist status, prior elected office within the past six years, dynastic ties, and the total number of candidates.

The multiple linear regression model is specified as follows:

$$\text{Vote_Share} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Reelectionist} + \beta_2 \text{Elected_Official_6Y} + \beta_3 \text{Dynasty} + \beta_4 \text{Total_Cand} + \varepsilon^4$$

Table 3 presents the regression results identifying the significant predictors of gubernatorial vote share in Laguna across nine electoral cycles (2001–2025). The model incorporates four independent variables: *Reelectionist*, *Elected_Official_6Y*, *Dynasty*, and *Total_Cand*. All variables are statistically significant, as indicated by their *p*-values: *Reelectionist* ($p = 0.0011$), *Elected_Official_6Y* ($p = 0.0000$), *Dynasty* ($p = 0.0004$), and *Total_Cand* ($p = 0.0034$). The model itself is statistically robust,

4 Variable definitions are as follows:

Vote_Share – Percentage of total votes obtained by a candidate

Reelectionist – Candidate running for gubernatorial reelection (yes = 1; no = 0)

Elected_Official_6Y – Candidate elected to any government position within the past six years (yes = 1; no = 0)

Dynasty – Candidate with dynastic relations, including outside Laguna (yes = 1; no = 0)

Total_Cand – Total number of candidates for the gubernatorial race

ε – Error term accounting for unexplained variance in the model

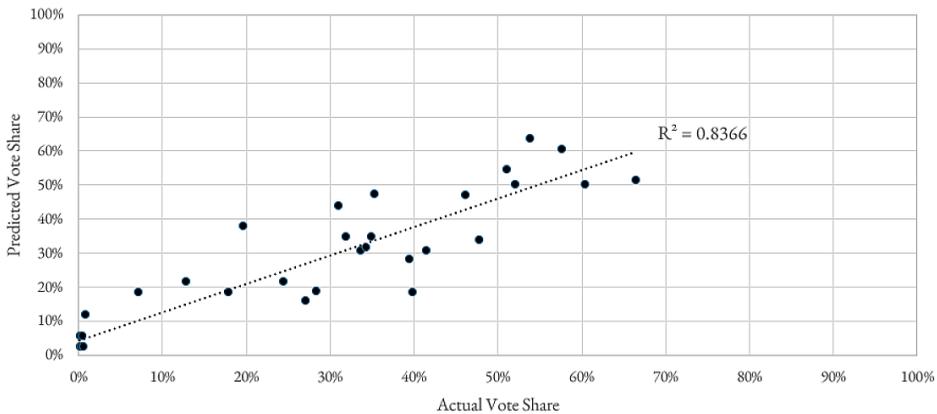
with an *F*-statistic of 39.6890 far exceeding the critical *F* value of 8.89625×10^{-12} , indicating that the regression equation provides a significant fit to the data.

Table 3. Multilinear Regression Results

Observations (n)	36		
F-stat	39.6890		
Prob>F	8.89625×10^{-12}		
R-squared	0.83663		
Adjusted R-squared	0.81555		
Independent Variables	coeff	std error	p-value
Reelectionist	0.1653	0.0460	0.0011
Elected Official_6Y	0.1893	0.0356	0.0000
Dynasty	0.1327	0.0338	0.0004
Total_Cand	-0.0304	0.0096	0.0034
Intercept	0.2083	0.0591	0.0013

Figure 1 further supports this through a scatterplot, showing a strong positive relationship between actual and predicted vote shares. The coefficient of determination (R^2 value) of 83.66 percent indicates that the model explains a substantial portion of the variation in gubernatorial vote share across all elections studied. Even after adjusting for degrees of freedom and potential model complexity, the adjusted R^2 remains high at 81.55 percent, confirming the model’s explanatory strength.

Figure 1. Actual versus Predicted vote share



The regression coefficients reveal the quantitative contribution of each predictor:

- Candidates running for reelection (Reelectionist) contribute an average increase of 16.53 percent in their vote share.
- Those who held elected office in the prior six years before the election (Elected_Official_6Y) enjoy an even greater advantage of 18.93 percent.
- Candidates with a dynasty affiliation (Dynasty) receive an additional 13.27 percent vote share on average.
- Conversely, the variable Total_Cand, representing the number of candidates in the gubernatorial race, negatively affects vote share with each additional opponent, reducing a candidate's share by approximately 3.04 percent.

These findings support existing literature on electoral advantage in Philippine politics (Querubín 2012; Cruz 2018; Cruz et al. 2017). Consistent with earlier studies, incumbency and prior elected experience appear to provide significant visibility and legitimacy among voters. Political dynasties also continue to benefit from established name recall, resources, and machinery (Fiva and Smith 2018).

Overall, the findings reinforce the study's central puzzle. The quantitative model confirms that the ingredients for dynastic advantage exist and confer electoral advantages in Laguna's gubernatorial elections. This disconnect leads the analysis to qualitative case studies. The findings now generate a supplementary research question: given the structural advantages enjoyed by dynastic candidates in Laguna, why have they repeatedly failed to translate those advantages into a successful dynastic succession?

The Anatomy of Dynastic Failure: Testing the Limits of Structural Advantages

This section qualitatively analyzes the cases of the Lazaro, Ejercito, and Hernandez clans to determine why the structural advantages identified in the quantitative model did not translate into dynastic consolidation, focusing on the intervening and unmeasured factors that spelled their defeat in the gubernatorial elections.

The Limits of Machine: The Lazaros' Failed Succession (2010)

- Structural advantages: The Lazaros was powerfully positioned to stage a successful dynastic succession in 2010. Ningning Lazaro held the governorship for nine years before the elections, giving her a massive incumbency advantage

and a reelectionist-derived advantage to transfer to her familial successor. Her son, Dennis, possessed dynastic advantage. However, such an advantage was limited. He only held a bureaucratic role as Laguna's provincial administrator before running for governor in 2010. However, this was an appointed rather than an elected position, which limits its advantage under the model's variable for having been elected into office within the past six years.

- **Intervening variable (Reputational Costs):** The Lazaro "brand" was not transferred cleanly. While the Lazaros located their bailiwick in Calamba, their command vote strategy, already diminished by the heir's lack of elected experience, was fatally undermined by the clan's reputational liabilities. Dennis' candidacy was overshadowed by a high-profile plunder case filed against him and his mother during her term. The case alleged the accumulation of ill-gotten wealth worth ₱50 million and the misuse of ₱250 million in public funds (Balagtas See 2009). Although both were acquitted in October 2010 after the elections, the controversy tainted the Lazaro "brand" during the crucial campaign period. In that election, their provincial reign was ended by ER Ejercito, who possessed multiple electoral advantages, including dynastic lineage, recent elected office, and high visibility.
- **Election Outcome and Analysis:** The Lazaros' succession plan failed decisively, with Dennis garnering only 27.16 percent of the vote. In Laguna's market vote system, the clan's reputational liability fatally tarnished the Lazaro "brand." Moreover, Dennis was outcompeted by E.R. Ejercito, who enjoyed superior market vote (celebrity) and structural advantages (dynastic affiliation and prior elected position) that he lacked.

Institutional and Market Punishment: The Ejercitos' Provincial Downfall

- **Structural advantages:** ER Ejercito began his political career as a longtime mayor of Pagsanjan (2001–10). His 2010 gubernatorial victory came in a highly competitive race, featuring several prominent candidates: Dennis Lazaro (son of outgoing governor Teresita Lazaro), former DILG Secretary and former Laguna Governor Joey Lina, and then-incumbent Vice-Governor Ramil Hernandez. Nevertheless, his advantages, dynastic affiliation and recent tenure as a local executive, proved decisive. He reinforced these by winning reelection by a majority (53.83 percent), compounding his reelectionist status with a powerful market vote profile, starring in three historical-action films (Manila Kingpin: The Asiong Salonga Story, El Presidente, and Boy Golden: Shoot to Kill) between 2011 and 2013 that reinforced his populist image.

- **Intervening Variable (Institutional Sanction and Brand Tarnishing):** Unlike its counterparts, the Ejercitos' attempt at dynastic consolidation failed not through elections, but through legal-institutional sanction. His second gubernatorial term abruptly ended in 2014 when the COMELEC First Division ruled to disqualify him for exceeding the official campaign spending limit. According to COMELEC, Ejercito had spent over ₱20 million on campaign advertisements, far beyond the allowable ceiling of ₱4.5 million (Philippine Daily Inquirer 2014). Such a sanction was further compounded by the tarnishing of the Ejercito "brand." In particular, he faced a graft charge related to a 2008 insurance contract he had entered into as mayor of Pagsanjan. His failure to appear for his arraignment led the Sandiganbayan Fourth Division to issue an arrest warrant in April 2016, further damaging his public image (Marcelo 2016). Critically, his 2016 comeback attempt was also marred by a pseudo-intrafamily competition designed to ensure political gains. He ran in the same election as his son, Jerico Ejercito. Although the family later attempted to withdraw Jerico's candidacy, the COMELEC ruled the withdrawal was invalid. This incident further split their voter base and created voter confusion, enabling Ramil Hernandez to win.
- **Election Outcome and Analysis:** The Ejercito "brand," once a winning market asset, became tarnished due to various controversies. The market voters, now possessing a negative view, electorally punished the damaged Ejercito "brand." ER lost in consecutive comeback attempts in 2016 and 2019, and Jerico losing his 2022 and 2025 vice-gubernatorial bid powerfully demonstrates this fallout. This trajectory illustrates that structural advantages alone do not ensure dynastic dominance when combined with legal controversies, institutional sanctions, and a tarnished reputation.

The Nontransferability of Power: The Hernandez Clan's Unsuccessful Handoff

- **Structural advantages:** The trajectory of the Hernandezes was the model's ultimate test. Ramil Hernandez served as governor for almost a decade (2014–25). His wife, Ruth, was the designated successor. She enjoyed the strongest possible advantages: dynastic affiliation (as the wife of the then-incumbent governor) and recent tenure as a congresswoman. Among the gubernatorial contenders in 2025, Ruth had the most precise alignment with the predictive model, suggesting she would be the frontrunner. Her combination of dynastic ties and recent electoral experience should have translated into a significant vote share advantage.
- **Intervening Variable (Reputational Friction and Credible Outsider):** Gubernatorial succession was not seamless for the Hernandez "brand". Ruth's

candidacy was marred by legal challenges that may have weakened her campaign momentum and public perception. She received four disqualification cases during the 2025 campaign period (Locus 2025). Although these were eventually withdrawn due to a lack of factual basis, the filing of such cases may have cast doubt on her candidacy and contributed to a decline in public confidence. Moreover, this reputational friction was fatally compounded by a competitive gubernatorial contest and the rise of a credible outsider, Marisol “Sol” Aragonés, a notable figure in Laguna politics.

- **Election Outcome and Analysis:** The Hernadezes’ gubernatorial handover plan failed, as Sol Aragonés defeated Ruth. This dynastic failure is the most theoretically significant. It supports the study’s hypothesis and demonstrates that, among Laguna’s significant market vote electorate, even the most potent combination of structural advantages is not a guarantee of securing the governorship. The electorate evaluated Hernandez as a separate “brand,” one associated with reputational friction. It rejected a seamless, blatant transfer of power between spouses in favor of a market-based alternative, perceived as more credible and untainted by political controversies and dynastic motives.

The Rise of a Credible Outsider: Sol Aragonés’ Victory as Market Politics in Practice

The 2025 elections not only demonstrated the failure of dynastic succession but also offered a definitive counter-case of a nondynastic victory. Interestingly, Sol Aragonés’ electoral victory supports the study’s hypothesis by demonstrating that an outsider candidate can substitute for dynastic advantage in a market vote system.

When running for governor, Aragonés can be considered a quintessential market-vote candidate. Unlike her strongest competitor, Ruth Hernandez, she is not a member of any political dynasty. However, she is highly popular due to her previous stint as a journalist at ABS-CBN, one of the country’s largest networks. However, two Ms played a crucial role in Aragonés’ 2025 campaign, enough to defeat her rivals: (1) machinery and (2) message.

Aragonés began her political career in 2013 as the representative of Laguna’s third district. Her shifting allegiances to three national parties (UNA, PDP-Laban, and Nacionalista) marked her nine-year stint in the House of Representatives. Party-switching was a common activity among legislators, driven by the shifting national political landscape and access to presidential patronage. Moreover, her political reach was previously limited to her legislative district. Laguna’s third district comprises a

city (San Pablo) and six municipalities (Alaminos, Calauan, Liliw, Nagcarlan, Rizal, and Victoria). Expectedly, except for Calauan, where she lost by a slim margin, the rest delivered for her during her 2022 gubernatorial candidacy. The only locality she won outside her traditional bailiwick was the capital, Santa Cruz. Her rival, former Governor Ramil Hernandez, won 23 towns, including Laguna’s vote-rich cities (Biñan, Cabuyao, Calamba, San Pedro, and Santa Rosa).

After her defeat in 2022, and with the intention of running again in 2025, Aragonés began organizing her locally based machinery. Instead of building a traditional clientelistic machine, she set up her organizational core through advocacy. As early as 2022, she oversaw an advocacy movement focused on persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Laguna. Through her Sol Aragonés Foundation, she initially partnered with the independent nonprofit organization, Alagang AKAY, to spearhead various donation and medical assistance drives to PWDs and their families across the province, dubbed the “Alagang Sol, Alagang Akay” program (Philstar.com, 2022). She then established the non-governmental organization Akay ni Sol, which later became a party list competing for representation in Congress. These initiatives enabled Aragonés to reach and engage with communities in Laguna beyond her bailiwick and to sustain public visibility through name-recall strategies (e.g., the prominence and use of her name in advocacy programs), despite not holding elective positions, which would benefit her in 2025.

To further mobilize political support, Aragonés founded the Akay National Political Party – Laguna’s first national party. In her hometown of San Pablo City in May 2024, she led the founding ceremony and mass oath-taking of new party members, during which she formally announced her intention to run for governor. The party secured various local positions across Laguna in the 2025 local elections, from the mayor to municipal council members. The notable politicians who won under its banner were former Governor and Pagsanjan Mayor ER Ejercito, Pagsanjan Vice-Mayor Januario Garcia, Rizal Vice-Mayor Antonio Aurelio, and Pangil Vice-Mayor Rianne Diaz.

Aside from organizing machinery, Aragonés adopted clear and issue-based campaign messaging. With so many issues that local candidates can capitalize on in their campaigns, she prioritized the one that is public-regarding yet can reap political rewards for the tangible and long-term benefits it can deliver to constituencies—healthcare. Making a province-wide health issue the centerpiece of her campaign is not a mere product of political opportunism. Despite being one of the country’s richest and most populous provinces, Laguna’s current health care system is underperforming and marred by dilapidated public hospital facilities and a lack of a tertiary hospital (De Leon 2025a). To address this, Aragonés committed to renovating facilities and improving personnel services in Laguna’s nine district hospitals (Mole

2025). She also pledged to establish her so-called “Akay ni Sol” pharmacies in the province’s 24 municipalities and six cities, providing free maintenance medicines to constituents (De Leon 2025b).

Aside from healthcare, another politically rewarding social service she sought to prioritize is education. She vowed to expand her scholarship program, dubbed “Iskolar ni Sol,” and make the provincial government’s educational assistance programs more inclusive. This includes expanding such programs by minimizing scholarship requirements and extending them to underprivileged students who do not meet a high academic benchmark (Mole 2025). Her campaign rhetoric assures Laguna residents of forthcoming social benefits while gently highlighting the shortcomings of the then-Hernandez administration, which her closest gubernatorial rival, widely perceived as a continuity candidate, must also defend.

Overall, Aragonés’ victory is the final confirmation of the study’s hypothesis. With her formidable opponent enjoying a substantial advantage in the command vote system, she used a market asset (a media brand, disciplined campaign messaging, and blending machinery with advocacy) to secure the governorship, defeating a dynastic heir who, at least on paper, possessed a potent combination of structural advantages.

Synthesis and Discussion

The qualitative analysis of the Lazaro, Ejercito, and Hernandez families solves the puzzle presented by the quantitative regression. The model presented in section V confirms that the structural advantages for dynastic persistence (incumbency, prior elected office, and dynastic affiliation) are potent and deliver a significant electoral advantage in Laguna. However, the case study of each clan shows that such advantages are merely a baseline, not a guarantee. The crucial finding is that these structural advantages were consistently neutralized by other variables that are highly salient among Laguna’s significant market vote electorate.

Nontransferability of Incumbency and Legitimacy

The literature emphasizes that dynastic survival is aided by the incumbency advantages of the founding patron and the capacity to convert these advantages into intergenerational political capital (Querubín 2016; Mendoza et al. 2018). In Laguna, however, incumbent performance and legacy remained largely individualized, rather than institutionalized within the clan.

For the Lazaros, Ningning cultivated a maternal, technocratic image anchored in health and education programs and bureaucratic stability. This conforms to

accounts of local executives who build legitimacy through effective service delivery and proximity to constituents. However, her successor, Dennis, could not inherit this capital. Her legitimacy was rooted in personal familiarity and affective trust rather than an articulated family project or programmatic vision. This supports the literature's argument that in clientelist settings, legitimacy often clings to persons rather than institutions, making succession especially fragile.

The Ejercitos followed a different path: E.R. Ejercito embodied a highly visible, populist leadership style that fused local governance achievements with film celebrity and the broader Estrada brand. This is consistent with Sidel's (2000) notion of "bossism," where personal charisma and media presence amplify the power of local bosses. Yet corruption cases, campaign overspending, and his COMELEC disqualification severely damaged his credibility, turning his personalistic capital into a liability. The family's attempt to re-enter the gubernatorial race (with ER and his son Jerico in 2016) occurred under a cloud of controversy, illustrating how negative shocks to the founding patron's reputation can derail dynastic continuity, even when initial support is strong.

In the Hernandez administration, Ramil Hernandez projected a technocratic, developmental image centered on modernization, PPPs, and disaster preparedness, with stable re-election margins from 2016 to 2022. However, his wife, Ruth, failed to translate this into a province-wide appeal in 2025, despite her own long political career in Calamba and the province. The Hernandez case supports the argument that good governance performance is necessary but not sufficient for dynastic reproduction: unless incumbents cultivate a transferable symbolic legacy, successors must build their own personal connection with voters.

Across all three cases, the core theme is nontransferability. As noted in the literature, personalistic political legitimacy, common in clientelist contexts, is based on individuals rather than families. Thus, even when incumbents govern effectively, their successors must independently cultivate charisma, moral authority, or symbolic capital. None of the Laguna heirs successfully crossed this threshold. While incumbents accumulated legitimacy, this legitimacy stayed personal, not dynastic, thereby confirming the literature's claim that clientelist legitimacy is often nontransferable and that succession is precisely where dynastic vulnerability becomes most visible. In a market vote system, voters evaluate the heir as a separate "brand," and the incumbent's performance does not guarantee a successful transfer of power.

The Importance of Market Vote Variables

The study's hypothesis is confirmed by the repeated failures of overreliance on command vote strategies. In other provinces like Cavite and Rizal, consolidated

“fat” dynasties rely heavily on deeply rooted patronage networks. In Laguna, the trajectories of the “Three Houses” show that these networks proved insufficient and fragile. The Lazaros’ machinery network in the second district could not scale province-wide. The Ejercitos’ alliances were fragile and contingent on his personal appeal. The Hernandezes’ institutionalized machine, well-oiled among the three, still failed to secure Ruth’s gubernatorial bid.

In every instance of dynastic failure in Laguna, market vote variables proved decisive:

- Negative market variables neutralized structural advantages. A plunder case fatally tainted the Lazaro succession. The Ejercito brand was tarnished by disqualification and graft conviction, leading to market sanction in the subsequent elections. The Hernandez transfer was also hampered by reputational friction stemming from multiple disqualification cases. Thus, in Laguna’s media-saturated market environment, a clan’s reputation can be critically tarnished in a way that is less impactful in a more dominant clientelistic environment. These findings align with the literature positing that in a market vote system, where the voters are less dependent on clientelistic exchanges, elections are seen as a mechanism to punish a tarnished “brand” (Fearon 1999). In a command vote system, the legitimacy of the patron-politician depends on their capacity to deliver patronage benefits, overshadowing other serious governance issues such as corruption. In Laguna, however, the reputational costs faced by dynastic candidates for governorship appeared to be negative market information, leading voters to punish their “brand” electorally.
- Positive market variables provided victory for outsiders and staged a dynastic upset. ER Ejercito’s 2010 victory over the Lazaro machine was a triumph of a superior market brand. Sol Aragones’ 2025 victory was, by far, the ultimate confirmation: media personality and programmatic messaging (healthcare) were market assets that upset a formidable Hernandez machine.

Laguna as a Deviant Case: Testing the Limits of Clientelism

The ‘Three Houses of the Lazaros, Ejercitos, and Hernandezes’ empirically confirms the claim that clientelism both enables and constrains dynastic succession. While patronage and personal loyalty can elevate a family to power, they do not automatically ensure inter- and intragenerational continuity because loyalty is tied to the founding patron rather than the dynasty as an institution.

It also shows that dynastic resilience is not simply a function of resource endowments or incumbency. In Laguna, each family possessed some of these attributes, but none achieved the synergy across performance, command votes, and market votes necessary for durable dynastic power. The Lazaros had technocratic performance but limited market appeal and shrinking command networks. The Ejercitos had charisma and visibility but possessed unstable legitimacy and fragmented alliances. The Hernandezes had administrative stability and organized machinery but lacked symbolic and emotional resonance. These mismatches prevented any family from achieving the synergistic alignment of performance, command vote components, and market vote attributes that is critical for dynastic resilience.

Thus, Laguna operates as a negative or deviant case within CALABARZON. It demonstrates that dynastic resilience is not automatic. In an electorally competitive province with a significant market vote electorate, command votes are insufficient, incumbency and legitimacy are non-transferable, and positive and negative market narratives are decisive.

Future Research Directions

The study opens new avenues for research that move beyond describing dynastic persistence to analyzing conditions and mechanisms of dynastic failure at the provincial level.

First, future studies should empirically test the market vote hypothesis more deeply. The current research proposes that voters from the urban-industrial areas are less responsive to clientelistic inducements. However, this requires microlevel testing. Future studies could combine municipality-level socioeconomic data (e.g., poverty incidence, percentage of industrial vs. agricultural employment) with precinct-level voting results. This would allow for a quantitative test of whether precincts in highly urban, industrialized areas demonstrate a weaker correlation between command vote and dynastic persistence than those in rural, agrarian areas.

Second, the impact of campaign strategies in this new market environment warrants a deeper qualitative investigation. The current study identified the “what” (programmatic messaging, celebrity, and media appeal), but the “how” remains a rich field for inquiry. Future studies of market-oriented campaigns could explore how candidates convert media visibility into ground mobilization that bypasses traditional clientelistic networks. Conversely, other studies could explore how tarnished dynastic “brands” use air and digital campaigns to repair their reputations, and how these strategies are effective against negative market information.

Lastly, future studies can strengthen the model presented in the current study by comparing Laguna's negative case directly with a province where dynasties have long dominated provincial politics, such as Cavite or Rizal. This would help test one of the study's key ideas—that Laguna's industrial economy was a crucial factor. Future studies could examine how this economic structure, combined with other factors such as fragmented provincial elites, actually sustains dynastic fragility in the province identified in the current study. This would help confirm whether Laguna's "marketized" politics is just a special case or a trend that would eventually be evident in other developing provinces.

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Declaration of AI Application Usage

We acknowledge the use of AI tools in the editing of the study's final draft, namely Grammarly and Turnitin, for the sole purpose of improving its writing clarity and ensuring that it is free from any grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. The suggestions provided by these AI tools are carefully screened, evaluated, or modified. Thus, we guarantee that the study's final draft very much reflects our original work.

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Glass Ceilings and Dynastic Chains

The Economic Realities of Female Leadership in Philippine Local Governance¹

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"Campaign Sorties sa Barangay Concepcion Pequeña: Heavenly Peace asin San Roque | April 22, 2025."

An Bagong Team Naga 2025 Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=122151604886561822&set=pcb.122151605762561822>

Abstract

Despite the Philippines' high global ranking in gender equality, women remain significantly underrepresented in local political leadership, particularly in municipal and city positions. This study investigates this paradox by exploring the fiscal and economic implications of female-led local government units (LGUs) from 1998 to 2013. This study aims to examine whether the presence of female mayors influences LGU income and expenditure patterns, with a particular focus on welfare-related allocations such as education, health, and social services. Grounded in Wagner's law, fiscal decentralization theory, and gender and governance literature, this study employs a mixed-methods framework to understand the allocative tendencies and economic priorities under female leadership. It utilizes panel regression models across 145 highly urbanized cities, independent component cities, and component cities, investigating how fiscal autonomy interacts with gendered governance practices and economic growth. All datasets used in this study—covering local election results, gender of elected officials, and LGU fiscal performance—are sourced from the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies program on electoral dynamics and local governance in the Philippines. The study also considers structural factors such as political dynasties and cultural barriers that influence women's access to and performance in elected office. While the quantitative analysis is currently ongoing, this work-in-progress anticipates generating empirical insights into the relationship between women's political leadership and inclusive fiscal governance. This research attempts to contribute to the limited but growing literature given the intersectionality of gender, local governance, and development economics in Southeast Asia. It also aims to inform evidence-based policymaking by demonstrating how greater female representation in politics may align with more equitable public spending and improved governance outcomes. By highlighting these dynamics, the study underscores the importance of promoting gender-inclusive leadership as a pathway to more responsive and effective local governance.

Keywords: local public economics, governance, gender economics, glass ceilings, female leadership

Introduction

Leadership plays a crucial role in driving economic growth and social progress. Historically, women played pivotal roles in transforming and shaping societies. The Philippines, often regarded as a regional leader in gender equality, presents a paradox (e.g., Aguilar 1990; Salvador 2017). While the Philippines has produced female political icons and achieved high rankings in global gender indices, significant disparities remain at the local government level. Systemic challenges continue to impede their broader political participation, particularly in leadership roles at the local level (Tapales 2016; Encinas-Franco and Laguna 2022; Encinas-Franco and Laguna 2023; Lampitoc and Ignacio 2017; Rodriguez 2002; Mendoza et al. 2016). Gender disparity persists, especially at the local political leadership; hence, the need for a focused investigation into the economic and governance outcomes associated with women's leadership.

Grounded in gender and governance literature, Wagner's law, and fiscal decentralization theory, this study aims to explore the allocative dynamics of women's leadership, particularly their prioritization of welfare-enhancing expenditures. It seeks to comprehend and analyze the economic impacts of having female mayors on the income and expenditure patterns of local government units (LGUs) in the Philippines from 1998 to 2013. This paper aims to

1. examine whether the presence of female executives (mayors) influences economic growth, particularly through changes in LGU income levels in the Philippines;
2. identify and assess the prioritization patterns in LGU budget allocations (e.g., social welfare, health, and education spending) under female leadership at the LGU level; and
3. analyze the influence of political dynasties on economic outcomes related to female political representation in the Philippines.

This study builds on previous research suggesting that women in leadership roles tend to prioritize welfare-improving expenditures, such as health, education, and social services, which align with the broader goals of inclusive growth and equitable development (Hassami and Lopes de Fonseca 2020; Novotney 2023; Joshi and Kingma 2013; Martinez-Cordoba et al. 2023). By demonstrating the fiscal and economic advantages of having more women politicians, the study can help dismantle the barriers to women's political participation. Moreover, different income class classifications may provide critical insights into urban governance and spatial economic activity, and the potential for transformative leadership is significant. Finally, this research emphasizes the importance of delivering data-driven insights in

the largely underexplored intersection of gender, governance, and fiscal performance in the Philippines.

Framework, Data, and Methodology

To understand the dynamics between women's political representation and its economic implications, this study builds upon established theories and literature in political economy and governance. This study introduces a framework anchored on the following theoretical perspectives: Wagner's law, fiscal decentralization theory, theories of gender and governance literature, and the tenets of public goods and welfare economics.

1. Wagner's law

Wagner's law states that public expenditure increases as the economy grows, driven by factors such as increased household consumption, private investment, and net exports. This expansion then supports activities that cater to the growing needs of the population. Policymakers, in this context, ensure that state income is directed towards fostering economic growth across various sectors, with public spending aimed at improving overall societal welfare. This theory supports the gender and governance studies in looking at how the increase in government spending reflects the priorities and policies of local chief executives and, in turn, assesses the interplay between economic growth and fiscal decisions made, particularly by women leaders.

2. Fiscal decentralization theory

Fiscal decentralization theory posits that when political and governmental decision-making is devolved to local levels, welfare can be enhanced through the diversification of local public outputs. Fedelino (2010) explains that this theory is based on two key assumptions. First, local politicians have better knowledge of the preferences of their constituents than central governments, allowing them to align the provision of public goods more effectively with local needs (allocative efficiency). Second, citizens can "vote with their feet" by relocating to jurisdictions that better satisfy their preferences, which creates competitive pressures on subnational governments to provide more efficient and innovative public services (productive efficiency). The dynamics of this theory suggest that fiscal decentralization can lead to more efficient and responsive governance. In addition, through decentralized authority, local governments can manage resources and make decisions appropriate to the needs of their jurisdiction. We look particularly at how decentralization affects the flexibility of expenditure programming and prioritization of women leaders, whether they can decide

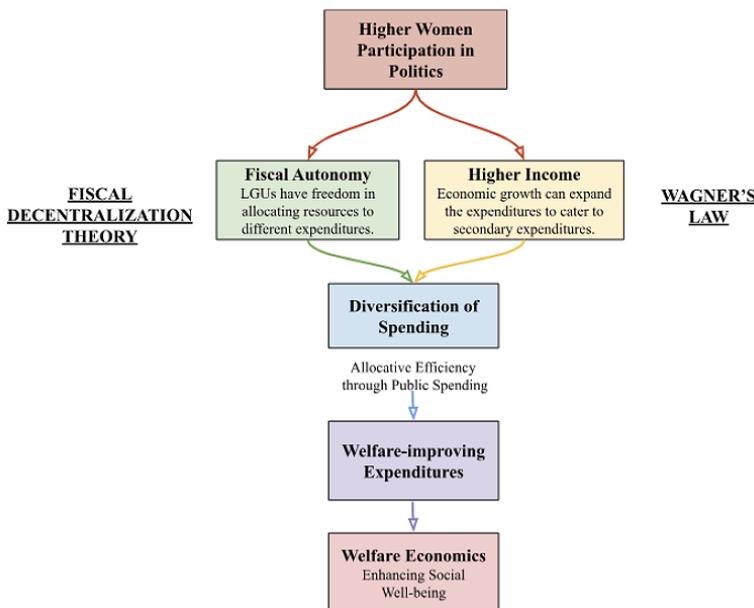
with a significant degree of freedom, or are they constrained to follow their male predecessors, which may be related to women’s ascension to power by democratic vote or influenced by dynastic politics.

3. Theories of gender and governance

On the one hand, some goods and services, such as education, health, and social services, possess characteristics of non-excludability and nonrivalry. These features make them classic examples of public goods that are most effectively provided or subsidized by the government (Samuelson 1954). Given that women leaders have been observed to prioritize these sectors, this theory aligns with the study’s focus on welfare-related expenditures as indicators of leadership priorities. Welfare economics, on the other hand, focuses on how government resource allocation impacts social well-being and equity. Welfare-related expenditures, such as those for education, healthcare, and social services, are seen as instrumental in achieving allocative efficiency (Pigou 1920). The premise is that public spending targeted at enhancing welfare can bridge social inequalities and improve the quality of life.

In the context of this study, economic theory reinforces why welfare-related expenditures are valid indicators of leadership priorities and governance outcomes. By analyzing how female leadership influences the allocation to these sectors, the study aims to demonstrate how leadership styles translate into economic and social outcomes at the local government level. We demonstrate these relationships in figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework on women’s leadership in local governance



Note that from these linkages, we outline some necessary assumptions for the study, stemming from the theoretical framework and relevant literature.

1. Related literature and studies show indications and evidence that women in leadership positions are more likely to prioritize welfare-improving expenditures, such as education, health, and social services, compared to their male counterparts. Female leaders are assumed to exhibit different allocative behaviors due to their governance style, which emphasizes inclusivity and social welfare (e.g., Eswaran 2014; Salvador 2017; Abueg 2021; Monsod 1994).
2. Different income classifications of LGUs in the Philippines have varying degrees of fiscal and administrative autonomy to allocate resources. Decentralized governance structures allow LGUs to make context-specific spending decisions, which may vary based on leadership composition, given income, and other fiscal resources.
3. Economic growth leads to increased government revenues, enabling more diversified public expenditures that include secondary and welfare-related sectors. The availability of higher incomes at the LGU level enhances the capacity for welfare-improving expenditures under female leadership, per Wagner's law.

Nature and Sources of Data

The study spans election data from 1998 to 2013, and the analysis covers 145 LGUs (cities and municipalities). Data on elected mayors, including position (i.e., gender, votes gained, total number of voters, and election year). We also obtained data on LGU income, and welfare-related expenditures such as educational, public welfare, social services, health, and other fiscal variables. These were sourced from the Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset of the Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC) of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS).

Income classification was sourced from the Department of Finance (DOF). LGUs in the Philippines are classified based on income as follows:

- a. Highly urbanized cities (HUCs). Cities with an annual income of at least PHP 50 million and not under the jurisdiction of any province.
- b. Independent component cities (ICCs). Cities that are independent from the province and directly under the national government's jurisdiction.

- c. Component cities (CCs). Cities that are politically and administratively a part of the province.

Information on political dynasties was derived from academic studies, PSPC dataset records, and existing political science research.

Data Analysis

Numerical data were analyzed through descriptive statistics to assess the average participation of females in politics and their correlation with fiscal performance among cities. Pooled ordinary least squares (POLS) regression was used as the baseline method to examine the relationship between female executive presence, LGU income, and expenditures. The Hausman test was conducted to determine whether fixed effects (FE) or random effects (RE) is appropriate.

Discussion on political dynasties was done to substantiate the empirical results. Dynastic factors (e.g., gender dynamics, political family structures, cultural norms) were analyzed to assess how they influence and shape women's political opportunities and leadership styles. The qualitative insights were used to interpret the regression results, explaining potential mechanisms behind the observed relationships.

POLS regression model

POLS was done to assess the baseline for the study and a follow-through of tests. UP CIDS data report local government income having sources via Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), tax collections, total local sources, and total external sources. On the expenditure side, apart from total expenditure, spending on health, labor, social services, economic development, housing, and public welfare are also reported. However, indications of statistically significant high collinearity (in the appendix) show that both components of income and expenditure may not be specifically included in the POLS model.

Thus, the model used is as follows: for LGU i and election year t , we have

$$\begin{aligned} govexp_{it} = & \alpha + \beta_1 (lgu_income_{it}) + \gamma_k (election_year_{it}) \\ & + \beta_2 (female_exec_{it}) + \beta_3 (female_inc_{it}) + \varepsilon_{it} \end{aligned}$$

where

$$\begin{aligned}
 govexp &= \text{local government total expenditure} \\
 lgu_income &= \text{local government unit's total income} \\
 election_year &= \text{election year dummy variable, } k = 2001, 2004, 2007, \\
 &\quad 2010, 2013 \\
 female_exec &= \text{binary variable for gender (0 for female, 1 for male)} \\
 female_inc &= \text{interaction variable of } lgu_income \text{ and } female_exec \\
 \varepsilon &= \text{error term}
 \end{aligned}$$

We also do a test of whether the appropriateness of the fixed effects or the random effects model is given the panel data used in the regression analysis. We included additional variables below, as defined:

$$\begin{aligned}
 gen_incumbent &= \text{binary variable for the gender of the incumbent} \\
 &\quad \text{mayor prior to the midterm election (0 for female, 1} \\
 &\quad \text{for male)} \\
 incumbent_inc &= \text{interaction variable of } lgu_income \text{ and } gen_incumbent
 \end{aligned}$$

We also include a panel logit model to assess the odds or likelihood of spending of female local chief executives given the components of spending mentioned above. We have the model

$$\begin{aligned}
 \Pr [female_exec_{it} = 1 | \mathbf{x}] &= \alpha + \beta_1 (lgu_income_{it}) + \gamma_k (election_year_{it}) \\
 &\quad + b_4 (healthexp_{it}) + b_5 (laborexp_{it}) + b_6 (housingexp_{it}) \\
 &\quad + b_7 (socservexp_{it}) + b_8 (econdevexp_{it}) + u_{it}
 \end{aligned}$$

where

$$\begin{aligned}
 female_exec &= \text{binary variable for gender (0 for female, 1 for male)} \\
 govexp &= \text{government expenditure} \\
 pubwelf &= \text{public welfare expenditure} \\
 educexp &= \text{education expenditure} \\
 healthexp &= \text{health expenditure} \\
 laborexp &= \text{labor expenditure}
 \end{aligned}$$

housingexp = housing expenditure

socservexp = social services expenditure

econdevexp = economic development expenditure

To statistically compare the differences in welfare spending between dynastic and non-dynastic female mayors. Unlike the standard *t*-test, Welch’s *t*-test does not assume equal variances, making it more appropriate for datasets with heteroscedasticity or unequal group sizes. To complement the Welch’s *t*-test, the Cohen’s *d*-test was used to calculate the effect size of differences in welfare spending between dynastic and non-dynastic female mayors. Effect size quantifies the magnitude of the difference, providing insight into whether the observed difference is practically significant, even if statistically significant. Cohen’s *d* is calculated as the difference between the means of the two groups, divided by the pooled standard deviation. The interpretation follows standard benchmarks: small effect ($d = 0.2$), medium effect ($d = 0.5$), and large effect ($d = 0.8$).

To identify dynastic female mayors, this study adopts the framework proposed by Mendoza et al. (2019) that distinguishes between fat dynasties—those holding multiple elective positions simultaneously—and thin dynasties—those holding positions successively. For this study, we define a dynastic ruler (as reflected in the binary variable in table 1) as follows: a female mayor is considered dynastic if she belonged to a political family with either concurrent or sequential control over elective posts within the same locality. Note that we are only working on dynasties being indicative (not fat or thin), since we are only looking at local chief executives (also given by the data source).

Results and Discussion

We start with profiling the LGUs included in the HUC, ICC, and CC classifications, given in table 1, broken down into political regions, and the percentage of the total 725.

Table 1. Number of LGUs per region (2001-13)

Region	HUC	CC	ICC	Total
BARMM	0	10	0	10
Bicol Region	0	35	0	35
Cagayan Valley	0	20	0	20
CALABARZON	5	80	5	90

Region	HUC	CC	ICC	Total
CAR	5	5	0	10
Caraga	5	25	0	30
Central Luzon	15	50	5	70
Central Visayas	20	60	0	80
Davao Region	10	20	0	30
Eastern Visayas	5	30	0	35
Ilocos Region	0	40	5	45
MIMAROPA	5	5	0	10
NCR	65	5	15	85
Northern Mindanao	10	35	0	45
SOCCSKSARGEN	5	15	5	25
Western Visayas	10	70	0	80
Zamboanga Peninsula	5	20	0	25
Total	165	535	25	725
Percentage	22.76	73.79	3.45	100.00

Source: UP CIDS, DOF, and Department of the Interior and Local Government, with percentages as authors' calculations.

It is important to note that the selection of LGUs presented in this table is based on the availability of both election and fiscal data, covering only those cities and municipalities for which complete data were accessible. This may result in an underrepresentation of regions with incomplete records during the period.

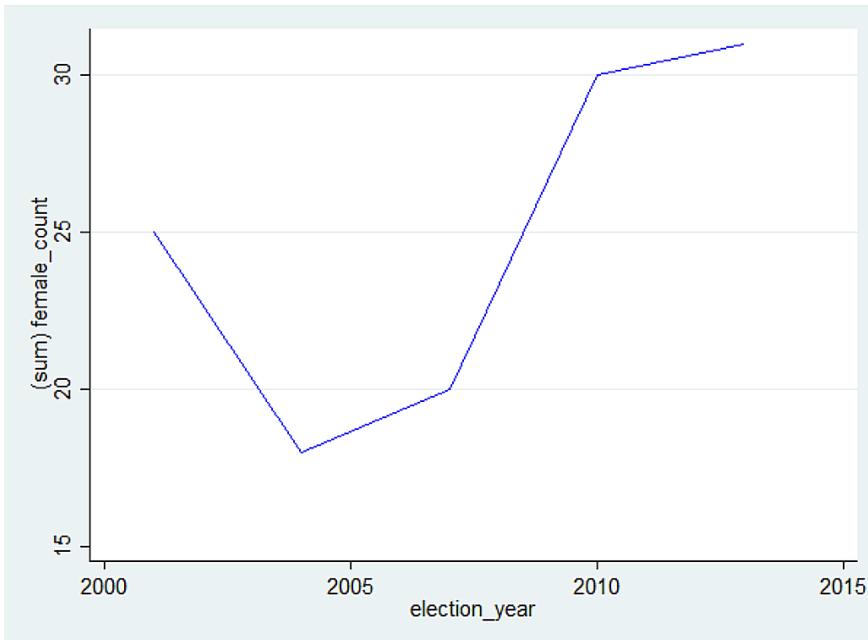
The data shows that urbanization is concentrated mainly in regions with high economic activity, such as NCR, CALABARZON, and Central Luzon. These regions serve as economic hubs, attracting investment and population growth, which in turn fosters the growth of HUCs (Abueg 2020a; Abueg 2020b; Correa and Abueg 2020; Abueg et al. 2021). Conversely, BARMM, Caraga, CAR, and Zamboanga Peninsula have relatively lower counts of urbanized cities, highlighting their more rural and less economically integrated character compared to the urbanized regions. We also look at gender representation, as provided in table 2. There is a gradual increase in female political representation in local governance throughout the five election years, which is more clearly presented in figure 2.

Table 2. Gender representation of mayors by election year

Election Year	Male Mayors	Female Mayors	Total	% of Female
2001	120	25	145	17.24
2004	127	18	145	12.41
2007	125	20	145	13.79
2010	115	30	145	20.69
2013	114	31	145	21.38
Total	601	124	725	17.10

Source of Data: UP CIDS, with percentages as authors' calculations.

Figure 2. Trend of elected female mayors, 2000-13



Before we do the regression analysis formally, we present some key descriptive statistics for the variables, reported in tables 4 and 5. The latter table presents the average values of key fiscal variables of LGUs across the five election years. To better understand the movement of these variables across years, Figures 3 and 4 reflect trends in average LGU spending and its components (focused on social welfare-enhancing expenditures).

Figure 3. Average LGU income, 2001-15

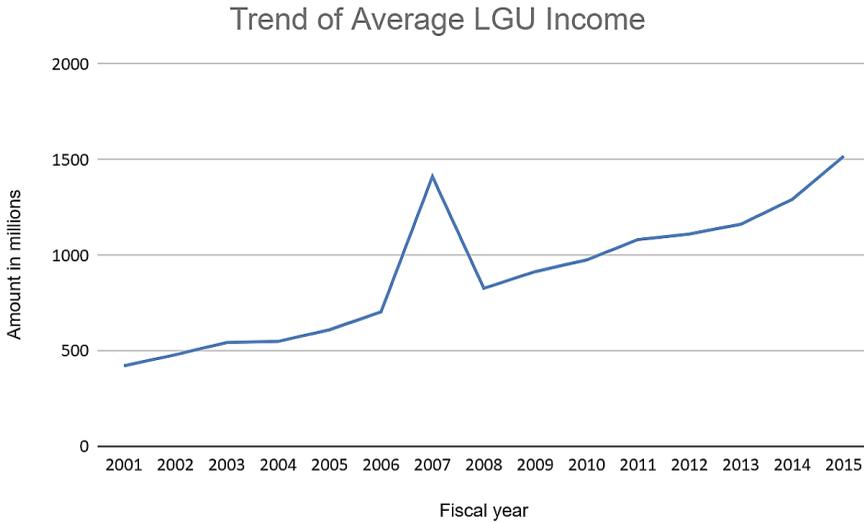
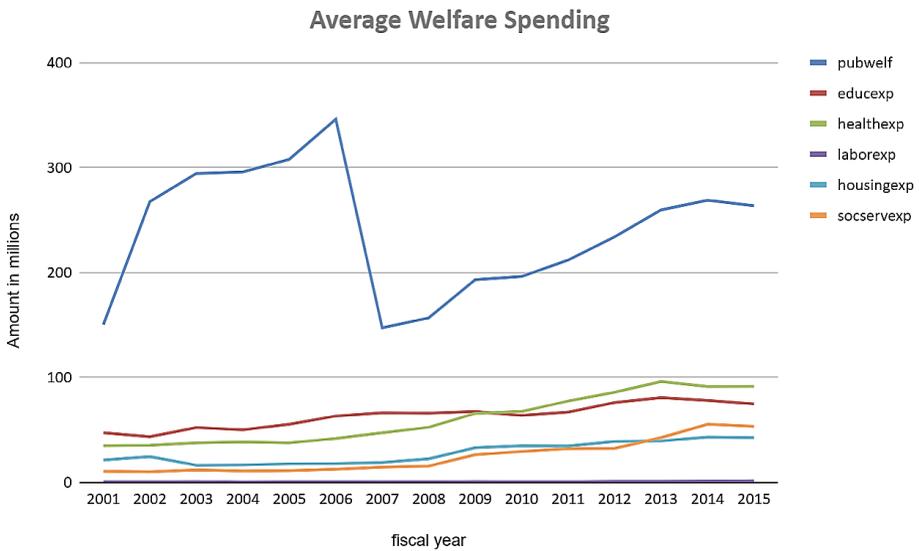


Figure 4. Average welfare spending, 2001-15



Overall, the trends align with the hypothesis that female leadership may prioritize welfare-related expenditures, particularly in public welfare and education (e.g., Dollar and Gatti 1999; Koch-Merin and Weh 2023; Joshi and Kingma 2013). However, the minimal increase in economic development spending raises questions about whether welfare-oriented leadership effectively translates to economic growth and income enhancement (e.g., Hessami and Lopes de Fonseca 2020; Jayasuria and Burke 2013;

Mirziyoyeva and Salahodjaev 2023; Mitra et al. 2015). Further, the above trends only indicate for the whole data set, and we investigate later if there are indications of the stated hypothesis for female leadership.

We now present the baseline regression results using our model, via POLS (see table 3). The details of the regression results are found in the appendix of the paper.

Table 3. POLS regression results

Dependent variable: government expenditure (<i>govexp</i>)		
Regression variables	Coefficient value	Standard error
Local government income (<i>lgu_income</i>)	0.2254***	0.0146
Dummy variable for election year (2004)	-4.2114	19.4732
Dummy variable for election year (2007)	-16.7228	19.5811
Dummy variable for election year (2010)	85.4290***	19.6357
Dummy variable for election year (2013)	65.2383***	19.7624
Dummy variable for female local chief executive (<i>female_exec</i>)	-4.6086	19.8157
Dummy interaction term for female executive and local government income (<i>female_inc</i>)	0.0299**	0.0150
Constant term	42.7284**	21.6559
R^2 (overall)	0.8446	
χ^2 (Wald statistic)	4577.07***	

***significant at $\alpha = 0.01$, **significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, *significant at $\alpha = 0.1$

Looking at the overall model, it indicates significance at the 1 percent level using the chi-square (χ^2) statistic, with an overall coefficient of determination (R^2) at 0.8646. Local government income and dummies for election years 2010 and 2013 are also highly significant. Note that income is theoretically important in relation to expenditure, which the data shows high statistical conformity. However, while the intercept dummy is not statistically significant, the slope dummy (reflected by the interaction variable *female_inc*) is only significant at the 5 percent level. Thus, the propensity to increase spending rises with a male LGU chief. This may be explained by the dominance of the male local chiefs in the data, and the fact that the 2010 and 2013 election years also indicate significant increases in spending overall (regardless of the gender of the LGU chief).

Results of the Hausman test to determine the appropriate model between FE and RE in analyzing the economic impacts of female leadership on LGU income show that the RE is more appropriate. The full run of the test is provided in the appendix.

Given the potential heteroskedastic nature of income and expenditure data (Danao 2013; Wooldridge 2020), we run the RE panel regression with robust standard errors again. The results are presented below in Table 4.

Table 4. RE panel regression with reported robust standard errors

Dependent variable: government expenditure (<i>govexp</i>)		
Regression variables	Coefficient value	Standard error
Local government income (<i>lgu_income</i>)	0.2254***	0.0607
Dummy variable for election year (2004)	-4.2114**	2.0200
Dummy variable for election year (2007)	-16.7228**	8.4249
Dummy variable for election year (2010)	85.4290***	11.5689
Dummy variable for election year (2013)	65.2383***	14.3286
Dummy variable for female local chief executive (<i>female_exec</i>)	-4.6086	26.9671
Dummy interaction term for female executive and local government income (<i>female_inc</i>)	0.0299	0.0593
Constant term	42.7284	26.8618

***significant at $\alpha = 0.01$, **significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, *significant at $\alpha = 0.1$

From the robust standard errors' version of the panel regression above, the dummies for 2010 and 2013, and the income variable remain highly statistically significant, and the two previous election years became statistically significant (at the 5 percent level). This updated result from the robust standard errors indicates that, in general, spending increases during election years (regardless of gender).⁴ However, in checking the effects of the gender of the current LGU chief, both *female_exec* as an intercept dummy and *female_inc* as an interaction variable are both nonsignificant. This means that spending behavior against the gender of the LGU chief does not indicate a difference in spending via income, statistically speaking. This may again be due to the dominance of the males in the data, and the minority of females in the data may

4 Note that while the Omnibus Election Code prohibits spending within three months before and after election day (during the second Monday of May), counterfactual evidence shows that politicians may program spending for longer periods that may spillover during the election ban.

behave similarly or do not have enough variability to show a statistical difference in spending patterns.

We also look at the distribution of elected female mayors in the Philippines from 2001 to 2013, classified based on whether they are affiliated with political dynasties. The data reflects the prevalence of political dynasties among female local executives, highlighting the influence of family ties in local politics. Using the definition we have provided, we present the data presented in table 5.

Table 5. Data on elected female mayors (2001-13)

Total female mayors	Frequency	Percentage
From political dynasties	60	89.56
Not from political dynasties	7	10.44
Total female mayors	67	

Note: Values are from the authors' own profiling, and percentages are the authors' calculations.

The high percentage may suggest that family political capital plays a crucial role in enabling women to gain political positions. With only 10.3 percent of female mayors not affiliated with political dynasties, it becomes evident that women outside political families face substantial barriers in both candidacy and electoral success. These statistics align with existing literature on political dynasties and gender (e.g., Folke et al. 2021; Labonne et al. 2020), which suggests that women often gain access to political office through kinship ties. This dynamic may imply that, despite an increase in female political representation, the path to office for many women remains heavily reliant on familial connections rather than meritocratic or independent political mobilization.

We also present in tables 6 and 7 the summary statistics of LGU income and welfare-related expenditures for female mayors, segmented into dynastic and non-dynastic groups. These tables may highlight and suggest key differences in income levels and expenditure priorities between the two subgroups of female leadership.

Table 6. Summary statistics of variables for dynastic female mayors

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
<i>ln_lgu income</i>	884.838	1279.786	70.128	7766.717
<i>pubwelf</i>	193.7463	249.4851	21.09	1300.718
<i>educexp</i>	51.31617	93.96451	0.4843834	583.0196
<i>healthexp</i>	53.40621	82.96813	1.604897	549.2646

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
<i>housingexp</i>	22.14683	52.63446	0	318.561
<i>socservexp</i>	23.30034	28.94229	2.057	146.7831

Note: Authors' calculations using PSPC data.

Table 7. Summary statistics of variables for non-dynastic female mayors

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
<i>ln_lgu income</i>	483.8293	271.7326	47.49044	757.4388
<i>pubwelf</i>	118.6549	134.7893	24.559	407.9192
<i>educexp</i>	20.70552	22.43802	1.692934	60.15621
<i>healthexp</i>	25.76705	15.46246	2.626091	44.51724
<i>housingexp</i>	12.08299	20.26361	0	49.92408
<i>socservexp</i>	18.26676	13.98424	0.8481442	39.99307

Note: Authors' calculations using PSPC data.

Dynastic female mayors show significantly higher average LGU income compared to non-dynastic female mayors. We also observe from data that female mayors with dynastic affiliations are usually governing wealthier LGUs. This is likely due to the political capital and established networks of the dynasties. Additionally, income variability is much greater among dynastic female mayors, as indicated by the large standard deviation, while non-dynastic mayors exhibit more consistent (though lower) income levels.

Public welfare expenditure is notably higher among dynastic female mayors, compared to non-dynastic counterparts. This disparity indicates that dynastic female leaders may prioritize social welfare more, possibly reflecting their established political influence in addressing community needs. Similarly, education expenditure is significantly greater for dynastic female mayors compared to non-dynastic ones, suggesting a stronger emphasis on educational initiatives within politically entrenched LGUs.

Health expenditure also differs considerably between the groups, with dynastic mayors allocating more on average than non-dynastic mayors. The higher allocation in health spending among dynastic leaders could reflect their broader access to resources or more comprehensive public health programs. In contrast, housing expenditure remains relatively low for both groups, but it is still noticeably higher among dynastic mayors than non-dynastic ones, suggesting that housing investment may be more feasible for those with greater political backing. Additionally, social services expenditure also shows a notable difference, with dynastic female mayors

spending more on average compared to non-dynastic female mayors. This higher spending could indicate a prioritization of community welfare services among politically influential leaders, though the difference is less pronounced compared to other expenditure categories.

Table 8. Data on the income class of dynastic and non-dynastic female mayors

Mayor	HUC	CC	ICC
Dynastic	8	50	2
Non-dynastic	1	5	1
Total	9	55	3

Note: Authors' calculations using DOF data.

The results indicate that female mayors from political dynasties generally have access to more substantial fiscal resources and tend to allocate more to welfare-related expenditures, particularly public welfare, education, and health. Note also that this behavior on expenditure may be supported by the data in table 8, considering where the dynastic mayors are against the non-dynastic mayors. This trend supports the hypothesis that dynastic ties enhance the capacity to mobilize and utilize public funds effectively. In contrast, non-dynastic female mayors demonstrate more conservative and consistent spending patterns, reflecting potentially limited budgetary access or a more cautious fiscal approach. These findings highlight the importance of political lineage in shaping both the fiscal capacity and expenditure priorities of female-led LGUs.

We statistically checked for a difference between two subgroups. The results are indicated in table 9.

Table 9. Test comparison of means between dynastic female and non-dynastic female mayors

Variable	Mean Difference	Welch's <i>t</i> -test (<i>p</i> -value)	Cohen's <i>d</i>	Effect Size Interpretation
<i>pubwelf</i>	-75.09	0.2375	0.31133238	moderate difference
<i>eduexp</i>	-30.61	0.0453***	0.34094459	moderate difference
<i>healthexp</i>	-27.64	0.0276***	0.34904271	moderate difference
<i>housingexp</i>	-10.06	0.3387	0.19919372	small but meaningful difference
<i>socservexp</i>	-5.03	0.4505	0.18041788	small but meaningful difference

***significant at $\alpha = 0.01$, **significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, *significant at $\alpha = 0.1$

The results indicate that dynastic female mayors tend to spend less on education and health compared to non-dynastic counterparts. The difference in education expenditure (and health expenditure) is statistically significant, and both show a moderate effect size as indicated by Cohen's *d* (suggesting that the difference, while not large, is meaningful). This finding highlights that non-dynastic female leaders may place a higher emphasis on human capital and healthcare development, whereas dynastic leaders might allocate resources differently. For public welfare, housing, and social services expenditures, the differences between dynastic and non-dynastic female mayors are not statistically significant. The effect sizes for these categories are small, indicating that any observed differences are not practically significant. The mean difference for public welfare expenditure indicates that dynastic mayors spend slightly less, but this is not statistically meaningful.

To explore the potential influence of political continuity and prior leadership characteristics on local fiscal behavior, we introduced a dummy variable on the incumbent's gender (*gen_incumbent*) and its interaction term with local government total income (called *incumbent_inc*).⁵ These variables indicate whether the gender of the predecessor influences how subsequent administrations prioritize public welfare programs. The rationale is that institutional legacies, program continuity, or even political mentorship dynamics may differ depending on the gendered leadership history of an LGU.⁶

Table 10. RE panel regression with the gender of the incumbent mayor as a dummy variable⁷

Dependent variable: government expenditure (<i>govexp</i>)		
Regression variables	Coefficient value	Standard error
Local government income (<i>lgu_income</i>)	0.2473***	0.0165
Dummy variable for election year (2004)	-3.0653	19.4604
Dummy variable for election year (2007)	-14.7448	19.5241

5 Given that the panel regression model used 2001-13 election years, the introduced dummy will use data from 1998-10 election years.

6 The change of office in an election year happens during 30 June, after the election scheduled every second Monday of May (per 1987 Constitution). This means, the start of the fiscal year coincident with the election year is set forth by the local chief executive and may have little room for adjustments if there is a new elected official come 30 June.

7 We also performed a version with robust standard errors, but the statistical significance of regression parameters did not change (even at the specified levels of 1, 5, and 10 percent). These are reported in the paper's appendix.

Dummy variable for election year (2010)	88.8706***	19.6001
Dummy variable for election year (2013)	62.3201***	19.7545
Dummy variable for female local chief executive (<i>female_exec</i>)	-18.9062	22.2999
Dummy interaction term for female executive and local government income (<i>female_inc</i>)	0.0500***	0.0167
Dummy variable for gender of local chief prior to midterm election (<i>gen_incumbent</i>)	29.0162	23.3119
Dummy interaction term for gender of local chief prior to midterm election and local government income (<i>incumbent_inc</i>)	-0.0438***	0.0159
Constant term	28.1349	24.7550
R ² (overall)	0.8660***	
χ^2 (Wald statistic)	4621.25	

***significant at $\alpha = 0.01$, **significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, *significant at $\alpha = 0.1$

In this version of panel regression, the income and the dummy variables for 2010 and 2013 remain highly significant as in the previous panel data versions. However, the introduction of the gender of the previous incumbent leader, given the gender of the winning election candidate in the midterm election, is worth looking at. Observe that both interaction dummies (*female_inc* and *incumbent_inc*) are only statistically significant, and they are highly significant (at the 1 percent level). However, the slopes have opposite signs: the gender of the current LGU chief positively affects spending via income (in this case, a male mayor), while the gender of the LGU chief before the midterm election shows a negative effect on spending via income (in this case, also of a male mayor). This would have a statistical implication should a female candidate win in the midterm election—a reduction in spending may affect the latter's programs in her first six months of her term (completing the fiscal year when the election was held).

We also include a panel logit regression to determine the propensity of a female leader to decide on the spending breakdown of the local government (given the components of spending allocated to public welfare, health, labor, housing, social services, and economic development). We include in this model the variable *gen_incumbent* to see the potential influence of the incumbent mayor. We present the results in table 11.

Table 11. Panel logit regression with the gender of the incumbent mayor as a dummy variable

Dependent variable: dummy variable for female local chief executive (<i>female_exec</i>)		
Regression variables	Coefficient value	Standard error
Total local government expenditure (<i>govexp</i>)	0.0002	0.0006
Public welfare (<i>pubwelf</i>)	0.0029	0.0015
Education expenditure (<i>educexp</i>)	-0.0021	0.0039
Health expenditure (<i>healthexp</i>)	-0.00005	00.38
Labor expenditure (<i>laborexp</i>)	-0.0445	0.0436
Housing expenditure (<i>housingexp</i>)	-0.0039	0.0030
Social services expenditure (<i>socservexp</i>)	0.0003	0.0051
Economic development expenditure (<i>econdevexp</i>)	-0.0016	0.011
Dummy variable for gender of local chief prior to midterm election (<i>gen_incumbent</i>)	2.4393***	0.2397
Constant term	-0.4492*	0.2383
log likelihood	-270.7228***	
χ^2 (Wald statistic)	109.73	

***significant at $\alpha = 0.01$, **significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, *significant at $\alpha = 0.1$

In the above result for the panel logit model, none of the spending components are significant. Only the gender of the incumbent mayor prior to the midterm election is highly significant. This means that if the incumbent is a male, there are increased odds in favor of a woman being a local chief executive winning in the midterm election. Note that the constant term is significant at the 10 percent level. This means, allowing for this probability of a type 1 error, there is also a likelihood that, if all else is zero, there are decreased odds to favor that the governing local chief executive is a female. Again, this may be attributed to the dominance of male LGU heads in the data used for the study.

Contextualizing these results within the political structure of the Philippines reveals that the dynamics of female political leadership are significantly shaped by three interrelated factors: low female representation in local executive positions, the gendered nature of political dynasties, and the structural constraints of LGU income classification, as reflected in the literature review in Vivas and Abueg (2025).

We also note that much of the female leadership in local governance (as indicated by data) would be on the behest of their families. To keep the political dynasty, male

politicians substitute their female relatives (by consanguinity [blood], or by affinity [marriage or matrimony⁸]). Some studies indicate reasons such as the “male fatigue” and that the inclination in literature that women are more inclined to reform or less into a traditional power structure—which economic theory usually posits. Others also say that the fledging of women into politics is to rebrand the dynastic rule by having a new face and addressing declining support towards the ruling male politicians (Leeper 1991; Folke, Rickne, and Smith 2020; Panao 2025). These developments affect local governance, especially in terms of spending portfolio and prioritization, and may even affect income generation apart from the traditional Internal Revenue Allotment and local tax revenues.

Summary and Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the economic impact of female leadership in LGUs in the Philippines, focusing on the extent to which female mayors influence welfare-related expenditures. The research was motivated by the paradoxical position of the Philippines as a regional leader in gender equality, while female political representation remains low, particularly at the local executive level. Despite theoretical expectations that women leaders would prioritize social welfare and inclusive governance, empirical evidence on this relationship remains limited (Vivas and Abueg 2025).

Using PSPC data with regression analysis using panel data from 1998 to 2013, we also did some qualitative contextualization derived from profiling the political backgrounds of female mayors and indicating possibilities of being in a political dynasty. The primary theoretical frameworks guiding this research were Wagner’s law, fiscal decentralization theory, and the gender and governance framework. However, the findings of this study reveal a more nuanced reality, shaped by political dynasties, patriarchal norms, and rigid fiscal structures.

The regression analysis revealed that female leadership does not have a statistically significant effect on welfare-related expenditures. This finding challenges the theoretical assumption that female mayors would inherently prioritize welfare-related fiscal policies. This adds to the statistical inconclusiveness of the literature in approaching the roles of female leadership in public spending and its effects on the local economy. However, the consideration of the gender of the winning mayor in the midterm election and the gender of the mayor during the start of the year of the midterm election shows repelling effects on local government income influences on public spending. We also see that these dynamics do not statistically indicate differences in the spending portfolio.

8 We distinguish unions as religious (matrimony) or legal (marriage).

As shown in the profiling data, nearly 90 percent of elected female mayors came from political families, highlighting how patriarchal norms are perpetuated through dynastic succession. Female mayors often take office as placeholders or symbolic leaders, maintaining continuity rather than pushing for transformative change. More importantly, reported data indicate that dynastic female mayors generally have access to more substantial fiscal resources and tend to allocate more to welfare-related expenditures, particularly in public welfare, education, and health. In contrast, non-dynastic female mayors demonstrate more conservative and consistent spending patterns, reflecting limited budgetary access or a more cautious fiscal approach. However, the tests to compare the two subgroups show that political dynasties do not significantly influence the prioritization of welfare-related expenditures among female mayors, except in education and health spending, where non-dynastic leaders allocate more.

Furthermore, while gender and governance framework (stemming from economic theory) may suggest that women leaders are more likely to pursue social welfare improvements, this study found that female mayors from dynastic backgrounds are often limited in their ability to break away from the traditional governance practices established by male predecessors. As most female leaders emerge from patriarchal political families, their roles often reflect symbolic representation rather than substantive changes in fiscal priorities. The results challenge the theoretical assumptions that female leadership would inherently lead to more welfare-oriented fiscal policies. While Wagner's Law posits that public expenditure increases alongside economic growth, this relationship does not hold uniformly within the Philippine local governance context, where political and institutional factors strongly mediate fiscal decisions. Also, the income class classification further exacerbates this issue. LGUs categorized as lower-income face stricter budget constraints, prioritizing mandatory expenses over welfare improvements.

This study faced some limitations, particularly the availability of data. The study only had the available data (with respect to the needed variables) from 2001 to 2013, which may not fully capture recent shifts in female political representation. Future research should include more contemporary data and investigate non-dynastic female leadership to understand how independent women leaders might differ from dynastic counterparts in terms of fiscal prioritization. It would be in the best interest of this undertaking to have more data not only covering the LGU chief executives, but also the members of the LGU council. Additionally, it would also be interesting to expand the years available, especially the dynamics of women's leadership and roles during the recent COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Abueg 2020b; Abueg 2021; Abueg 2023; Bruce et al. 2022; Soares and Sidun 2021). Only through reforms that promote independent female leadership and increase fiscal flexibility can gender equity in local governance translate into genuine social and economic progress.

Appendix

Appendix A. Correlation Matrices for Income and Expenditure Data

```
. pwcorr govexp lgu_income pubwelf educexp healthexp laborexp housingexp socservexp econdevexp, sig
```

	govexp	lgu_in~e	pubwelf	educexp	health~p	laborexp	housin~p	
govexp	1.0000							
lgu_income	0.9252 0.0000	1.0000						
pubwelf	0.7899 0.0000	0.8670 0.0000	1.0000					
educexp	0.8097 0.0000	0.9181 0.0000	0.9422 0.0000	1.0000				
healthexp	0.7283 0.0000	0.8530 0.0000	0.8644 0.0000	0.9052 0.0000	1.0000			
laborexp	0.2842 0.0000	0.3451 0.0000	0.2764 0.0000	0.2950 0.0000	0.2804 0.0000	1.0000		
housingexp	0.6093 0.0000	0.6909 0.0000	0.6886 0.0000	0.6316 0.0000	0.6496 0.0000	0.3065 0.0000	1.0000	
socservexp	0.6339 0.0000	0.6853 0.0000	0.6164 0.0000	0.6194 0.0000	0.7024 0.0000	0.2868 0.0000	0.4471 0.0000	
econdevexp	0.5680 0.0000	0.7146 0.0000	0.6603 0.0000	0.7106 0.0000	0.6771 0.0000	0.3043 0.0000	0.4266 0.0000	
								socser~p econde~p
socservexp								1.0000
econdevexp								0.5432 0.0000

```
. pwcorr lgu_income ira tottax totlocsrc totexsrc, sig
```

	lgu_in~e	ira	tottax	totloc~c	totexsrc
lgu_income	1.0000				
ira	0.7344 0.0000	1.0000			
tottax	0.9575 0.0000	0.6049 0.0000	1.0000		
totlocsrc	0.9686 0.0000	0.6242 0.0000	0.9956 0.0000	1.0000	
totexsrc	0.7703 0.0000	0.6376 0.0000	0.5820 0.0000	0.6031 0.0000	1.0000

Appendix B. POLS Regression

```
. xtreg govexp lgu_income i.election_year female_exec female_inc
Random-effects GLS regression           Number of obs   =       725
Group variable: election_y~r           Number of groups =         5

R-sq:                                  Obs per group:
    within = 0.8563                      min =         145
    between = 1.0000                     avg =        145.0
    overall = 0.8646                      max =         145

                                           Wald chi2(7)    =    4577.07
corr(u_i, X) = 0 (assumed)              Prob > chi2     =     0.0000
```

govexp	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
lgu_income	.2254101	.0145697	15.47	0.000	.196854 .2539661
election_year					
2004	-4.211416	19.47323	-0.22	0.829	-42.37825 33.95541
2007	-16.72279	19.58112	-0.85	0.393	-55.10108 21.65551
2010	85.42898	19.6357	4.35	0.000	46.94371 123.9142
2013	65.23826	19.7624	3.30	0.001	26.50467 103.9718
female_exec	-4.608603	19.81565	-0.23	0.816	-43.44657 34.22936
female_inc	.029942	.0150463	1.99	0.047	.0004518 .0594323
_cons	42.72838	21.65586	1.97	0.048	.283682 85.17308
sigma_u	0				
sigma_e	165.61778				
rho	0	(fraction of variance due to u_i)			

Appendix C. Hausman Test

```
. xtreg govexp lgu_income i.election_year female_exec female_inc, fe
note: 2004.election_year omitted because of collinearity
note: 2007.election_year omitted because of collinearity
note: 2010.election_year omitted because of collinearity
note: 2013.election_year omitted because of collinearity
```

```
Fixed-effects (within) regression           Number of obs   =       725
Group variable: election_y~r           Number of groups =         5

R-sq:                                  Obs per group:
    within = 0.8563                      min =         145
    between = 0.9046                     avg =        145.0
    overall = 0.8562                      max =         145

                                           F(3,717)       =    1424.38
corr(u_i, Xb) = 0.1125                  Prob > F        =     0.0000
```

govexp	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]
lgu_income	.2254101	.0145697	15.47	0.000	.1968057 .2540144
election_year					
2004	0	(omitted)			
2007	0	(omitted)			
2010	0	(omitted)			
2013	0	(omitted)			
female_exec	-4.608603	19.81565	-0.23	0.816	-43.51224 34.29504
female_inc	.029942	.0150463	1.99	0.047	.0004019 .0594822
_cons	68.67499	18.24152	3.76	0.000	32.86182 104.4882
sigma_u	46.058104				
sigma_e	165.61778				
rho	.07178701	(fraction of variance due to u_i)			

```
F test that all u_i=0: F(4, 717) = 10.88           Prob > F = 0.0000
```

```
. estim stor fe_mod
```

Appendix C. Hausman Test

```
. xtreg govexp lgu_income i.election_year female_exec female_inc, re
```

```
Random-effects GLS regression      Number of obs   =      725
Group variable: election_y~r       Number of groups =        5
```

```
R-sq:                               Obs per group:
  within = 0.8563                    min =      145
  between = 1.0000                   avg =     145.0
  overall = 0.8646                    max =      145
```

```
corr(u_i, X) = 0 (assumed)          Wald chi2(7)    =    4577.07
                                          Prob > chi2     =      0.0000
```

govexp	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
lgu_income	.2254101	.0145697	15.47	0.000	.196854	.2539661
election_year						
2004	-4.211416	19.47323	-0.22	0.829	-42.37825	33.95541
2007	-16.72279	19.58112	-0.85	0.393	-55.10108	21.65551
2010	85.42898	19.6357	4.35	0.000	46.94371	123.9142
2013	65.23826	19.7624	3.30	0.001	26.50467	103.9718
female_exec	-4.608603	19.81565	-0.23	0.816	-43.44657	34.22936
female_inc	.029942	.0150463	1.99	0.047	.0004518	.0594323
_cons	42.72838	21.65586	1.97	0.048	.283682	85.17308
sigma_u	0					
sigma_e	165.61778					
rho	0	(fraction of variance due to u_i)				

```
. estim stor re mod
```

```
. hausman fe_mod re_mod
```

	Coefficients			
	(b) fe_mod	(B) re_mod	(b-B) Difference	sqrt(diag(V_b-V_B)) S.E.
lgu_income	.2254101	.2254101	1.69e-15	7.90e-10
female_exec	-4.608603	-4.608603	1.16e-12	8.92e-07
female_inc	.029942	.029942	-1.90e-15	8.23e-10

b = consistent under Ho and Ha; obtained from xtreg
 B = inconsistent under Ha, efficient under Ho; obtained from xtreg

Test: Ho: difference in coefficients not systematic

```
chi2(3) = (b-B)'[(V_b-V_B)^(-1)](b-B)
         =      0.00
Prob>Chi2 =      1.0000
```


Appendix E. Welch's *t*-Tests for Local Expenditure Data (Components)

Education Expenditure

Two-sample *t* test with unequal variances

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
0	7	20.70552	8.480776	22.43802	-0.046191	41.45723
1	60	51.31617	12.13077	93.96451	27.04256	75.58978
combined	67	48.11804	10.94604	89.59717	26.26358	69.97251
diff		-30.61065	14.80132		-60.54801	-.6732912

diff = mean(0) - mean(1) t = -2.0681
 Ho: diff = 0 Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom = 39.0464

Ha: diff < 0 Ha: diff != 0 Ha: diff > 0
 Pr(T < t) = 0.0227 Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.0453 Pr(T > t) = 0.9773

Health Expenditure

Two-sample *t* test with unequal variances

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
0	7	25.76705	5.84426	15.46246	11.46666	40.06744
1	60	53.40621	10.71114	82.96813	31.97327	74.83915
combined	67	50.51854	9.656729	79.04374	31.23826	69.79882
diff		-27.63916	12.2018		-52.1119	-3.166418

diff = mean(0) - mean(1) t = -2.2652
 Ho: diff = 0 Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom = 53.0898

Ha: diff < 0 Ha: diff != 0 Ha: diff > 0
 Pr(T < t) = 0.0138 Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.0276 Pr(T > t) = 0.9862

Housing Expenditure

Two-sample *t* test with unequal variances

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
0	7	12.08299	7.658925	20.26361	-6.657722	30.82371
1	60	22.14683	6.79508	52.63446	8.549909	35.74375
combined	67	21.09539	6.137122	50.23451	8.842227	33.34855
diff		-10.06384	10.23876		-31.57234	11.44466

diff = mean(0) - mean(1) t = -0.9829
 Ho: diff = 0 Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom = 18.0274

Ha: diff < 0 Ha: diff != 0 Ha: diff > 0
 Pr(T < t) = 0.1693 Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.3387 Pr(T > t) = 0.8307

Appendix F. Cohen's *d* Effect Sizes (Dynastic vs Non-dynastic)

Public Welfare Expenditure

```
. summarize meanpubwelf if dynasty == 0
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
meanpubwelf	7	118.6549	134.7893	24.559	407.9192

```
. summarize meanpubwelf if dynasty == 1
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
meanpubwelf	60	193.7463	249.4851	21.09	1300.718

```
. display sqrt(((60-1)*(249.4851)^2 + (7-1)*(134.7893)^2)/(60 + 7 - 2))
241.19367
```

```
. display (193.7463 - 118.6549)/1.0292548
72.957056
```

```
. display (193.7463 - 118.6549)/1.0292548
72.957056
```

```
. display (193.7463 - 118.6549)/241.19367
.31133238
```

Education Expenditure

```
. summarize meaneducexp if dynasty == 1
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
meaneducexp	60	51.31617	93.96451	.4843834	583.0196

```
. summarize meaneducexp if dynasty == 0
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
meaneducexp	7	20.70552	22.43802	1.692934	60.15621

```
. display sqrt(((60-1)*(93.96451)^2 + (7-1)*(22.43802)^2)/(60 + 7 - 2))
89.78189
```

```
. display (51.31617 - 20.70552)/89.78189
.34094459
```

Appendix F. Cohen's *d* Effect Sizes (Dynastic vs Non-dynastic)

Health Expenditure

```
. summarize meanhealthexp if dynasty == 1
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
neanhealth-p	60	53.40621	82.96813	1.604897	549.2646

```
. summarize meanhealthexp if dynasty == 0
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
neanhealth-p	7	25.76705	15.46246	2.626091	44.51724

```
. display sqrt(((60-1)*(82.96813)^2 + (7-1)*(15.46246)^2)/(60 + 7 - 2))
79.18561
```

```
. display (53.40621 - 25.76705) / 79.18561
.34904271
```

Housing Expenditure

```
. summarize meanhousingexp if dynasty == 1
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
neanhousin-p	60	22.14683	52.63446	0	318.561

```
. summarize meanhousingexp if dynasty == 0
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
neanhousin-p	7	12.08299	20.26361	0	49.92408

```
. display sqrt(((60-1)*(52.63446)^2 + (7-1)*(20.26361)^2)/(60 + 7 - 2))
50.522878
```

```
. display (22.14683 - 12.08299) / 50.522878
too few ']' or '['
r(132);
```

```
. display (22.14683 - 12.08299)/50.522878
.19919372
```

Social Services Expenditure

```
. summarize meansocservexp if dynasty == 1
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
neansocser-p	60	23.30034	28.94229	2.057	146.7831

```
. summarize meansocservexp if dynasty == 0
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
neansocser-p	7	18.26676	13.98424	.8481442	39.99307

```
. display sqrt(((60-1)*(28.94229)^2 + (7-1)*(13.98424)^2)/(60 + 7 - 2))
27.899563
```

```
. display sqrt(((60-1)*(28.94229)^2 + (7-1)*(13.98424)^2)/(60 + 7 - 2))
27.899563
```

```
. display (23.30034 - 18.26676)/27.899563
.18041788
```

Appendix G. Random Effects Panel Regression with the Incumbent's Gender

```
. gen incumbent_inc = gen_incumbent*lgu_income
. xtreg govexp lgu_income i.election_year female_exec female_inc gen_incumbent incumbent_inc
```

```
Random-effects GLS regression           Number of obs   =       725
Group variable: election_y~r           Number of groups =         5

R-sq:                                   Obs per group:
    within = 0.8579                      min =         145
    between = 1.0000                     avg =        145.0
    overall = 0.8660                      max =         145

Wald chi2(9)                           =       4621.25
corr(u_i, X) = 0 (assumed)              Prob > chi2     =       0.0000
```

govexp	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
lgu_income	.247283	.0165372	14.95	0.000	.2148707	.2796953
election_year						
2004	-3.065286	19.46036	-0.16	0.875	-41.20689	35.07632
2007	-14.74483	19.52408	-0.76	0.450	-53.01133	23.52167
2010	88.87057	19.60011	4.53	0.000	50.45506	127.2861
2013	62.32014	19.75448	3.15	0.002	23.60207	101.0382
female_exec	-18.90623	22.29992	-0.85	0.397	-62.61327	24.8008
female_inc	.0499946	.0166805	3.00	0.003	.0173014	.0826877
gen_incumbent	29.01624	23.31185	1.24	0.213	-16.67415	74.70663
incumbent_inc	-.0438212	.0159429	-2.75	0.006	-.0750686	-.0125737
_cons	28.13491	24.75502	1.14	0.256	-20.38404	76.65387
sigma_u	0					
sigma_e	164.96183					
rho	0	(fraction of variance due to u_i)				

Appendix H. Random Effects Panel Regression with the Incumbent's Gender, Using Robust Standard Errors

```
. xtreg govexp lgu_income i.election_year female_exec female_inc gen_incumbent incumbent_inc, re vce(robust)
```

```
Random-effects GLS regression           Number of obs   =       725
Group variable: election_y~r           Number of groups =         5

R-sq:                                   Obs per group:
    within = 0.8579                      min =         145
    between = 1.0000                     avg =        145.0
    overall = 0.8660                      max =         145

Wald chi2(4)                            =         .
corr(u_i, X) = 0 (assumed)              Prob > chi2     =         .
```

(Std. Err. adjusted for 5 clusters in election_year)

govexp	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
lgu_income	.247283	.0482833	5.12	0.000	.1526495	.3419165
election_year						
2004	-3.065286	2.417802	-1.27	0.205	-7.804091	1.673518
2007	-14.74483	9.557708	-1.54	0.123	-33.47759	3.987932
2010	88.87057	16.81951	5.28	0.000	55.90494	121.8362
2013	62.32014	12.68888	4.91	0.000	37.4504	87.18987
female_exec	-18.90623	45.47129	-0.42	0.678	-108.0283	70.21586
female_inc	.0499946	.0957559	0.52	0.602	-.1376835	.2376727
gen_incumbent	29.01624	23.53643	1.23	0.218	-17.11432	75.1468
incumbent_inc	-.0438212	.0532419	-0.82	0.410	-.1481734	.060531
_cons	28.13491	23.55129	1.19	0.232	-18.02477	74.29459
sigma_u	0					
sigma_e	164.96183					
rho	0	(fraction of variance due to u_i)				

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What Does a Candidate-Centric Democracy Mean for Education?

A Case for Provincial Education Spending and Electoral Dynamics in the Philippines (2001–22)

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"Individuals walk past campaign posters of local and national candidates for the 2025 midterm elections in Baguio City on Friday." Andy Zapata/Philippine Star Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1150779920419219&set=pcb.1150780523752492>

Abstract

This paper examined how candidate-centric politics shapes provincial investment in education in the Philippines. We ask whether provincial education spending is associated with candidate-centric politics and under what electoral and fiscal conditions such effects strengthen or weaken. We constructed a province-year panel (2001–22) from the UP CIDS Local Government Dataset, combining fiscal data with a composite Candidate-Centricity Index (CCI) that captures fragmented, personalistic, and locally branded gubernatorial competition. Using ordinary least squares with province and year fixed effects, cluster-robust standard errors, and GIS-based spatial analysis, we assessed temporal and spatial patterns in provincial education spending shares. We argue that candidate-centric competition can shape education budgets through credit-claiming incentives for visible, attributable programs (e.g., scholarships, school buildings, learning materials), but that effects on aggregate budget shares may be muted because political incentives often operate through within-sector targeting and because education spending is partially routinized by institutional and fiscal rules.

Baseline fixed-effects estimates show no robust association between within-province changes in CCI and changes in the share of provincial expenditures devoted to education; budgets appear “sticky” and path-dependent once long-run provincial characteristics and national shocks are accounted for. Across standard electoral moderators, we find no systematic conditioning of the CCI–education share relationship. Small, context-dependent effects appear only under specific fiscal and local-party configurations: competition is mildly associated with higher education shares in transfer-dependent provinces and where local or independent actors are stronger, but becomes neutral or negative as fiscal autonomy increases. GIS and Local Moran’s I (LISA) maps reveal High–High and Low–Low clusters of education spending, underscoring regional trajectories of state capacity and investment. Overall, provincial education budget shares are shaped more by fiscal structure, institutional inertia, and spatially uneven state building than by short-term shifts in candidate-centric competition.

Keywords: candidate-centricity, education spending, fiscal decentralization, local government units

Introduction

What does a candidate-centric democracy mean for education? In the Philippines, electoral competition is widely described as personalistic and patronage-driven, with weakly institutionalized parties and dynastic families dominating many local arenas. Rather than aggregating broad programmatic platforms, provincial politics often revolves around individual candidates, local labels, and clientelist networks that promise targeted benefits to supporters. At the same time, fiscal decentralization under the 1991 Local Government Code has given provinces meaningful resources and formal responsibilities for social services, including a supporting role in basic education through the National Tax Allocation (NTA), the Special Education Fund (SEF), and participation in Local School Boards. Education is politically salient yet electorally ambiguous: it can generate credit-claiming opportunities through visible projects and scholarships, but aggregate education budget shares may remain stable if politicians instead reallocate within the education sector or prioritize other more targetable goods.

This combination of candidate-centric politics and decentralized education finance raises a central governance puzzle: do electoral incentives in a personalistic system encourage or undermine provincial investment in education? Existing work on patronage, dynasties, and decentralization links electoral competition to public goods provision and fiscal behavior, while studies of education and local governance document uneven support for schools and persistent regional disparities in school quality, infrastructure, and learning outcomes. Yet we know relatively little about whether—and under what conditions—candidate-centric provincial politics systematically shapes the share of provincial budgets devoted to education, or how these dynamics are patterned across space.

This article addresses that gap by analyzing provincial education spending and electoral dynamics in the Philippines from 2001 to 2022. Using a province-year panel constructed from the UP CIDS Program of Social and Political Change Philippine Local Government Interactive Dataset, we develop a Candidate-Centricity Index (CCI) based on gubernatorial elections, which captures fragmentation, party switching, local labels, and local party strength, and link it to provincial fiscal data. We estimate two-way fixed-effects models with province and year fixed effects and cluster-robust standard errors, complemented by GIS-based spatial analysis of provincial education spending. We ask the following questions: (1) Is provincial education spending associated with candidate-centric politics? and (2) Under what political and fiscal conditions are these effects stronger or weaker? By connecting debates on patronage and decentralization to the concrete question of how much Philippine provinces actually invest in education, the study contributes both empirical evidence and a spatially grounded perspective on candidate-centric democracy.

Problem Statement

Provincial governments in the Philippines display wide and persistent variation in education spending despite operating under the same national legal framework and facing similar mandates to support basic education. Some provinces devote consistently higher shares of their budgets to education, while others allocate relatively little, even as learning crises, infrastructure backlogs, and regional inequities in access and quality persist. These disparities unfold in a political context that is strongly candidate-centric: gubernatorial races are shaped by fragmented party systems, dynastic dominance, party switching, and the prominence of local or independent labels. Such features may pull spending toward short-horizon, highly visible projects rather than sustained, multi-year investments in education. Governors also sit on Local School Boards and influence SEF use, making their political incentives directly relevant to provincial education budgets.

Yet there is limited systematic evidence on whether candidate-centric politics helps explain cross-provincial differences and temporal changes in education spending, and under what conditions its effects are strongest. We lack empirical answers to basic questions: Do more candidate-centric provinces spend more or less on education relative to their total budgets? Are any effects amplified or muted by fragmentation, dynastic control, electoral competitiveness, turnover, or fiscal arrangements such as autonomy and the balance between transfers and own-source revenues? And how are these relationships embedded in the spatial patterning of provincial education investment across the archipelago? This study tackles these gaps by linking fiscal, electoral, and spatial data to identify whether, when, and where a candidate-centric democracy matters for provincial education spending.

Review of Related Literature

In Paul Hutchcroft's book, *Strong Patronage, Weak Parties* (2019), the empirical case and situation of political party systems in the Philippines is a contradiction of the very democratic values a country swears to have.³ While party-centric democracies adhere to broad programmatic interests,⁴ the country currently has a candidate-centric orientation (Hicken 2019, 40), which leans more on the candidates and individual

3 Present in the Philippine political climate and landscape is the subservience of parties over elite families and oligarchies manifested in election mechanisms such as patronage politics, vote buying, and money politics that manipulate voter turnouts.

4 Parties, having a strong foundation of its ideals and platforms, are said to contribute more to issue-driven and development-based platforms and campaigns.

interests, i.e., particularism and clientelism, where personality-driven and patronage politics are the norm in the country, especially in selecting the next seats of power among national and local government posts. Such manifestations of personality-driven elections hinder the facilitation of party activity and engagement among voters and are a blockage that is detrimental to the implementation of national-local developmental policy and decision-making. However, parties continue to be a useful factor in identifying trends in voters' turnout in a country that has a mixed electoral system (Thames, Patterson, and McMichael 2009, 21), such as ours.⁵

While competition is said to provide an avenue for a healthy government and accountability among local governments (Packel 2008, 9) with studies contesting that competition among local leaders and its relationship with local government development, performance, effectiveness, and initiatives are bleak, consequently, the aftermath of the 1986 People Power Revolution, which toppled authoritarian power, swindled the country's political and electoral systems, including the national or central government. There is a need to address the public sector locally in a diverse landscape such as the Philippines, particularly responding to the enactment of the 1987 Constitution⁶ (Asenci et al. 2024, 4). Republic Act (RA) 7160, or the Local Government Code of 1991 in the Philippines, defines a local government as a territorial and political subdivision that shall have its autonomy via decentralization. Decentralization is a process of allocating resources and ensuring their accountability. Such a mechanism is considered as a way to logically provide autonomy amongst the geographically and ethnically diverse, urbanized, and growing population (Diokno 2012, 11), to lessen corruption and to improve public service delivery (Mansuri and Rao, 2013; Packel 2008), e.g., health, public works and highways, food and agriculture, and other relevant social services.

As local governments are given the authority to provide public services to their local citizens and communities, fiscal decentralization is being considered to improve public service delivery. King (2024, 10) identified fiscal decentralization as a benefit to empower local leaders to generate and manage the resources they receive from the national and central government, expecting that they allot such resources to

5 Reilly (2019, 54) identified key Southeast Asian countries' electoral systems. The Philippines (following the 1987 Constitution) currently has a mixed plurality system (first-past-the-post and multimember plurality system) and a party-list system with a three-seat limit (shared by parties with the most percentages).

6 Article II, Section 25 of the 1987 Constitution states that the "*State shall ensure the autonomy of local governments;*" and Article X, Section 6 identified LGUs shall have a "*just share, as determined by law*" of the national tax that will be released to them. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1987-constitution/>.

public service delivery and initiatives. To aid this endeavor, LGUs are awarded with grants, instruments, or mechanisms to achieve efficiency and achievable outcomes. Chapter I, Sections 284–85 of RA 7160 states that LGUs have a share of around 40 percent of the Internal Revenue Allotment⁷, which becomes the National Tax Allocation (NTA) after considerations following the Mandanas-Garcia ruling⁸ in 2013. Fiscal decentralization, via delegation and devolution,⁹ has made it possible for local governments to be fiscally responsible in providing public services to their constituents and making it more economically efficient. For instance, a study of public health service delivery in the country (Asenci et al. 2024, 5) identified that a higher fiscal decentralization (and NTA allocation) leads to lower efficiency score in healthcare service delivery (investments in health infrastructure, lengths of hospital stay, and medical service) particularly on decentralization dependence yet having a lack of administrative capability and insufficient healthcare training or availability leads to misallocation of funds and inefficiency of LGUs’ fiscal powers. Prompting LGUs to address first structural barriers to healthcare delivery, more tailored policies per LGU contexts, and to improve LGU capability in healthcare service delivery. Much has been said by Diokno (2012, 18, 24) regarding the NTA’s reliance on LGUs to provide public service delivery among their constituents, that the electoral system must put incumbents and candidates in check on how much they get and spend from this grant alone.

Public goods in political economy literature have been synonymous with the capacity of the incumbent or the running candidate to provide such goods and services for the betterment of its citizens. Education as a public good is being budgeted, allocated, and spent by LGUs via various Department of Education (DepEd) memoranda¹⁰

7 An intergovernmental fiscal transfer of operating revenue among national and local governments in providing basic public services for socioeconomic development.

8 The Mandanas-Garcia Rulings in 2019 (GR Nos. 199802 and 208488) identified the collection of tax for funds—subtracting funds for special purposes and allotments—as inclusion to the computation of the funds appropriated for each LGU.

9 There are four typologies of decentralization (See Rondinelli, Nellis, and Cheema 1983): (1) deconcentration, which refers to the “partial transfer” of where the central government decides while the local government follows and obeys service delivery; (2) delegation, which is the transfer of implementation procedures to the local government; (3) devolution, which involves the transfer of decision-making and implementation to the local government; and (4) privatization that identifies the total transfer of authority among private institutions or individuals.

10 DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2016 on the allocation and utilization of education budget for materials and other operating expenses (MOOEs) and DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2022 addressing COVID-19 effects on the education crisis through budget and expenditures.

and circulars that have shown positive externalities¹¹ that would later translate into national economic development agendas (Beronibla 2024, 65). Decentralization in education remains contentious (King 2024, 12) as empirical findings share their grievances towards fiscal decentralization implications on granting LGU authority, mobilization of education service delivery (via school-based management/SBM, see Saguin and Ramesh 2020), how outcomes are produced, and addressing its budgetary concerns and resource limitations. In a country where education governance has meant throughout the country's colonial history and archipelagic geography, decentralizing education delivery is its task (Saguin and Ramesh 2018, 5), more often delegated to private establishments and the central government (through the DepEd for basic education, the Commission on Higher Education [CHED] for higher education institutions, and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority [TESDA] for technical-vocational learning and certificate program centers which creates the “trifocalization” of Philippine education) to fulfill the country's Education for All (EFA) mandates and the demand for a generation of citizens who have completed their education, leaning for the need to apply for careers and professions. Specifically, education budget allocation requires the establishment of LSBs, which shall determine the budgetary needs for public schools within the province, city, or municipality. An important part of fiscal allocation is via special funds acquired by local governments, such as the Special Education Fund (SEF), ascertained by RA 5447¹²—operation and maintenance of public schools, construction and repair of school infrastructure, facilities, and equipment, and educational research, materials, and sports and culture development (Manasan et al. 2011, 3). RA 9155, or the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001,¹³ calls for better decentralization mechanisms through SBMs, which aim to develop authentic, accountable, and localized education bureaucracy (9).

11 Such as, but not limited to, the provision of financial resources for infrastructure, technology, learning and instructional materials, and incentives for teaching and non-teaching personnel.

12 The SEF was created from proceeds of the real property tax, a portion of tax from Virginia-type Cigarettes, and duties given on imported leaf tobacco that are pooled, allocated, and distributed among LGUs for the education funding. https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra1968/ra_5447_1968.html.

13 Such law was enacted to provide clear distinctions between national and regional basic education policies that hope to be reflected and monitored via the SBM. https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2001/ra_9155_2001.html

Education spending and school quality¹⁴ show a “robust” relationship of education spending per person in the Philippines as compared to our annual increase in GDP scores (Abrigo 2021, 13). Yet, much of this is still unresolved and substantial, considering education issues such as the decline in the annual enrolment rates, low performance in international learning assessments and standards, and regional and local disparities in fiscal management and school administration.¹⁵ An analysis of the utilization of the funds from the SEF and LSB-recorded local education spending via accomplishment reports has shown surplus amounts of the funds recorded to be “underutilized,” while the comprehensive outcomes of what would have been the performance of DepEd programs that have fixed funding from the SEF; there is little to no indication of funds being effective in the implementation of DepEd programs for the local scene (Manasan et al. 2011, 31). In a more comparative aspect, Pascua et al. (2024, 298) identified public education budget in the country to increase in the short-run then eventually fell as compared to our ASEAN neighbors (i.e., Indonesia, Singapore) using the human development index (HDI) due to changes in education landscape and budget shifts (e.g., the implementation of the K–12 program which justified increase in education investment and budget allocation from DepEd to the Department of Public Works and Highways/DPWH for school infrastructure) and socio-economic pressures (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic that shifted the budget to healthcare and other priority sectors).

To add, in a study of 36 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries,¹⁶ empirical findings on education decentralization and governance still fall primarily to the national government and central offices of departments and agencies. All the while, this is a key observation that public education spending and budgeting are still unresolved, given its less emphasis on regional disparities among local contexts. Provincial and local governments are left to identify and allocate resources and implement key programs, activities, and projects that were relayed to them by the top executives and agencies. This is contrary to the finding that schools

14 Among other factors such as schooling outcomes, and later-life welfare measures, as well as demographic and contextual factors have shown positive relationships with education spending (See Abrigo, 2021)

15 Hoping that these education spending issues will be addressed through prevailing cash transfer programs, government subsidies for public infrastructure, and the increase in private education.

16 A 2018 survey by OECD on locus of key decision-making among four domains (organization of instruction, personnel management, planning and structures, and resource management) were implemented in a report by OECD in 2022. Key findings identify $\frac{1}{3}$ of decision-making still relies on the central government while the other $\frac{1}{3}$ are given to the schools and only 13% come from local-level decision and policies. See OECD (2018) <https://doi.org/10.1787/e14575d5-en> and OECD (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en>.

and local governments are delegated or given the responsibility to decide on key educational functions, such as curriculum and instruction, content and standards, resources, and personnel and stakeholders, as this could have helped promote EFA (King 2024, 24). Lanzona et al (2025, 11) also mentioned how education spending in the country, notwithstanding the SEF and other fiscal education programs set in place by the DepEd, the Department of Budget and Management/DBM, and the Bureau of Local Government Finance/BLGF, may have produced significant multiplier effects for increasing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) yet is insufficient to cover for pending issues among the youth, such as job skills mismatch and wage inequality. To wit, Nuñez et al. (2024, 208) have shown the insignificant relationship between education spending and macroeconomic objectives (i.e., poverty, unemployment) despite the education sector garnering the largest share in the national budget.¹⁷ One other factor worth noting is the presence of corruption between and within institutions and industries that make it hard to see the effects of education spending on the former factors, if policies and regulations are not transparent and such actors of institutions are not accountable enough (207).

Returning to the candidate-centric nature of the country's present electoral system, decentralization also pertains to the use of candidates in generating and promoting clientelist and patronage tendencies (Lanzona et al., 2025, 6). Kim (2020, 15) deemed this as a form of "political currency" where Lanzona et al. (2025, 6) reiterated how dynastic rule, through the provision of public-turned-private goods in the country, is "decentralized" among local families that control the provinces and cities from top to bottom positions, as well as the provision of such goods and services from pork, cash transfers, and other financial mechanisms that, in turn, become a political and electoral incentive to gain advantage of the entire *baluartes* or jurisdiction of power and control. The way they are doing this is through increasing public spending during the preelection years¹⁸ to make the client-patron relationship intact, primarily resulting in vote share guarantees in the next elections at an expense for long-term and incremental policies and reform programs (Daniele and Vertier, 2016, 4; Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre 2013, 360). Hence, dynasties and elites in the local scene remain in position similarly as voter demands¹⁹ and the access of the incumbents to

17 As per the 2023 General Appropriations Act (Department of Budget and Management 2023) <https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/GAA/GAA2023/GAA-2023-VOL-1-A.pdf>.

18 Or when they nearly end their term in office, politicians and incumbents increase public spending on capital expenditures during this time as it is "easier" for them to handle than current expenditures (see Daniele and Vertier 2016).

19 Voter demands are also inclined with demand-side theories on patronage politics. See *Theoretical and Conceptual Framework* (page 97).

state resources²⁰ and goods provision are inclined with candidate-centric electoral systems, particularly in developing and underdeveloped nations. Thus, shaping the political climate and landscape of a country as the former factor increases the chances for incumbents to win in the elections (Shin 2015a, 3). Conversely, education as a public good provided to the poor is deemed beneficial for politicians because them immediately providing such a good to the masses, as a particularist good, outweigh the costs for campaigns and other expenses by the incumbent during their term in office; driving national economic development agendas and initiatives (Manasan et al. 2008, 28) that will make their names better through clientelist networks with the marginalized²¹ (Saguin, 2023, 474).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The Philippine political climate and landscape have been thoroughly candidate-centric, with noticeable theoretical and empirical underpinnings of a few elite and/or dynastic politicians who control its jurisdiction or area of power and control. Shin (2015b, 131–32) identified demand-side and supply-side theories as to how these incumbents rise to power based on their willingness and ability to provide short-term, “particularistic” goods for the masses to become their clients, which offer loyalty²² over the access of state resources and fiscal mechanisms from incumbent national chief executives allocated and used by patrons to provide to their clients (either through the immediate creation of jobs, financial subsidies for basic and social services) contingent to secure their win in the next elections (which is also the case for dynastic families; see Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre 2013, 366).

In contrast, well-off and better-educated voters are deemed to subscribe more to “programmatic”²³ goods, as access to information and capabilities to expose patron-client relationships have disincentivized incumbents and dynasties, as these voters

20 Alternatively, in some cases, incumbents or first-time candidates cling to the top executive to secure their access to state resources. This is synonymous with candidates in the opposition side who are scarce in influence and control over available resources.

21 The use of patronage and clientele relationships to afford the poor private (which was once public-also characterized as scarce resources that is bureaucratically processed and relayed from national-regional-local networks) goods for loyalty; the proliferation of the political entrepreneur via the clientelist network and the use of education in the theoretical and conceptual lens.

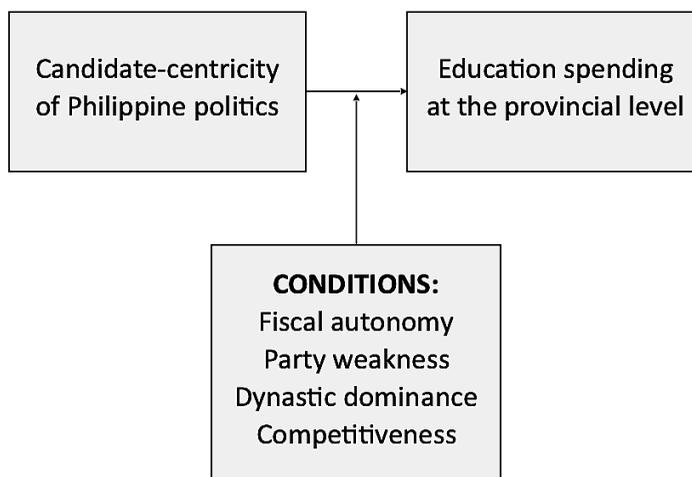
22 Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre (2013) briefly recounted how dynasties also use patronage politics to gain electoral incentives by using resources for long-term infrastructure and economic development to either acquire votes or generate wealth motivated by self-interests.

23 Goods identified by Shin (2015) that serve long-term benefits through effective means of budget allocation and spending for reform agendas.

advocate for long-term effects of reform policies and attaining universal basic and social services (Shin 2015b, 129). Yet, a portion of voters who belong to well-off and better-educated status are also ironic in stating that they prefer particularistic goods over programmatic ones, as patronage outweighs its counterpart. When you have programmatic goods that are scarce, the fewer opposition candidates there will be as more incumbents affiliate themselves with the top official with the most control over state resources (133). Therefore, a voter's burden is on choosing among the few candidates left to vote for.

What could have been the provision of programmatic goods was depleted due to the increase in the demand for direct, immediate relief, without looking at its value for long-term change and socioeconomic development, as well as the low frequency of opposition candidates who advocate and campaign for the delivery of such programmatic goods (Shin 2015, 366). Generally, poor households are quick to affiliate themselves with candidates that provide them with basic social services disguised as "aid," which creates clientelist relationships that will make voter turnout for elections predictable. So far as corruption practices are coterminous with patronage and dynasties, areas with elites ruling over them are more likely to have populations with high poverty rates and worsening levels of income inequality and Human Development Index (HDI) (Nuñez et al. 2024, 207). This is in line with Lanzona et al's (2025, 3) highlights of how, given the "resilient" nature of the economic structure to adhere amongst political objectives and machineries, the political dynamics and structures present have persisted to become questionable in providing effective, efficient, and equitable goods and services, given patronage and dynasties in a candidate-centric system. And how the prioritization of basic and social services among Filipinos is still within the survival aspects, while national interests are low. Alternatively, the selectorate-winning coalition (S-W) model²⁴ (3) is used to identify the frequency and systems of political incentives and relaying of public goods and services amongst politicians and voters, especially the provision and acceptance of loyalty among elite families to keep them in position over the next elections. Generally, a small W is related to an increase in private goods, most especially in dynastic families; conversely, a large W is its opposite, where it might be difficult for dynasties and elites to control the electorates. When the public knew of this small control, it would break out among opposition groups, media, and other concerned entities, which would contradict the majority support for democratic, good governance.

24 Selectorate is referred to as the total number of electorates while the winning coalition is a subset of the selectorate whose patronage and support is ever loyal to incumbents, elites and/or dynasties (Lanzona et al. 2025).

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Nevertheless, the prospective use of education as a good and service should also be regarded as human capital (Nuñez et al., 2024, 198; 208), potentially increasing and aiming for national economic development through the improvement of socioeconomic standards of living. This prescribes the connection between the type of electoral dynamics present and the extent (experiences, challenges, and opportunities) for public education spending at the local levels. To this, we have used key political economy conditions such as fiscal autonomy,²⁵ the challenges to party-centric systems, the prevalence of political dynasties, and the competitiveness²⁶ and turnover of seats among provincial chief executives (i.e., governors).

To this extent, there is still much to be identified empirically on the relation of political climates and electoral dynamics at the local (provincial) level and how this affects education spending towards efficient and effective fiscal decentralization of education-related governance and services.

25 With the NTA having the opportunity to be mis/appropriated for and from LGUs, Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre (2013, 374) contend that these are in line with anecdotal evidences and cases on the provision of private goods that seek to increase the expansive patron-client relationships to earn voter turnouts.

26 Deemed as a way to increase re-election chances and secure votes through provision of particularistic public goods; this projects positive externalities on competitive efficiencies of candidates to prescribe to the public who should be deemed proper to govern, all the while, exhibits appropriate governance traits.

Data and Variables

1. Fiscal Data and Education Spending

We constructed a province-year panel covering all provinces from 2001 to 2022. Fiscal data are drawn from official provincial income and expenditure accounts compiled into a unified dataset. For each province p and year t , we observe education expenditure and total expenditure. Our dependent variable is the provincial education spending share:

$$\text{edushare}_{p,t} = \frac{\text{education expenditure}_{p,t}}{\text{total expenditure}_{p,t}}$$

interpreted as the proportion of the provincial budget devoted to education-related spending in province p and year t .

2. Electoral Data and Candidate-Centricity Index (CCI)

We compiled gubernatorial election data for all provinces, including candidate names, party labels, and vote shares for each election cycle. From these data, we constructed the Candidate-Centricity Index (CCI) at the province-election year level using four components derived from gubernatorial results:

1. Local/independent vote share: the share of votes cast for nonnational parties.
2. Fragmentation: the effective number of candidates based on the Laakso-Taagepera index.²⁷
3. Party switching: an indicator for whether the winning candidate's party differs from that of the previous governor.
4. Local label: an indicator for whether the winner ran under a local or independent party label.

27 The effective number of candidates is computed using the Laakso-Taagepera index, defined as $N = 1/\sum_i s_i^2$ where s_i is the vote share of candidate i expressed as a proportion. This measure captures both the number and relative size of candidates in a race, so that contests dominated by one candidate yield a low effective number, while contests with several similarly strong candidates yield a high effective number (Laakso and Taagepera 1979).

Each component is standardized (z -score), and CCI is computed as the average of the four standardized measures. Higher CCI values indicate more personalistic, fragmented, and locally branded politics. The resulting CCI series is then matched to fiscal years using the election year in force (i.e., the term during which a given governor's CCI applies).

3. Moderators: Fiscal and Political Context

To examine conditional effects, we construct several moderators:

1. Fiscal autonomy: local income divided by total income, capturing the extent to which provinces rely on own-source revenues rather than intergovernmental transfers.
2. Party weakness/localism: the share of votes going to local or independent gubernatorial candidates.
3. Party fragmentation: effective number of candidates.
4. Party change, dynasty, turnover, competitiveness: indicators for whether the winner switched parties, whether the same family name occupies the governorship, whether a new person replaces the previous governor, and closeness of the race (1 minus margin of victory), respectively.

These moderators allow us to test whether the association between CCI and education spending varies across different fiscal and political environments.

4. Spatial Data and GIS Procedures

To embed the analysis in geographic space, we integrate the province–year panel with a provincial boundary shapefile for the Philippines. Province names and codes in the shapefile are harmonized with those in the fiscal–electoral dataset, allowing us to join attributes and create spatial layers at the provincial level.

All spatial processing is conducted in QGIS. From the panel, we compute province-level averages from 2001 to 2022 and generate choropleth maps of: (1) average education spending share; and (2) average Candidate-Centricity Index (CCI). Variables are classified into quantiles (e.g., quintiles) and visualized using sequential colour ramps, enabling direct visual comparison of provinces with higher and lower education spending and of provinces with higher versus lower levels of candidate-centric politics.

We then conduct exploratory spatial data analysis (ESDA) by constructing a province-level spatial weights matrix based on queen contiguity (provinces sharing a boundary or corner). Using this weights matrix, we compute global Moran's I for the cross-sectional averages of education spending share and CCI to test for spatial autocorrelation. We also compute Local Indicators of Spatial Association (LISA) to identify high-high, low-low, and outlier clusters of provinces. These GIS and ESDA outputs serve as descriptive complements to the regression analysis.

Methodology

1. Panel Regression Strategy

We estimate two-way fixed-effects models using ordinary least squares with cluster-robust standard errors at the province level. Our general specification is:

$$\text{educshare}_{p,t} = \beta_1 \text{CCI}_{p,t} + \beta_2 Z_{p,t} + \beta_3 (\text{CCI}_{p,t} \times Z_{p,t}) + \alpha_p + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{p,t}$$

where:

- $\text{educshare}_{p,t}$ is the education spending share in province p , year t ;
- $\text{CCI}_{p,t}$ is the Candidate-Centricity Index;
- $Z_{p,t}$ is a moderator (fiscal autonomy, local/independent vote share, etc.);
- α_p are province fixed effects, capturing time-invariant provincial characteristics (structural economic conditions, geography, long-term institutions, baseline political culture);
- γ_t are year fixed effects, capturing national shocks and policy changes that affect all provinces in a given year;
- $\varepsilon_{p,t}$ is the error term.

Province fixed effects absorb time-invariant characteristics of provinces, such as geography, historical institutions, and long-standing political cultures—while year fixed effects capture national shocks and policy changes affecting all provinces simultaneously. This design exploits within-province variation over time to identify how changes in candidate-centric politics and contextual conditions relate to shifts in education spending shares.

For the first research question (unconditional effect), we estimate a baseline model with CCI but without moderators:

$$\text{educshare}_{p,t} = \beta_1 \text{CCI}_{p,t} + \alpha_p + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{p,t}$$

For the second research question (conditional effects), we introduce each moderator Z and the interaction term $\text{CCI} \times Z$. Standard errors are clustered by province to account for serial correlation and heteroskedasticity within provinces over time.

2. Integrating GIS and ESDA into the Analysis

GIS and ESDA are integrated into the study in two ways:

- a. Descriptive context. Choropleth maps and LISA cluster maps provide a spatial picture of where high and low values of education spending share and CCI are located. This helps us situate the regression results within recognizable regional and provincial patterns, rather than treating provinces as geographically isolated units.
- b. Diagnostic support. Moran's I statistics indicate whether education spending and candidate-centric politics exhibit spatial autocorrelation rather than being randomly distributed across provinces. While we do not estimate a formal spatial econometric model in this article, recognizing spatial clustering helps avoid purely spatial interpretations of the fixed-effects estimates and underscores that fiscal-political dynamics unfold within a concrete geographic landscape. Accordingly, we use spatial analysis to describe where high and low education spending cluster across provinces, rather than as a separate causal test. The fixed-effects models provide the main estimates by tracking within-province changes over time while accounting for nationwide shocks common to all provinces in a given year.

Results

1. Descriptive patterns of provincial education spending and candidate-centric politics

Figure 2 shows the average provincial education spending share from 2001–22 (education expenditure as a share of total provincial expenditure). Darker shades of blue indicate provinces that devote a larger fraction of their budgets to education. The map reveals substantial spatial variation: provinces in Central Luzon, Bicol, parts of Eastern Visayas, and portions of Northern Mindanao

allocate relatively larger budget shares to education, whereas several provinces in Northern Luzon, Western Visayas, and parts of BARMM lie in the lowest quantiles. These geographic differences suggest that provincial commitments to education are far from uniform and may reflect fiscal capacity, historical trajectories of investment, and political priorities.

On the other hand, figure 3 shows the average provincial Candidate-Centricity Index (CCI) over the same period. Higher values (darker reds) denote more personalistic, fragmented, and locally branded gubernatorial competition; lower values indicate more programmatic, nationally anchored competition. High-CCI provinces are found across multiple island groups, including clusters in Northern and Central Luzon, parts of the Visayas, and several provinces in Mindanao, while some provinces in Luzon and the Visayas show negative or low CCI scores. These patterns suggest that candidate-centric politics is not confined to a single macro-region but is geographically diffuse.

Figure 2. Average Provincial Education Spending as a Share of Total Expenditure, 2001-22

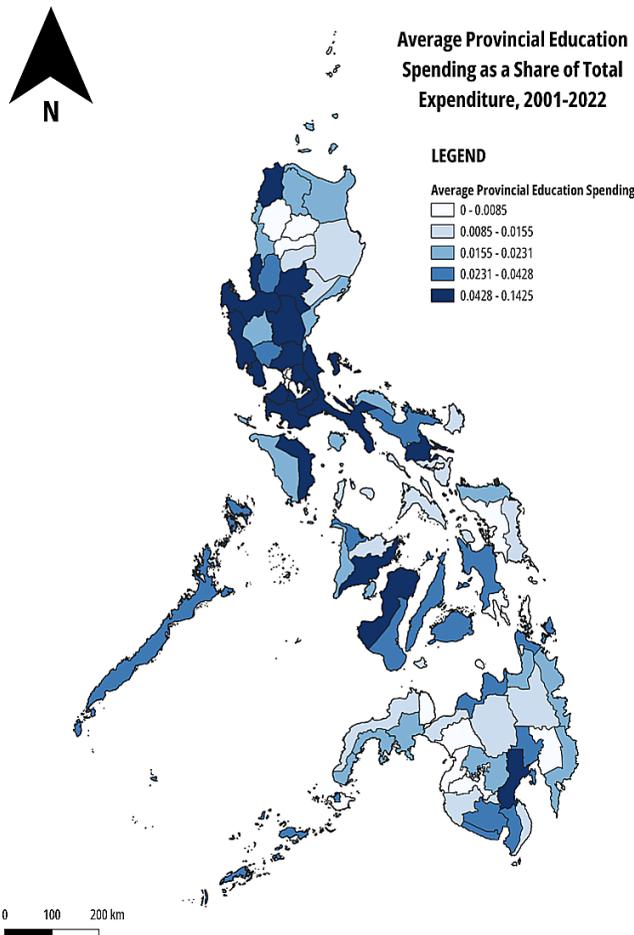
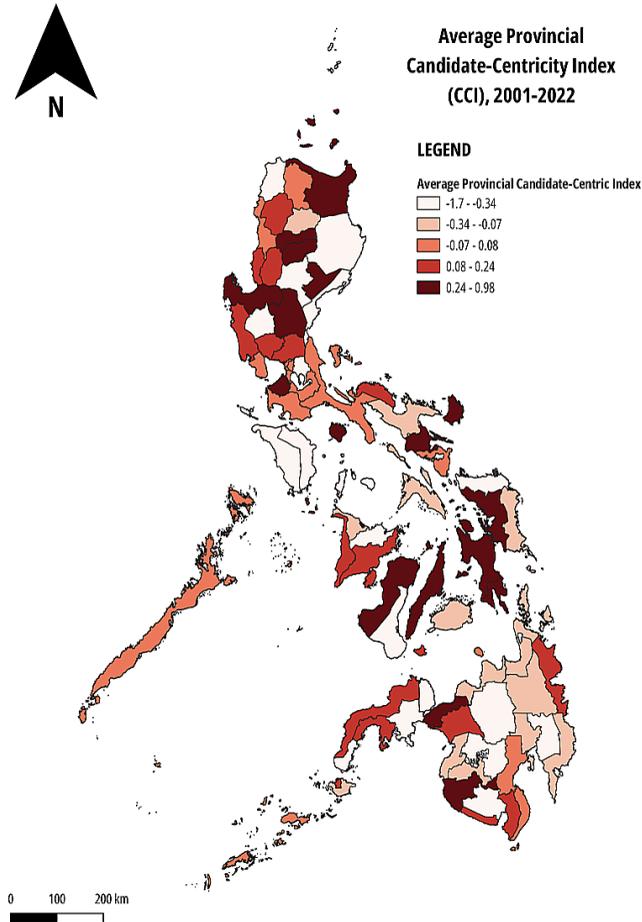
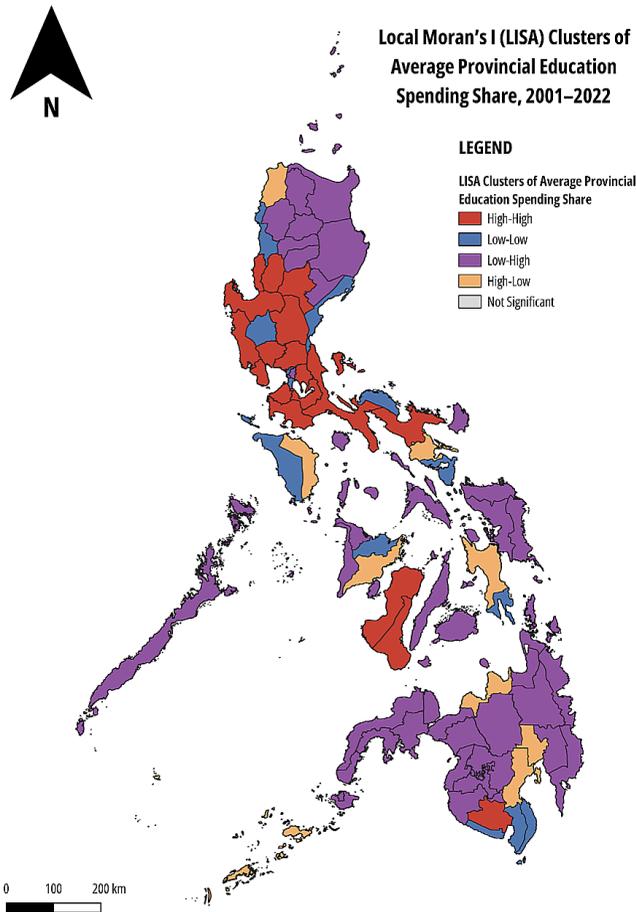


Figure 3. Average Provincial Candidate-Centricity Index (CCI), 2001-22

To explore the spatial distribution of education spending, Figure 4 presents a Local Moran's I (LISA) cluster map of the average provincial education spending share. High-High clusters (in red) indicate provinces with high education spending surrounded by similarly high-spending neighbors; Low-Low clusters (in blue) mark provinces where both the province and its neighbors devote relatively small shares of their budgets to education. High-Low and Low-High outliers (orange and purple) represent provinces that diverge from their immediate neighbours. The map indicates notable High-High clusters in portions of Central Luzon and the southern Philippines, alongside Low-Low clusters in parts of the archipelago. The presence of these clusters suggests that provincial education spending is spatially patterned rather than randomly distributed, consistent with provincial spillovers or shared structural constraints.

Figure 4. Local Moran's I (LISA) Clusters of Average Provincial Education Spending Share, 2001-22



2. Baseline relationship between candidate-centric politics and education spending

We first estimate a two-way fixed-effects model relating the provincial education spending share to the Candidate-Centricity Index (CCI), controlling for province fixed effects (capturing time-invariant characteristics such as geography, long-run institutions, and historical legacies) and year fixed effects (capturing national shocks and policy changes). Cluster-robust standard errors are computed at the province level.

The baseline specification is:

$$\text{educshare}_{p,t} = \beta_1 \text{CCI}_{p,t} + \alpha_p + \gamma t + \varepsilon_{p,t}$$

Table 1 reports the results. The estimated coefficient on CCI is 0.0002 with a standard error of 0.0020 and a p-value of 0.924. The 95 percent confidence interval is extremely tight around zero (−0.004, 0.004). Substantively, the estimate implies that even a one-unit increase in CCI is associated with an approximately 0.0002 change in the education spending share—an effect that is negligible relative to observed year-to-year variation. The model explains about 58 percent of the variance in provincial education spending share ($R^2 = 0.578$), largely driven by the province and year fixed effects.

Table 1. Baseline fixed-effects regression of provincial education spending share on CCI

Variables	Estimate
Coefficient	0.0002
Standard Error	0.0020
<i>p</i> -value	0.924
95% CI	−0.004 to 0.004
N (province-years)	1,754
R^2	0.578
Fixed Effect (FE)	Province and year

Notes: Dependent variable is the provincial education spending share. Estimates from OLS with province and year fixed effects; cluster-robust standard errors at the province level.

The baseline results indicate no linear association between within-province changes in candidate-centric politics and changes in the share of provincial expenditures devoted to education. In other words, conditional on time-invariant provincial features and common national shocks, shifts in the CCI do not, on average, correspond to systematic shifts in education’s budget share. This suggests that education budgets are “sticky,” which means that long-standing provincial patterns and national trends account for most of the variation, leaving limited scope for short-term electoral dynamics to pivot education’s expenditure share on its own.

3. Conditional effects of electoral context

To address the second research question, we examine whether the impact of candidate-centric politics on education spending depends on specific electoral and political conditions. We estimate interaction models of the form:

$$\text{educshare}_{p,t} = \beta_1 \text{CCI}_{p,t} + \beta_2 Z_{p,t} + \beta_3 (\text{CCI}_{p,t} \times Z_{p,t}) + \alpha_p + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{p,t},$$

where $Z_{p,t}$ represents indicators of party fragmentation, party switching, dynastic control, electoral turnover, electoral competitiveness, fiscal autonomy, and the local/independent vote share. All models retain province and year fixed effects with cluster-robust standard errors.

a. Fragmentation, dynasties, party switching, turnover, and competitiveness

Table 2 summarises the interaction terms for five moderators measured at the provincial election level. None of these interaction terms is statistically significant at conventional levels, and their magnitudes are small.

Table 2. Interaction between CCI and electoral conditions

Moderator (Z)	Interaction Term (CCI x Z)	p-value	Interpretation
Party Fragmentation	0.0000	0.971	No meaningful interaction
Party change (winner)	0.0030	0.370	Not statistically significant
Dynastic control	0.0018	0.473	
Turnover	-0.0003	0.922	
Competitiveness	0.0151	0.121	Suggestive only, not robust

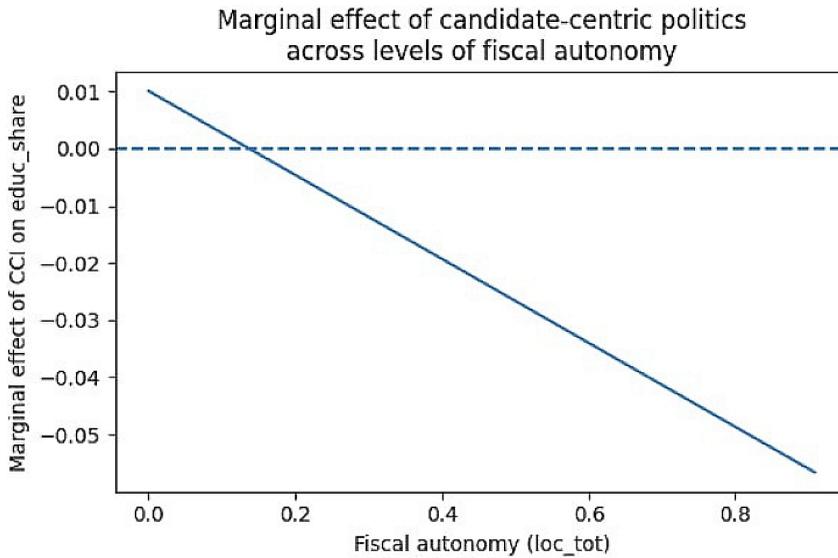
Notes: Coefficients are from separate fixed-effects models interacting CCI with each moderator; all specifications retain the baseline controls and include province and year fixed effects with cluster-robust standard errors.

The null results imply that, at least in terms of aggregate provincial education spending, electoral fragmentation, whether governors switch parties, whether a single clan controls the governorship, and whether elections bring in a new person do not systematically amplify or dampen the association between CCI and education budgets. This point aligns with the descriptive sense that, even in highly dynastic or fragmented provinces, education's share of expenditure remains relatively anchored by institutional and fiscal constraints.

b. Fiscal structure and local party systems

Although most political moderators are null, fiscal and party-system conditions show more nuanced patterns. Figure 5 below plots the marginal effect of CCI on education spending across levels of fiscal autonomy, measured as the share of locally raised revenue in total income. At very low levels of fiscal autonomy, where provinces rely heavily on national transfers, the estimated marginal effect of CCI on education's budget share is slightly positive. As fiscal autonomy increases, this effect declines and eventually turns negative.

Figure 5. Marginal effect of CCI on provincial education spending share across levels of fiscal autonomy

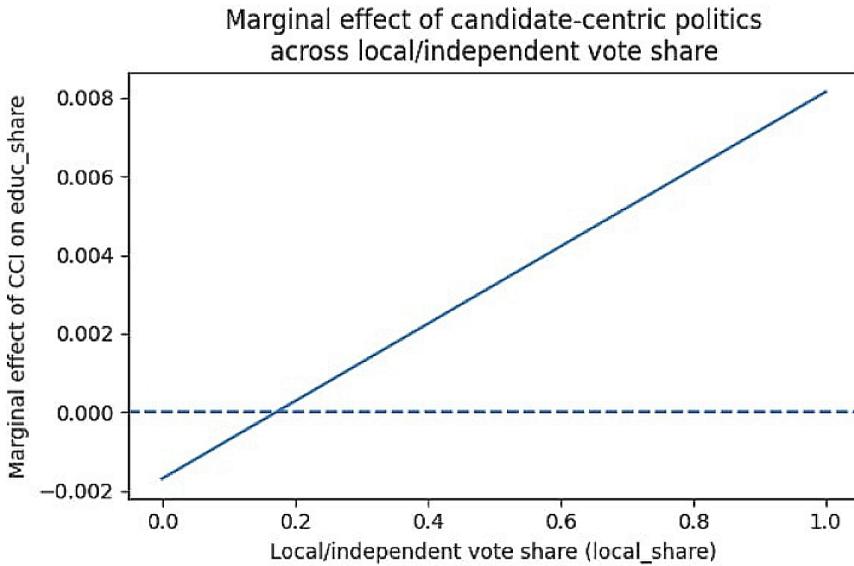


Substantively, this suggests that in transfer-dependent provinces, governors operating in more candidate-centric environments may find it electorally rewarding to channel additional resources into education, treating it as a visible, politically salient good. However, as provinces acquire greater control over their own-source revenues, the same candidate-centric logic appears to tilt against education, possibly because governors have more discretion to divert funds toward narrower patronage, infrastructure, or other projects that offer more direct, immediate credit-claiming opportunities. This pattern is consistent with a shift from broad, publicly legible spending (where education can be credited) toward more discretionary and potentially more targetable allocations once provinces control larger shares of their own-source revenues.

Figure 6 shows the marginal effect of CCI across the local/independent vote share, our proxy for party weakness and local party dominance. Where local or independent candidates are marginal, a higher CCI is associated with a slight reduction in education's budget share. As the local/independent vote share increases, CCI's marginal effect moves toward zero and becomes weakly positive, though the magnitude remains small.

Taken together, these interaction results indicate that CCI's influence is conditional and modest. Candidate-centric politics tends to help education only under highly specific fiscal arrangements (low fiscal autonomy) and, to a lesser extent, where local/independent actors are more competitive. Outside these contexts, the estimated effects are close to zero or slightly negative.

Figure 6. Marginal effect of CCI on provincial education spending share across local/independent vote share



4. GIS and spatial patterns

The GIS and ESDA results complement the regression analysis by situating these relationships in geographic space. Choropleth maps (see figures 2 and 3) show that provinces with high education spending shares and those with high CCI scores are not randomly scattered but form recognizable regional patterns. The LISA map (see figure 4) identifies High–High clusters of education spending in some parts of Central Luzon and the southern Philippines, as well as Low–Low clusters in other regions. These patterns indicate that education spending is influenced by factors that are spatially structured, such as regional economic development, historical program placements, or administrative capacity, which may partly explain why CCI’s average effect is weak once province fixed effects are included.

The spatial analysis, therefore, reinforces the interpretation that provincial education budgets are embedded in longer-run regional trajectories. Even where candidate-centric politics is prominent, governors operate within spatially patterned constraints and expectations that limit the scope for abrupt reallocation of education spending.

Discussion

This study offers a qualified answer to what candidate-centric democracy means for provincial investment in education. The central finding is that candidate-centric politics has no strong average effect on provincial education spending shares once long-run provincial characteristics and national shocks are taken into account. In the baseline two-way fixed-effects models, changes in the Candidate-Centricity Index (CCI) within provinces are not associated with systematic increases or decreases in education's share of the budget. Provincial education budgets instead appear sticky and path-dependent, reflecting established fiscal arrangements, bureaucratic routines, and inherited priorities rather than shifting with each electoral cycle. One reason a null average effect may arise is measurement: an unchanged education share can coexist with politically meaningful changes in education levels if total expenditures expand or if other sectors move in tandem; thus, stability in shares should not be read as proof that politics is irrelevant to education finance.

1. Candidate-centric politics and “sticky” education budgets

The first striking finding is the absence of a robust unconditional relationship between CCI and provincial education spending share. Once we control for province and year fixed effects, changes in candidate-centric politics within a province do not translate into systematic increases or decreases in the share of the budget devoted to education. This suggests that provincial education budgets are “sticky”: they are structured by long-standing fiscal arrangements, institutional routines, and historical trajectories rather than shifting responsively with each electoral cycle.

This finding nuances expectations from the patronage and political-budget-cycle literature, which often predicts that personalistic, clientelist competition will induce incumbents to manipulate public spending for electoral gain (Daniele and Vertier 2016; Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre 2013). Given a candidate-centric environment (Hicken 2019; Hutchcroft 2019), one might anticipate more visible spending on “vote-buying” goods, of which education scholarships, school buildings, and learning materials are plausible candidates. Our fixed-effects estimates indicate that, in aggregate, provincial elites cannot readily adjust the education share of the provincial budget in response to changes in CCI. A plausible explanation is that candidate-centric incentives are expressed less through shifting education's headline budget share and more through reallocations within the education sector—such as changes in program type, timing, and the geographic distribution of beneficiaries—which aggregate expenditure shares may not capture well. Education therefore appears to operate more like a quasi-entitlement, shaped by routine budgeting practices and the

institutionalized roles of Local School Boards and SEF processes (Manasan et al. 2011), rather than as a fully discretionary tool for electoral campaigning.

This pattern resonates with Shin's (2015b) distinction between particularistic and programmatic goods. Even where voters demand patronage and incumbent elites rely on clientelist networks, some categories of spending—such as basic education—may become sufficiently institutionalised that they are less malleable to short-term electoral calculus. The weak unconditional association between CCI and education spending thus suggests that candidate-centric politics operates within a bounded space of discretion defined by fiscal rules, bureaucratic norms, and inherited commitments.

2. Reconciling the null average effect with theories of patronage and political competition

The null effects for interactions with fragmentation, dynastic control, party switching, turnover, and competitiveness further challenge simple extensions of the patronage argument. The literature on dynasties and clientelism often posits that entrenched families and fragmented party systems will bias spending toward private or club goods and away from broad social investments (Lanzona et al. 2025; Shin 2015a; Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre 2013). However, our interaction models show that these electoral features do not systematically moderate the relationship between CCI and education's budget share.

One interpretation, consistent with Nuñez et al. (2024) and Lanzona et al. (2025), is that dynasties and fragmented competition may influence how education resources are allocated, targeted, or siphoned off through corruption, rather than how much is budgeted to education in the first place. Dynastic governors may keep the overall education share stable while using scholarships, hiring, and school projects as channels for patronage. Our aggregate spending measure cannot capture those within-sector reallocations. Theoretically, this suggests that patronage politics may be more about composition and targeting than about headline sectoral shares.

At the same time, the absence of strong moderating effects underscores the "resilience" of certain budget categories under decentralization. As Mansuri and Rao (2013) and King (2024) caution, decentralization does not automatically produce more efficient or equitable social spending; instead, local elites often adapt to new fiscal rules while preserving underlying political bargains. Our results fit this view: institutions of fiscal decentralization—NTA, SEF, and provincial budget processes—appear to provide a relatively stable education spending that is not easily dislodged by shifts in electoral fragmentation or dynasty status.

3. Why fiscal structure and local party systems still matter

The more interesting findings emerge when fiscal conditions are considered. Under low fiscal autonomy, a higher CCI is associated with slightly higher education shares, whereas under high fiscal autonomy, the CCI's effect becomes negative. This pattern highlights the importance of how money enters the province. Where provinces rely heavily on budget from the national government, governors may have less discretion to redirect funds away from education and may find it electorally advantageous to emphasize visible education spending as part of a clientelist but broadly distributive strategy. In contrast, when provinces raise more of their own revenue, they have greater flexibility to channel resources toward particularistic projects or patronage goods, and the political payoff from aggregate education spending may decline.

These results resonate with broader debates on decentralization: fiscal design can shape the incentives produced by local political competition. Rather than focusing solely on who runs, how many candidates contest, or how fragmented parties are, reforms that adjust the balance between transfers and own-source revenues may have more predictable implications for social sector spending.

4. The surprisingly modest role of dynasties and corruption

The one area where candidate-centric politics appears to matter is in interaction with fiscal structure and local party systems. Under low fiscal autonomy,²⁸ a higher CCI is associated with slightly higher education spending shares. Under high fiscal autonomy,²⁹ the marginal effect of CCI turns negative. Similarly, where local or independent parties capture larger vote shares, the marginal effect of CCI becomes weakly positive, though substantively modest.

These patterns can be read through the lens of decentralization and the selectorate-winning coalition model. In transfer-dependent provinces, governors may have limited discretion over the composition of spending and may use the more rigid but visible categories of education spending to signal responsiveness and benevolence to a broad coalition of voters (Shin 2015b; Kim 2020). Education here functions as a semi-programmatic good that can still be marketed within clientelist networks but is constrained by national rules and monitoring (King 2024).

28 Low fiscal autonomy provinces rely heavily on intergovernmental transfers.

29 High fiscal autonomy provinces generate more own-source revenues.

By contrast, in provinces with higher fiscal autonomy, governors enjoy greater control over discretionary revenues. In a candidate-centric system with small winning coalitions and strong family machines (Lanzona et al. 2025), these revenues may be more efficiently deployed toward narrowly targeted projects, employment, and transfers that yield higher marginal electoral returns than increasing the overall education share. The slight negative marginal effect of CCI at higher levels of fiscal autonomy is consistent with this logic: as local discretion increases, candidate-centric elites may reallocate effort away from broad, multi-year social investments toward more particularistic spending.

The interaction with local/independent vote share similarly suggests that where local party systems are more salient, candidate-centric competition can sometimes be channeled toward education as a reputational asset of local brands. However, the small magnitude of these effects again highlights that fiscal architecture and institutional routines significantly constrain how far candidate-centric politics can move education budgets.

5. Spatial trajectories and uneven state-building

The GIS and ESDA results add a spatial dimension to these theoretical debates. High–High and Low–Low clusters of education spending underscore that provincial investment in education is embedded in longer-run processes of state formation, regional development, and administrative capacity. Some high-spending clusters correspond to historically central regions with stronger economic bases and administrative infrastructures, while some low-spending clusters align with historically marginalized or conflict-affected areas.

From a political economy perspective, these spatial patterns support the view that decentralization and candidate-centric politics are layered onto pre-existing geographies of state presence (Hutchcroft 2019; Diokno 2012). Even where gubernatorial races are intensely candidate-centric, governors are constrained by the economic, institutional, and spatial legacies of their provinces. The limited effect of the CCI on education spending thus reflects not only institutional stickiness but also spatial path dependence: policies and investments in education tend to follow regional trajectories shaped by past choices, infrastructure networks, and patterns of inequality.

In this sense, candidate-centric democracy does not replace older geographies of state capacity; it interacts with them. High-spending provinces in High–High clusters may have institutionalized education as part of their regional development strategies, while Low–Low clusters may face a combination of weak fiscal capacity, thin bureaucracies, and entrenched inequalities that dampen

the impact of electoral incentives. Recognizing these spatial trajectories is crucial for understanding why reforms that focus solely on electoral engineering or local political competition may yield uneven gains across the archipelago.

6. Implications for education governance

Taken together, the findings suggest a more tempered view of what candidate-centric democracy means for education. Theoretically, our results support three claims:

- a. Candidate-centric politics operates within bounded institutional and fiscal constraints. Even in a system characterized by patronage and dynasties, some categories of social spending, such as provincial education budgets, can become stable enough that they do not fluctuate dramatically with short-term changes in electoral competition.
- b. Fiscal design shapes how political incentives translate into education spending. The small but meaningful interactions with fiscal autonomy and local party strength indicate that decentralization reforms and revenue structures influence whether candidate-centric competition nudges governors toward or away from education as a political good.
- c. Spatial inequalities mediate the impact of electoral incentives. Regional clusters of high and low education spending remind us that governance reforms are layered onto unequal geographies of state presence, capacity, and historical investment. Any theory of candidate-centric democracy and education must therefore be spatially attentive.

In sum, the Philippine case shows that candidate-centric democracy does not necessarily doom education to neglect, but neither does it guarantee sustained investment. Instead, its effects are filtered through fiscal institutions, regional trajectories, and the internal logics of decentralized education governance.

Conclusion

This article examined how candidate-centric politics relates to provincial education spending in the Philippines and whether this relationship depends on specific electoral and fiscal conditions. Using 2001–22 province-year panel data drawn from the UP CIDS Local Government Dataset, a composite Candidate-Centricity Index (CCI), two-way fixed-effects models, and GIS-based spatial analysis, we find that candidate-centric politics has, at best, a modest and conditional influence on education budgets.

The baseline fixed-effects estimates show no robust association between within-province changes in the CCI and changes in the share of provincial expenditures devoted to education. Once long-run provincial characteristics and national shocks are accounted for, provincial education budgets appear sticky and path-dependent, anchored in institutional routines and structural constraints rather than shifting with every electoral cycle.

Interaction models broadly reinforce this picture. Most commonly cited features of Philippine politics, including party fragmentation, party switching, dynastic control, electoral turnover, and competitiveness, do not systematically condition the relationship between the CCI and education spending. Only under particular fiscal and local-party configurations do small, context-dependent effects emerge: candidate-centric competition is mildly associated with higher education shares in transfer-dependent provinces and in settings where local or independent actors are stronger, but tends to become neutral or negative when provinces gain greater fiscal autonomy. These effects are substantively modest and do not overturn the basic picture of stickiness.

The GIS and ESDA results further situate these findings in space. Choropleth and LISA maps show clear High–High and Low–Low clusters of education spending across the archipelago, highlighting regional trajectories of state capacity and investment that long predate the electoral cycles captured by the CCI. Candidate-centric politics thus operates on top of, rather than in place of, deeper patterns of regional inequality and institutional development.

Taken together, the results caution against simple narratives that either blame personalistic, candidate-centric politics for underinvestment in education or assume that more programmatic competition alone will raise education spending. Provincial education budgets are shaped by an interplay of fiscal structures, institutional inertia, and spatially uneven state-building that dampens the direct impact of electoral volatility.

Policy and Research Recommendations

Policy-wise, the results suggest that reformers should focus less on “fixing” elections and more on the fiscal rules that structure provincial behavior. Strengthening and protecting education-sensitive transfer formulas and earmarked grants can give provinces, especially those in Low–Low LISA clusters, stable resources for education regardless of who wins. These spatial clusters should be treated as priority areas for extra technical support, capacity-building, and national cofinancing of education projects. At the same time, political incentives can be nudged toward education by

tying public scorecards, awards, and visible programs (such as scholarships and school improvement grants) to sustained or rising education spending and better outcomes, while introducing guardrails in revenue-rich provinces—minimum social-sector shares and stronger reporting or audit rules—to ensure that greater fiscal autonomy does not crowd out education.

Future work should move beyond aggregate spending totals to examine the composition and targeting of provincial education budgets, including what types of programs are funded and which municipalities or schools benefit, under varying levels of candidate-centric politics. This fiscal-electoral perspective should be linked to data on learning outcomes (test scores, completion and dropout rates, transition rates) to assess whether “sticky” spending actually translates into improved and more equitable learning. Finally, deeper spatial and multi-level analysis, which combines spatial econometric models with comparisons across provinces, cities, and municipalities, can clarify how political incentives diffuse across territory and which levels of government matter most for the geography of education provision.

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