

# Dynastic Politics and Democratic Choice: Exploring Voter Perceptions in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental

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**Abstract.** Political dynasties have long been dominant in Philippine politics, shaping electoral outcomes and governance structures. This study explores voter perceptions of dynastic politics and democratic choice in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, using a qualitative research design through one-on-one interviews with 12 participants. Findings reveal that while some voters recognize the potential benefits of political dynasties, such as experienced leadership and continuity in governance, many express concerns about their impact on fair competition, political diversity, and the emergence of new leaders. Participants highlight factors influencing their voting decisions, including candidate qualifications, integrity, and platforms, rather than solely relying on family background. The study also identifies increasing voter awareness regarding the need for political reform and a stronger emphasis on merit-based electoral choices. However, systemic challenges, such as limited political opportunities for independent candidates and the deeply rooted influence of name recognition, continue to sustain dynastic dominance. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on political participation and democratic representation in the Philippines. The study underscores the need for voter education programs, policy reforms, and grassroots political engagement to promote a more competitive and inclusive democratic process. Recommendations for future research include examining policy interventions to reduce dynastic influence in local elections.

**Keywords:** Democracy; Dynastic politics; Elections; Voter perception.

## 1.0 Introduction

For a long time, powerful families have controlled many leadership positions in many parts of the world. This system, known as dynastic politics, happens when a political power is passed down from one family member to another, often across generations (Puansah et al., 2024). The same families remain in charge for many years instead of allowing different people to take turns in leadership. Though it entails operating a government, this resembles how a family company is passed on from parents to children (Napolitano, 2019). Some dynasties begin when a politician, over a protracted career, assists a family member who has long been chosen to replace them. Others have become stronger when multiple relatives run for different positions simultaneously to ensure their family controls local or national politics. While some people believe that this would lead to stability and experience in leadership, others argue that it limits opportunities for new leaders who may have better ideas and skills (George & Ponattu, 2019).

The Philippines is one of the countries where dynastic politics is pervasive. Many of its leaders come from well-known political families, and it is not unusual for the parents, their children, and even their grandchildren to have taken turns holding such powerful positions (Mendoza et al., 2022). This is seen in towns, cities, provinces, and even in national offices, such as the Senate and the presidency. The nation has long had political dynasties, some of which have governed the same regions for decades (Mendoza et al., 2023). Political dynasty supporters have contended that these families already know how to run and possess the means to lead successfully. Critics have been countering it, saying it becomes challenging for fresh and more competent leaders to surface when the same families remain in power for too long (Teehankee et al., 2023). Many dynastic politicians are wealthy and well-known; hence, they have a significant edge over regular contenders who lack the means to wage a powerful campaign. Because of this, elections may not always be fair, and the same families continue to dominate politics.

Democracy is based on the idea that the people and the nation can choose their leaders through fair and open elections. According to Kulachai et al. (2023), in a healthy democracy, voters should have many choices and be able to elect leaders based on their abilities, plans, and vision for their country. However, in the Philippines, where political dynasties control many positions, national elections can feel very predictable as the same families keep running for office. While voters technically have the power to decide, their choices may be scarce because most candidates come from political dynasties (Batara et al., 2021). This makes some people question whether elections are truly democratic or if they only serve to keep powerful families in control. Although the country follows the democratic process of voting, strong political dynasties raise concerns about whether all candidates have a fair chance and whether voters are genuinely free to choose from various leaders (Mendoza et al., 2023).

Regarding political dynasties and their impact on democracy, Filipino citizens view things differently. According to Dulay and Go (2022), some think the dynastic leaders offer continuity and experience in governing, which would help stability and development using these qualities. Many voters in the country trust these politicians and feel at ease supporting the well-known personalities, as many come from families with a lengthy background of public service. Others believe that dynasty politics stifles competition and keeps qualified yet fresh or up-and-coming leaders from introducing innovative ideas to government (Mendoza et al., 2023). Rather than closely evaluating their leadership abilities and ideas, some voters may select leaders depending on popularity, wealth, and promises. Furthermore, in many places, voters could feel as though they have just minimal actual options, as all the candidates on the ballot came from the same political background. Dela Cruz (2021) states this fuels a loop whereby political dynasties have kept on reigning, and the voters have no say in altering the flawed structure.

The current investigation for this research centered on Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, where local government has been dominated by political dynasties (Jimenez, 2023). It sought to discover how city dwellers view political dynasties and whether they believe they have real options while choosing their leaders. Through this research, the study examined whether people support the idea of dynastic leadership or if they believe it limits democracy. By gathering insights from the voters, this study contributes to a better understanding of how dynastic politics affects local elections and whether it helps or hinders democratic choice in the city.

## **2.0 Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research design, which focused on gathering detailed opinions and experiences from the people involved instead of using numbers or statistics. Since this study is about how voters feel and think about political dynasties, a qualitative approach was the best way to understand their thoughts deeply and meaningfully. Using this method, the study explored voters' lived experiences and views rather than just counting how many people share a particular opinion. Through one-on-one interviews, participants had the chance to share their honest thoughts about political dynasties and how they feel about their choices in elections. This significantly helped in understanding the reasons behind their decisions and whether they believe political dynasties help or harm democracy.

### **2.2 Participants of the Study**

This study involved twelve (12) participants from Dumaguete City. These participants were registered voters who had experience in voting for local leaders. They were selected based on their willingness to share their opinions about political dynasties and their experiences in past elections. The study included a mix of people from different

backgrounds to ensure that different perspectives are considered. Since this research aims to explore how voters think, the participants do not need to represent the entire population of Dumaguete City. Instead, the study focused on gathering detailed stories and opinions from a smaller group. The goal was to listen to their experiences and understand how they feel about their choices in elections where political dynasties are involved.

### 2.3 Research Instrument

To gather information, this study used an interview guide as the main research tool to guide the one-on-one interviews with the participants. Interviews are helpful because they allow participants to speak freely about their thoughts and experiences without feeling pressured by others. Each interview was guided by open-ended questions, meaning the participants could explain their answers in their own words instead of just choosing from a list of options. The interviews focused on how participants feel about political dynasties, whether they believe they have real choices in elections, and what factors influence their voting decisions. The goal was to gather honest and detailed answers so the study could truly understand voters' thoughts about political dynasties and democracy.

### 2.4 Data Gathering Procedures

Before starting the interviews, the researcher selected and invited twelve (12) participants willing to share their experiences. Once they agreed to join the study, a schedule was set for the interviews. The interviews then took place in a private and comfortable setting that the participant chose depending on what was most convenient for them. During the interview, the researcher asked open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their thoughts in detail. The interviews were written and audio-recorded after permission was granted during the introduction of informed consent to ensure no important information was lost. After all the interviews, the researcher reviewed and analysed the answers to identify common themes and patterns in the participants' views about political dynasties and voter choice.

### 2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study followed strict ethical guidelines to make sure that all of the participants felt safe and respected. Before the interviews began, each participant had received a clear explanation of the study through an informed consent form, which included the details of its purpose, the types of questions that were asked, and how their answers would be used. Participants were also asked to sign the consent form to demonstrate that they fully read, understand, and agree to participate in the study. To protect the participants' privacy, all personal information was kept confidential. Their names were not included in the final report, and their responses were only used for research. Suppose a participant has decided that they no longer want to continue and proceed with the undertakings of this research. In that case, they can withdraw from the study without any consequences. The goal is to ensure that all participants feel comfortable and their voices are heard respectfully and ethically.

## 3.0 Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Influence of Political Dynasties in Elections

The identified themes include: (1) influence of political dynasties on voter choice, (2) negative impact of political dynasties, and (3) influence of political dynasties on voter choice.

*"When voting, I feel like I have a real choice. Just because a political family is running does not mean independent candidates are not given a chance. Ultimately, it depends on the voter's decision." (P1)*

*"Political dynasties can have both positive and negative effects. They may bring experienced leadership, but can also limit fair competition and fresh ideas in elections. Political dynasties continue to exist in the Philippines due to name recognition, voting family influence, voter loyalty, and control over resources and networks that help them stay in power." (P6)*

*"It is negative as it only elects one family, and they will only work for their goal, not for the common good." (P8)*

*"Yes, I have voted for a candidate outside of a political dynasty. He was running for SK Chairman in our barangay. I voted for him even if he was not a well-known man, but rather because of his academic background. Hilig ko tig tan-aw sa mga academic achiever or ganahan rako." (P9)*

The responses from Dumaguete City voters provide insightful perspectives on how political dynasties influence elections. Political dynasties have been a significant feature of the Philippine political landscape, shaping the electoral process and governance structures. Participant P1 expressed that despite the dominance of political dynasties, they still have a real choice when voting. According to the participant, while political families have a strong presence in elections, independent candidates still have a chance to compete, and ultimately, the decision remains in the hands of the voters. This suggests that some voters believe they can exercise their democratic right freely, even if political dynasties maintain a significant influence.

However, other voters highlight political dynasties' complex and sometimes negative impact on elections and governance. Participant P6 mentioned that political dynasties can have both positive and negative effects. On one hand, they can provide experienced leadership and stability due to their political background and established networks. On the other hand, they may limit fair competition and discourage fresh ideas from emerging. The participant noted that the strength of political dynasties often comes from name recognition, voter loyalty, and control over resources, which gives them an advantage over independent or new candidates. This reflects a broader structural issue in the political system, where established families can secure and maintain power through their influence and access to resources.

Some voters express strong dissatisfaction with the dominance of political dynasties, viewing them as barriers to progress and fair governance. Participant P8 emphasized the negative impact of political dynasties, arguing that they tend to serve their interests rather than the common good. This view reflects the perception that political dynasties often operate to consolidate their power rather than address the community's broader needs. Furthermore, Participant P9 shared a more optimistic perspective by recounting their decision to vote for a candidate outside a political dynasty. The participant highlighted that their choice was based on the candidate's academic background and potential to lead effectively, rather than their political affiliation or family connections. This suggests that some voters are willing to break away from traditional voting patterns and support candidates based on merit and capability rather than political legacy.

The responses suggest that while political dynasties remain influential in Dumaguete City, voters have mixed perceptions about their impact. Some voters recognize the potential benefits of experienced leadership and stability that political dynasties may bring. However, others express concern that political dynasties limit democratic choice and hinder progress by maintaining power within a small circle of influential families.

### **3.2 Choices in Leaders**

The identified themes include: (1) voter empowerment and influence, (2) limited electoral options, (3) voter independence and informed choice, (4) disengagement and strategic voting, and (5) desire for electoral fairness and competition.

*"I have only participated in one election so far, and at that moment, it felt so empowering to contribute to this community simply by voting. [...] At first, I found the voting process confusing, but I managed it with the help of my mother." (P1)*

*"I feel like political dynasties dominate elections. People vote for the families because they are popular, and they may not consider whether the people they vote for are good leaders." (P3)*

*"I sometimes feel that elections are dominated by the same political families, making choices limited, but there are still opportunities for new leaders to emerge. Yes, I have voted for a candidate outside a political dynasty because I believe in choosing leaders based on their qualifications, vision, and integrity rather than family background." (P6)*

*"We always have a choice, of course. The reality is that sometimes none of the candidates align with my preferences. Sometimes, I leave it blank. I cast my vote outside a political dynasty because those candidates offer the best leadership." (P10)*

*"Election is always an exciting activity for me because I can elect a new set of leaders. I have participated in 9 elections already. I hate political dynasties. Please give a chance to others." (P12)*

The responses from voters in Dumaguete City highlight a complex relationship between political dynasties and voter choice. Some voters, particularly first-time voters, feel empowered and proud when participating in elections. For instance, one participant (P1) described feeling empowered despite initial confusion about the voting process, which was eased with the help of their family. This shows that family influence plays a significant role in shaping early political engagement. However, other voters expressed concerns about the dominance of political dynasties, which they believe restricts proper democratic choice. Participant P3 mentioned that voters often select candidates based on popularity rather than qualifications, reinforcing the influence of political families.

Despite these frustrations, some voters remain hopeful about the emergence of new leaders. Participant P6 noted that while political dynasties dominate elections, there are still chances for independent candidates to succeed based on merit, integrity, and vision. This suggests that informed voters actively seek to break away from the influence of dynasties by making independent and merit-based decisions. On the other hand, some voters feel disengaged when they believe that none of the candidates represent their values, as highlighted by P10. This sense of disconnection sometimes leads to strategic voting or even leaving ballots blank when no suitable candidate is available.

Experienced voters, such as P12, showed frustration with the recurring dominance of political dynasties. Having participated in multiple elections, they expressed a desire for greater competition and opportunities for new leaders. This reflects a broader call for more balanced political competition and the chance for new voices to emerge in local governance.

### 3.3 Political Dynasties and Democratic Choice

The identified themes include: (1) corruption and power consolidation, (2) cultural foundation of political dynasties, (3) political dominance of influential families, and (4) stagnation and lack of progress.

*“Political dynasties continue to exist in the Philippines mainly because of corruption. Political families gain more power when another member secures a government position, which becomes their main goal.” (P1)*

*“Political dynasties continue to exist in the Philippines largely because of deeply rooted aspects of Filipino culture. As an SK councilor, we are very aware of those things.” (P12)*

*“Political dynasties have played a significant role in shaping the governance of Dumaguete City. Among the most influential families are the Teves, Sagarbarria, Degamo, Remullo, and Macias, each of whom has held key government positions over the years.” (P4)*

*“Negative effect [for the society], because it is inefficient with the same families with only the same principles and beliefs.” (P11)*

The responses from Dumaguete City voters reveal diverse and complex perceptions about political dynasties and their influence on democratic choice. One recurring theme is the link between political dynasties and corruption. Participant P1 explained that political families tend to secure more power once they have gained a foothold in government positions. This strategy strengthens their influence and allows them to control political outcomes, making it harder for new leaders to emerge. This view reflects a belief that political dynasties prioritize maintaining power rather than working for the common good.

Another important perception highlighted by Participant P2 is the cultural foundation of political dynasties. Filipino culture places a high value on family loyalty and respect for established figures, which makes it natural for voters to trust and support political families. This cultural aspect reinforces the power of political dynasties, as voters may feel obligated to vote for familiar names due to tradition rather than evaluating candidates based on their qualifications or platforms. The dominance of specific political families in Dumaguete City was also a key observation. Participant P4 pointed out that families such as the Teves, Sagarbarria, Degamo, Remollo, and Macias have maintained significant influence over local politics for years. This pattern reflects how political dynasties create lasting political legacies that shape local governance. These families have established strong political networks and resources, making it difficult for independent candidates to challenge their position.

On the other hand, some voters expressed frustration with the repetitive nature of political leadership under dynasties. Participant P11 noted that political dynasties recycle the same ideas and policies because leadership remains within the same family. This leads to a lack of fresh perspectives and innovative solutions for the city's problems. This suggests that political dynasties may contribute to stagnation in governance, as new leaders with different approaches and ideas struggle to gain political traction.

Overall, the responses show that while political dynasties remain deeply rooted in the political landscape of Dumaguete City, voters have mixed feelings about their influence. Some recognize political families' stability and experience, but others see them as a barrier to proper democratic choice and progress. Consequently, the study reveals that voters in Dumaguete City have diverse opinions on political dynasties and their influence on elections. Some voters feel that political families provide experienced leadership, while others believe they limit fair competition and new ideas. Despite these dynasties, many voters emphasize the importance of a candidate's qualifications, integrity, and genuine commitment to community improvement when making their electoral choices. This suggests that while political dynasties are influential, voters are increasingly aware of assessing candidates based on merit rather than family ties.

This study aligns with recent research examining political dynasties' role in elections. For instance, Dulay et al. (2023) analyzed the 2022 Philippine presidential election, highlighting how historical continuity and family identity contributed to the victory of Bongbong Marcos. They stated that political dynasties continue to dominate Philippine politics, with approximately 80% of Congress and over 50% of local government positions held by dynastic politicians. Additionally, a 2024 article in *The Guardian* discussed the enduring power of political dynasties in Asia, noting that influential families often maintain control across generations, which can limit political competition. This resonates with the perceptions of Dumaguete City voters who acknowledge the advantages and drawbacks of such familial political dominance. Conversely, some studies present differing perspectives. An article by Pedroletti (2024) in *Le Monde* from September 2024 highlighted the emergence of movements in Southeast Asia challenging the dominance of political dynasties, which highly indicate a push toward more democratic practices. Similarly, reports from the anticipation surrounding the Philippines' 2025 midterm elections suggest a growing public sentiment against entrenched political families, with voters increasingly supporting candidates based on merit rather than lineage (Lema & Flores, 2024).

#### 4.0 Conclusion

The findings from the present study in Dumaguete City indicate that while political dynasties remain a significant force in local elections, there is a discernible shift among voters toward prioritizing candidate qualifications over familial ties. This evolving mindset reflects a broader trend in the Philippines, where citizens are becoming more critical of entrenched political families and more supportive of merit-based leadership. However, the enduring presence of political dynasties suggests that systemic factors, such as economic disparities and limited access to political resources for non-dynastic candidates, continue to perpetuate their dominance. Addressing these underlying issues is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and competitive political environment.

Hence, to promote a more inclusive and democratic electoral process, it is essential to encourage voter education programs that evaluate candidates based on their qualifications, platforms, and commitment to public service. Implementing stricter regulations on political dynasties could also ensure fairer competition. Fostering a political culture that values transparency and accountability can empower voters to make informed decisions, ultimately strengthening the democratic fabric of communities like Dumaguete City. Furthermore, supporting grassroots political movements and providing platforms for independent candidates can diversify the political landscape. Encouraging civic engagement and participation, especially among the youth, can lead to a more vibrant democracy where leadership is determined by competence and integrity rather than lineage. Moreover, this study has several significant ramifications for Philippine local governance policy and practice. Initially, electoral changes that reduce political families' advantages in campaign funding may help level the playing field for independent candidates. To improve accountability, local government entities should implement transparency procedures that mandate the disclosure of family ties amongst public servants. Finally, to foster leadership based on qualifications rather than familial relationships, political parties must set up stronger internal democratic procedures. Together,



these actions could fortify democratic institutions and provide more opportunities for political engagement in areas where political dynasties hold sway.

## 5.0 Contribution of Authors

This research paper is authored solely by the researcher, who independently conducted all aspects of the study, including conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and writing.

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## 7.0 Conflicts Of Interest

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