

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**POLITICAL PATRONAGE AND
POVERTY ERADICATION
PROGRAM IN SABAH**

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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

This research explores the influence of political patronage on the design, implementation, and outcomes of poverty eradication programs in the state of Sabah, guided by three research objectives. The first objective is to investigate the interplay between political patronage and poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level. The second is to explore how the patron network influences the prioritization of interests within poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level. The third is to explore how the rent-seeking behaviour affected the implementation and outcomes of poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level. To make sense of this reality, the study integrates three theoretical perspectives, neo-patrimonialism, institutionalism, and patrimonialism into a single analytical framework. This study employed a qualitative case study, with data collected using purposive sampling techniques and the semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used as the primary method of data collection, while thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns of patronage that underpin the study's findings. The results indicate that the dynamics of political patronage significantly contribute to the challenges in coordinating and implementing poverty eradication programs in Sabah. The findings reveal how political patronage leads to substantial obstacles, including the emergence of patronage networks, rent-seeking in policy implementation, manipulation of development projects, unequal distribution of resources and benefits, institutional weaknesses and rentier opportunities, politics of staying poor, challenges in coordination and implementation, federalism-related political tensions, sweeping political power, uneven development, dependence on political actors, power imbalances in development projects, power dynamics in federal-state relations, resource allocation driven by network interests, bureaucratic control, and elements of the resource curse. Collectively, these findings explain why Sabah remains one of the poorest states in Malaysia.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations

BA	Barisan Alternative
BERJAYA	Parti Bersatu Rakyat Jelata
BERSATU	Parti Bersatu Sabah
BN	Barisan National
DAP	Democratic Action Party
FFP	Future Forward Party
GST	Goods and Services Tax
HDB	Housing and Development Board
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISA	Internal Security Act
JPN	Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Sabah
LDPR	Laos People's Democratic Republic
LGTS	Lembaga Tabung Getah Sabah
MCA	Malaysia Chinese Association
MDGs	Millenium Development Goals
MIC	Malaysia Indian Congress
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order
NEP	New Economic Policy
PAD	People Alliance for Democracy
PAP	People Action Party
PAS	Party Islam Se-Malaysia
PBS	Parti Bersatu Sabah

PH	Pakatan Harapan
PH+	Pakatan Harapan Plus
PKR	Party Keadilan Rakyat
PN	Perikatan Nasional
PPRP	Palang Pracharath Party
PR	Pakatan Rakyat
PTP	Phue Thai Party
SCA	Sabah Chinese Association
SEDCO	Sabah Economic Development Corporation
SOEs	State Owned Enterprise
TRT	Thai Rak Thai Party
UDD	United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UN	United Nation
UPKO	United Party Kadazan Organization
USNO	United Sabah National Organization
WARISAN	Party Warisan Sabah

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of Political Patronage in Southeast Asia

Political patronage can serve as a foundational element in developing a country and driving economic growth, several scholars argue that it is a primary factor in state deterioration (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2001; Alam & Sujarwoto, 2017; Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Bearfield, 2009; Browne, 2022; Desai, 2011; Godfrey & Yu, 2014; Orlando & Suffian, 2023; Wilson, 1961).

Historically, political patronage was seen as largely confined to Mediterranean and Latin American contexts. It is defined as a specific form of dyadic (two-person) ties characterized by an instrumental friendship. In this relationship, an individual of higher socioeconomic status (the patron) utilizes their influence and resources to provide protection and benefits to a person of lower status (the client).

In return, the client reciprocates by offering general support, loyalty, and personal services. Essentially, this system functions as a reciprocal exchange of security and resources intended to consolidate mutual support (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2012; Brown, 2020; Titeca, 2006).

Analysts explain that political patronage is frequently exploited by various political actors, including presidents, legislators, and both national and local party leaders (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Bayart, 2014; Brown, 2020; Gordin et al., 2001; Orlando & Suffian, 2023; Piliavsky, 2024). The concept is often considered synonymous with pork barrelling, as it is fundamentally associated with the targeted distribution of public resources, such as government jobs, pay raises, and discretionary allowances (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984; Gordin, 2001; Oliveros, 2013; Piliavsky, 2024; Powell, 1987). Scholars define political patronage through various conceptual lenses. Broadly, it refers to a system where patrons (political elites) identify the public as their clients. Many scholars emphasize the significance of this relationship in the distribution of benefits by the patron in direct exchange for political support and economic sustainability (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Browne, 2022; Hopkin, 2006; Wilson, 1961).

Furthermore, research highlights the patron-client relationship as a strategic platform used by "political bosses" to reward party loyalists (Apriliyanti, 2023; Brown et al., 2020; James, 2006; Scott, 1972; Sorauf, 1956). In this context, the exchange functions as a circular flow of resource allocation: parties provide access and resources to voters, who in turn provide the necessary electoral support to maintain the parties' power (Brown et al., 2020).

Research conducted across 22 countries from five distinct regions indicates that the practice of political patronage varies significantly across the globe (Kopecký et al., 2012; 2016; Kopecký, Mair, & Spirova, 2012). However, regardless of the specific definition applied, patronage is consistently characterized by the strategic distribution of resources. It is often rooted in political tradition and historical inheritance, such as established party systems or the "politics of the belly", a system where power is maintained through the redistribution of patronage-based resources (Scott, 1972a, 1972b; Piattoni, 2002; Scott et al., 1975; Smith, 2003; Reno, 2003; Maye, 2017).

Existing literature on political patronage highlights the politicization of civil services, government agencies, and statutory bodies. Scholars focus on several key areas, including administrative traditions, public service delivery, and the mechanics of vote-buying. Furthermore, research explores how patronage facilitates profit-seeking, business negotiations, and shifts in power during the transition of ruling political parties (Dahlström, 2015; Gist et al., 2021; Gomez, 1997, 2012; Jomo & Gomez, 1999; Jomo et al., 2004; Kreuzer, 2020; Lewis, 2009; Oliveros, 2013; Painter & Peters, 2010; Peters, 2005; Siddiquee & Zafarullah, 2001; Tapsell, 2020).

In the Latin American context, political patronage is often synonymous with the distribution of public sector jobs to supporters in exchange for political services. This system persists because society generally believes that employment security is tied to the electoral success of incumbent politicians (Khan, 1998; Kopecký et al., 2016; Oliveros, 2013b). In practice, while patrons distribute jobs to their clients (supporters), this exchange is not always guaranteed or universal (Calvo & Murillo, 2004; Dixit & Londregan, 1996; Fernando Medina & Stokes, 2002; Morgan & Várdy, 2007; Robinson & Verdier, 2013; von Soest & Wahman, 2015). This dynamic often results in an unequal exchange relationship between the patron and the client (Eisenstadt, 2017; Coulborn, 1956; Lande, 1968; Powell, 1970). Consequently, the interactions between these parties reflect and reinforce significant disparities in relative wealth, power, and

social status (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Gherghina & Volintiru, 2017; Kaufmann, 1972; Khan, 1998; Lande, 1964; Linch & McCormack, 1964; Orlando & Suffian, 2023b; Powell, 1974; Scott, 1972; Villanueva & Salazar, 2015).

A client is defined as an individual who enters into an exchange relationship that they are unable to fully reciprocate. In this dynamic, the patron is often in a position to unilaterally supply essential goods and services required for the survival and well-being of the client and their family. This includes physical protection, employment, access to education, and food security during times of crisis.

By acting as a monopolist over these critical needs, the patron is in an ideal position to demand strict compliance from those seeking access to these scarce resources. Consequently, the client becomes fundamentally bound to the patron through a sense of obligation and dependency.

Debates surrounding patronage reveal the prevalence of the "backer system" (often referred to as the *padrino* system), characterized by the appointment of individuals to specific positions regardless of their professional credentials. This practice is inherently advantageous to the appointing official, as personal or familial links become the primary foundation for decision-making (Teehankee, 2012, 2020, 2022). Scholars and political economists argue that these patronage practices have long existed in the Philippines, where the "backer system" remains deeply entrenched within the nation's political and administrative structures (Anastacio, 2022).

Consequently, due to the existence of complex networks involving political clans, clientelistic ties, and political machinery, patronage has long played a central role in Southeast Asian nations, most notably the Philippines. In these contexts, political parties and candidates generally rely on the conditional distribution of resources, a practice defined as patronage to mobilize supporters and voters. While patronage is often classified as a deeply rooted political culture, it is also described as "illusive," as it is frequently framed as a negative or corrosive element within the national political system (Teehankee, 2022b; Villanueva & Salazar, 2015b). Ultimately, the distribution of state resources has remained an enduring feature of Philippine local politics, where the term "patronage" is frequently used interchangeably with clientelism (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Teehankee, 2022b).

While the concepts are similar, scholarly arguments have evolved to differentiate between the two terms based on the patron's formal position and the classification of

the resources involved. The primary distinction lies in the patron's specific point of access. In patronage, the patron must occupy a formal position that provides direct access to state resources (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Teehankee, 2012, 2022a; Villanueva & Salazar, 2015a). This implies that the patron is an individual, whether an elected politician or an appointed official who utilizes government assets to maintain the relationship.

Conversely, in clientelism, the patron may or may not hold a formal position of authority. Instead, they may rely on unorthodox methods of exchange, utilizing personal wealth, party-specific resources, or other informal channels to secure support (Teehankee, 2012; Villanueva & Salazar, 2015a). Thus, while patronage is strictly tied to the machinery of the state, clientelism can operate through private or non-state avenues.

1.1.1 Philippines

The foundation of political patronage in the Philippines relies heavily on the traditional cultural value of reciprocity, known as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude). This concept describes a situation in which an individual is deeply indebted to another for a favor or service rendered (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Kaut, 1961; Teehankee, 2022a). At its core, *utang na loob* functions as a binding mechanism of reciprocity that can manifest in various ways, whether directly or indirectly toward a benefactor, and through either implicit or explicit expectations (Alspach, 2009; Mathews & Green, 2010; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000).

Political analysts describe *utang na loob* as a way of expressing appreciation for another person's or group's good deeds, serving as a social mandate to respond appropriately to such kindness (Cohen, 2006; Mathews & Green, 2010). In a political context, this cultural obligation often translates into unwavering loyalty and electoral support for a patron who has provided assistance to a client.

Because *utang na loob* is deeply embedded as a shared cultural value among Filipinos, it is considered essential for maintaining relationships with those who have demonstrated good deeds or intentions. This sense of "indebtedness" goes beyond simple gratitude; it suggests that a person's behavior must reflect the goodness they received (Deloso, 2007). In this context, reciprocating a kind act is more significant

than simply saying "thank you", it is seen as a way to bring out the inherent goodness of the recipient.

Political analysts explain that a direct link and exchange exists between the patron and the client within this framework. When a patron directly distributes resources to a client, the client becomes socially and morally indebted (*utang na loob*) to that patron. This cultural debt of gratitude is then leveraged into sustained political loyalty (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Teehankee, 2022a).

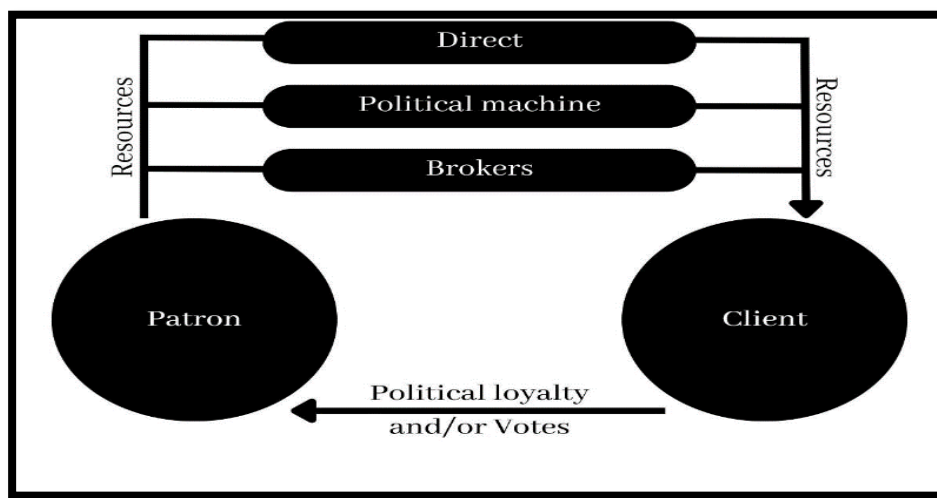


Figure 1.1 Traditional Cultural Values Of Reciprocity, Or Utang Na Loob Enriquez, 1994

The organizational platform used to facilitate patronage is commonly referred to as a political machine (see Figure 1.1). In the rural Philippines, patron-client relationships have evolved to become increasingly impersonal and indirect, driven largely by shifts in economics and technology. As a result, the traditionally deep-seated reciprocal relationship between leaders (patrons) and followers (clients) has shifted toward a "transactional or contractual" model. Within this framework, the patron utilizes the political machinery to provide short-term material benefits in direct exchange for the clients' votes (Hicken, 2001; Teehankee, 2022a).

The practices within patron-networks in the Philippines encourage the establishment of brokers or rent-seekers who act as mediators between the client and the patron. In these hierarchical structures, a rent-seeker functions as a patron to "lower-tiered clients" by distributing benefits received from an "upper-tiered patron." This

layered system is particularly common in situations where a primary patron manages a vast number of clients (Hezri & Hasan, 2006; Kristiana, 2020; Memon, 2000; Teehankee, 2020).

These mediators are vital actors upon whom political parties, incumbents, and candidates depend; they allow political elites to target the distribution of benefits while simultaneously monitoring voter participation. Because they control access to resources, these brokers possess the power to mobilize the public, influencing them "to vote or not to vote" for a particular candidate or party. The emergence of these rent-seekers has transformed the traditional patron-client dyad (two-person) into a triad or a pyramidal network. While these relations have become increasingly complex, they maintain the fundamental essence of political patronage at their core (Aspinall et al., 2018; Machado, 1974; Muñoz, n.d.; Nowak & Snyder, 1974; Teehankee, 2022a; Walter, 1984).

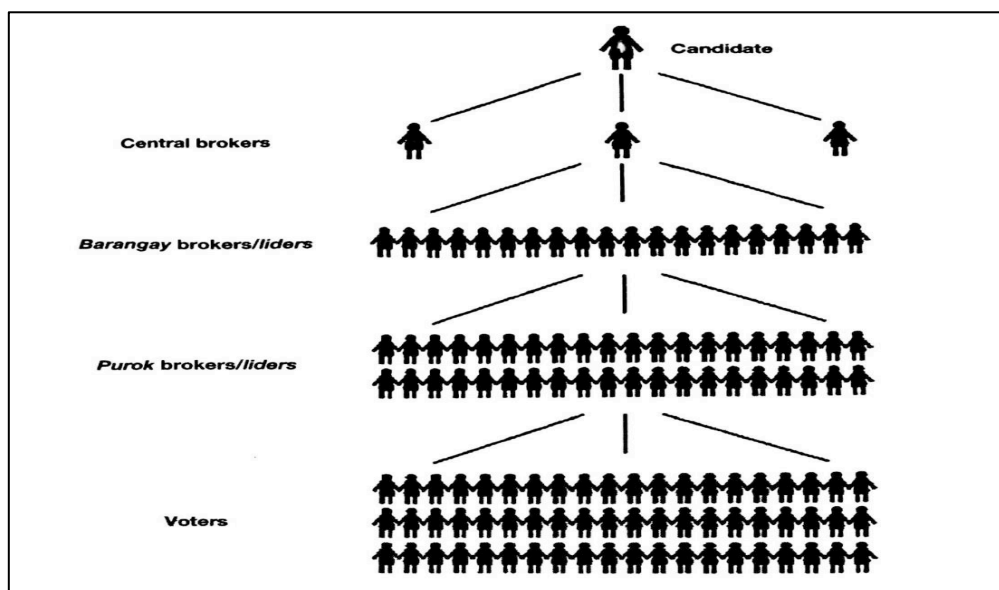


Figure 1.2 Brokerage Of Rent Seeker Structure In Philippines (Aspinall et al., 2018; Teehankee, 2022a)

In this dynamic, clients may interact with their patrons only occasionally or perhaps never at all; instead, the two are connected by a sophisticated chain of brokers (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Aspinall et al., 2018; Kaufmann et al., 2003; Lande, 1974; Powell, 1970). These clientelist systems extend from the heights of national politics down to the municipal level, often forming highly complex structures.

Within this pyramid, votes and other forms of political allegiance flow upward, while those at the apex produce, control, and distribute resources to the bottom. Consequently, national patrons rely heavily on local brokers who possess strong reputations and are well-integrated into their communities. These brokers are typically influential local figures, such as municipal government officials, prominent landowners, established businesspeople, or other notable community leaders (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023; Aspinall et al., 2018; Khan, 1998a; Nye, 1967; Teehankee, 2022a).

In contrast, within the Indochinese and broader Mainland Southeast Asian context, encompassing countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand, the concept of political patronage is frequently linked to extractive practices. These practices are associated with systemic corruption, vote-buying, and factionalism, often exacerbated by the "resource curse" and the dynamics of rural and money politics. Specifically in Thailand, these networks are anchored by provincial bosses (*jao pho*) and vote-canvassing (*hua khanaen*) networks (Agiros, 2001; Anek, 1996; Anyarat, 2011; Bowie, 2008; Callahan & McCargo, 1996; Chambers, 2005; Hicken, 2002; Jakkrit, 2013; Kasian, 2006; Khan, 1998a; McVey, 2001; Myrdal, 1968; Nelson, 2007; Okey, 1994; Pasuk & Sungsit, 1996; Prajak, 2013; Sombat, 1993; Viengrat, 2015; Walker, 2009).

The terms of exchange within patron-client networks are inherently complex (Kauffman & Kraay, 2001; Kauffman et al., 2002; Mauro, 1995). The varying positions of actors within the state and their respective bargaining powers reflect the asymmetrical structures of these networks. In the context of Thai politics, this is often characterized by the abuse of power, systemic corruption, and the distribution of economic rents to cronies and family members.

The existence of these rents and the pervasive process of rent-seeking are widely considered to create significant distortions in market efficiency. By diverting resources away from productive uses and into the hands of political favorites, these practices ultimately reduce the net benefits to society (Bhagwati, 1982; Krueger, 1974).

1.1.2 Thailand

Thailand has experienced numerous political transitions, shifting from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy, from military dictatorship to electoral democracy, and from civilian rule back to military rule. Throughout these volatile shifts, political patronage has remained a persistent and pervasive feature of the Thai landscape, particularly regarding the strategic distribution of state resources. The evolution of political patronage in Thailand can be categorized into three distinct phases: the pre-1997 phase, the 1997–2014 phase, and the post-2014 phase.

The pre-1997 phase was characterized by a fragmented multi-party system in which numerous small and medium-sized parties competed for parliamentary seats. Because no single party could achieve a clear majority or political dominance, coalition governments were frequently formed and just as quickly dissolved, leading to a period of low political stability. During this era, political parties and politicians relied heavily on patronage to secure electoral victories and maintain fragile alliances. They actively recruited and outsourced their campaigning to extensive networks of local government bureaucrats, locally elected officials, and community leaders. These intermediaries mobilized voters by distributing cash, favors, and jobs, or by providing privileged access to government resources all in exchange for political support.

During this period, political parties and politicians utilized patronage to co-opt influential elites and civil society actors, integrating them into the party structure or the state apparatus. This was achieved by offering specific privileges, such as public appointments, prestigious awards, or scholarships.

However, political parties and candidates in this phase lacked significant ideological or policy differentiation. Consequently, their patron-client networks remained largely personalistic, fragmented, and opportunistic. Because these connections were based on individual benefits rather than shared programs, party-voter linkages were weak and fluid, resulting in a low level of party institutionalization (ISEAS, 2023).

The 1997–2014 phase was defined by the adoption of the 1997 Constitution, a landmark reform aimed at professionalizing the political system and curbing the influence of patronage and money politics. This "People's Constitution" introduced a mixed-member proportional representation system, which increased the proportion of

party-list seats relative to constituency seats in Parliament. Furthermore, it imposed stricter regulations on party registration, membership, and campaign financing to encourage the development of more stable, policy-oriented parties

To ensure accountability, the constitution strengthened the role of independent oversight agencies, including the Election Commission, the Constitutional Court, and the National Anti-Corruption Commission. These bodies were tasked with monitoring and enforcing the "rules of the game" to prevent electoral fraud. Additionally, this era saw an unprecedented surge in the participation of civil society and social movements, most notably the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) which fundamentally reshaped the political arena. In this new landscape, political parties and politicians were forced to adapt to these structural shifts, with some successfully navigating the reforms while others struggled to maintain their traditional influence.

The most notable example of this transformation was the Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT), founded and led by Thaksin Shinawatra, a former telecommunications tycoon and Prime Minister. The TRT successfully cultivated a strong and loyal base among the rural poor and urban lower-middle class by implementing landmark populist policies. These included the universal healthcare scheme (the "30-baht" program), the village fund, the farmers' debt moratorium, and the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) initiative.

Simultaneously, the TRT expanded and consolidated its patronage networks by co-opting local politicians, bureaucrats, business leaders, and the media into the party or state apparatus. In exchange, the party provided various benefits and privileges, such as government contracts, licenses, subsidies, and political protection. This strategy allowed the TRT to secure landslide victories in the 2001 and 2005 elections, effectively dominating the political landscape.

However, this centralization of power triggered fierce resistance from traditional elites, including the military, the judiciary, and the urban middle class. These groups accused the TRT of systemic corruption, abuse of power, and disloyalty to the monarchy, eventually leading to a deep political polarization in the country. The conflict between the TRT and its opponents sparked a series of severe political crises, including the 2006 military coup, the 2008 judicial dissolution of the TRT and its successor parties, the 2010 violent crackdown on UDD protesters, and the 2014 military

coup. This prolonged friction deeply polarized Thai society, manifesting in the rivalry between the "Red Shirts" (pro-TRT/pro-Shinawatra) and the "Yellow Shirts" (anti-TRT/establishment-leaning). During this period, political parties and their actors became increasingly ideological and policy-driven. Their patronage networks transformed as well, becoming more organized, centralized, and durable. Consequently, party-voter linkages grew stronger and more stable, leading to a notably higher degree of party institutionalization compared to previous eras (ISEAS, 2023).

The post-2014 phase is characterized by the return of military rule under the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha. Following the coup, the NCPO implemented a series of stringent measures designed to suppress political parties and neutralize the influence of established politicians. These actions included the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution, a comprehensive ban on political activities, and the systematic detention and intimidation of political activists and critics. A central pillar of this era was the drafting of the 2017 Constitution, which was specifically engineered to diminish the power of political parties while entrenching the influence of the military and the state bureaucracy.

To achieve this, the new constitution introduced a Mixed-Member Apportionment (MMA) system. This electoral shift significantly reduced the number of party-list seats, which had previously favored large, centralized parties and increased the emphasis on constituency seats. Additionally, it imposed even more rigorous regulations on party registration, membership, and funding, creating high hurdles for political mobilization outside of state-sanctioned channels.

The 2017 Constitution further consolidated power by establishing a 250-member appointed Senate, which was granted the pivotal authority to vote for the Prime Minister. Moreover, the NCPO was given the power to appoint members to key independent agencies, such as the Election Commission, the Constitutional Court, and the National Anti-Corruption Commission. Effectively allowing the military to control the monitoring and enforcement of the "rules of the game."

This legal framework also significantly curtailed the participation and representation of civil society and progressive movements, such as the Future Forward Party (FFP) and the People's Movement. In this restrictive environment, political parties have been forced to navigate a hostile landscape, with some facing far greater challenges than others.

The most prominent example is the Pheu Thai Party (PTP), the successor to the TRT. Although the PTP maintains a large, loyal base among the rural poor and urban lower-middle class, it has encountered systemic legal and political obstacles. These include the dissolution of its allied parties, the strategic defection of its members, the disqualification of its candidates, and the ongoing harassment of its supporters. Despite these hurdles, the PTP managed to win the most seats in the 2019 election; however, it was ultimately blocked from forming a government due to the combined intervention of the military-aligned Senate and the judiciary.

The Pheu Thai Party (PTP) currently faces dual pressure from both the establishment and a changing electorate. On one side, it is challenged by the Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP)—a military-backed vehicle designed to sustain General Prayut's premiership through state-aligned resources. On the other, it faces the Future Forward Party (FFP) (and its successor, Move Forward), a progressive force that prioritizes democratic reform and social justice over traditional material exchanges.

Furthermore, the PTP must navigate shifting voter preferences. A growing segment of the population, particularly young and urban voters, is increasingly driven by programmatic issues such as human rights, socioeconomic inequality, and environmental sustainability, rather than traditional patronage. This shift is mirrored in the methods of political mobilization; the rise of social media and digital platforms has created more accessible and interactive spaces for engagement, bypassing the need for the physical "brokers" of traditional patronage networks.

In this current phase, political parties and actors find themselves significantly more constrained by the military-bureaucratic apparatus. As traditional patronage networks are disrupted or diminished by these new legal and digital realities, party-voter linkages have become more volatile, leading to a decline in formal party institutionalization.

Thailand's political history has been significantly shaped by military intervention and pervasive corruption since the coup of November 1947 (James, 2010). A major point of criticism involves the extensive leakage of the national budget, which stems from both political and bureaucratic corruption, as well as poorly designed socioeconomic policies. Furthermore, while formal democratic processes have been frequently interrupted by military coups, "money politics" has emerged as the standard modus operandi of the party-political process (Sayeed, 2004; Siamwalla & Christensen,

1993). Consequently, a substantial portion of the country's resources and efforts is dedicated to the creation, maintenance, and transfer of economic rents to elite groups.

The transfer of resources in the form of bribes often results in a significant reduction of social value. Theoretically, bribes could be viewed as "pure transfers" that simply redistribute wealth without diminishing the total economic pool. However, in practice, these transfers create systemic inefficiencies. By 1996, immediately preceding the Asian Financial Crisis, Thailand ranked as the sixth worst country globally in terms of income distribution, surpassed only by five Latin American nations.

The failure to address this increasing disparity between the wealthy and the poor has contributed to a severe imbalance in the control of national wealth. This concentration of resources has placed Thailand among the most unequal nations; the wealthiest 40% of the Thai population controlled 77% of the country's wealth, while the remaining 60% of the population, the lower-income group controlled only 23% (James, 2010).

In more typical scenarios, bribes from industrialists or other social actors to state officials represent a social cost of varying magnitude, as they inevitably reduce collective social wealth. This occurs primarily because the bribe-giver might otherwise have invested that capital into productive ventures; instead, the transfer to an official typically results in non-productive consumption, potentially diminishing the long-term value of the economy.

Simply put, the development of political patronage in Thailand has been shaped by shifts in the political system and the broader national context. These changes have profoundly influenced the strategies and behaviors of political parties and politicians, as well as the evolving responses and expectations of both voters and society at large. Political patronage in Thailand is not a static or monolithic phenomenon; rather, it is a dynamic and contested one that reflects the shifting political and social realities of the country. This system contributes significantly to systemic corruption and exacerbates income disparity by distorting the mechanisms of wealth creation. As illustrated in the flow of resources from social actors to state officials (see Figure 1.3), this cycle reinforces a structure where economic gains are captured by a few rather than distributed across society.

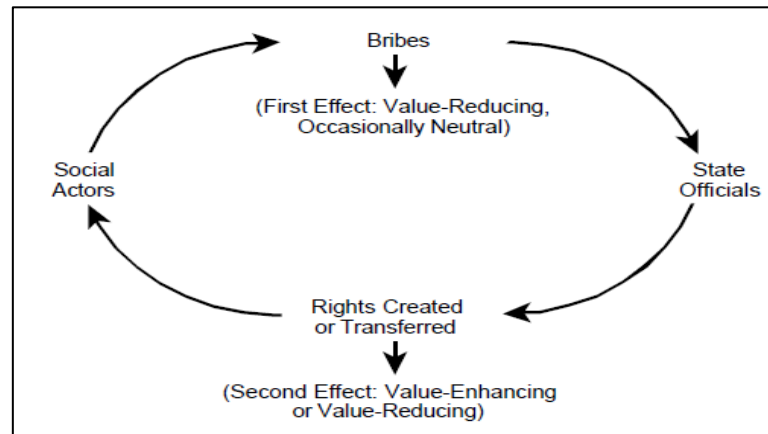


Figure 1.3 The Effects Associated With Rents Distribution And Corruption Krueger et al., 1994

The economic consequence of this system is the creation or reallocation of rights by state officials as a quid pro quo for the bribes they receive. Consequently, the rents created and transferred by these officials, often in direct response to such payments, generate a cycle that degrades social values and norms. As long as various forms of corruption persist, the structure and allocation of these rents will continue to coexist alongside them (Khan, 1998a, 1998b, n.d.; Khan & Jomo, 2000a, 2000b).

This dynamic is characterized by complex, bidirectional flows: on one hand, bribes and payoffs move from social actors to state officials; on the other, rights, subsidies, and the allocation of public resources move from officials back to those social actors.

1.1.3 Myanmar

Meanwhile, Myanmar exemplifies the adverse relationship between natural resource revenue and non-democratic political structures, a phenomenon often referred to as the "resource curse." Humphreys et al. (2006) note that access to significant oil and gas wealth allows patrons to successfully repress or co-opt their opposition, thereby avoiding the need to relinquish power through genuine electoral competition.

A broad endowment of natural resources, specifically oil and gas, may impede the development of a country's human capital if the institutional and policy frameworks necessary for equitable distribution are absent (James, 2010; Janar & Dashzevge, 2015; Pick & Thein, 2010; Shaxson, 2007; Sovacool, 2010). In countries afflicted by this

curse, there is a distinct prevalence of vertically integrated patronage politics. This system is typically accompanied by persistent conflict, extreme social inequality, high levels of corruption, and low levels of democratic governance.

International sanctions against Myanmar since 1988 have been predicated on the assumption that economic pressure is the key to resolving the political impasse that allowed the military junta to retain power despite its electoral defeat in 1990. Proponents of these sanctions assume that trade and investment barriers will trigger an economic collapse, thereby clearing the way for a fully-fledged democratic government.

The underlying logic is that sanctions cause widespread economic hardship, which in turn acts as a catalyst for a spontaneous and successful popular uprising. However, this strategy often overlooks the resilience of patronage networks: the ruling elite are largely insulated from such hardship through their centralized control of corruption revenue and resource rents. Since 1988, while most of the international community has utilized sanctions as the primary tool for prompting sociopolitical change, regional powers, including ASEAN members, China, India, Japan, and South Korea, have generally maintained different levels of engagement.

This perspective aligns with research from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which suggests that more open trade policies may help ameliorate the negative sociopolitical effects of the resource curse in nations with abundant natural wealth. Consequently, a one-dimensional sanctions policy is often criticized for inadequately accounting for the multifaceted issues that allow the Myanmar regime to maintain its grip on power. Beyond mere economic indicators, several geopolitical and structural factors contribute to this resilience.

Myanmar's strategic relationships, particularly its firm diplomatic support within the United Nations Security Council from China and Russia, provide a critical shield against global pressure. Furthermore, the country's comparative de-linking from the global international trade regime, ironically reinforced by the sanctions themselves, has forced the regime to develop alternative survival mechanisms. This insulation is bolstered by a resource-rich agricultural subsistence economy that provides a baseline of domestic stability, making the state less vulnerable to the intended consequences of Western economic isolation.

In the Southeast Asian context, the exchange of resources within patron-client networks is inextricably linked to rent-seeking and systemic corruption (World Bank, 1997; Kaufmann & Kraay, 2004). This relationship suggests that corruption is not merely a byproduct of these networks but is often the very mechanism through which they operate. The potential for such practices exists wherever power is entrusted, meaning that any government body, organization, or institution remains vulnerable. Specifically, officials at any level may be subject to undue influence, exercising their authority to secure benefits for themselves, their families, their friends, or their business partners (Fox, 2006; Fox, 2018).

Political corruption generates a multitude of undesirable consequences, including a significant reduction in national revenue and a declining ability to fund essential services for the public. Furthermore, these practices erode the efficiency of government administration and simultaneously undermine the legitimacy of ruling political parties (Alatas, 1990; Fox, 2005, 2015, 2018; Mahanty & Dressler, 2014; Sayalath & Creak, 2018; Transparency International, 2001). This grave situation often compels governments, whether coercive or willful, to attempt to keep corruption within certain bounds. This includes the government of Laos, which is governed by the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) ruling party.

One of the most significant challenges in combating corruption lies in moving society toward recognizing it as a systemic issue and taking collective action. In many contexts, it is taken for granted that an individual in power should benefit their family members or friends. Such actions are often no longer viewed as unusual or immoral; instead, nepotism is excused because individuals recognize that they would likely behave the same way if they held a similar position.

Consequently, this behavior is normalized within the social fabric. Even when such actions are recognized as excessive, criticism is often muted by a pervasive fear of the perpetrator's power. Over time, this dynamic fosters a "culture of corruption" that becomes widely accepted, making reform increasingly difficult to initiate from within the community.

1.1.4 Laos

The situation in Laos differs significantly from traditional models of political patronage, as the country's deep association with political corruption has been a primary factor driving its underdevelopment (Alatas, 1990). The most prominent and prevalent forms of political corruption in Laos involve institutionalized predatory behaviors across all levels of government. These practices include officials accepting payments to overlook illegal trade, affecting both imports and exports, as well as collusion with officials to disregard environmental regulations or reduce taxes and rents. Furthermore, bribes are frequently demanded for the issuance of essential documents, particularly those required to establish a business or register land titles.

The corruption also extends to the extortion of regular payments by businesses to the ruling political party or to influential individual party members in exchange for political "protection" and kickbacks for the awarding of government contracts. Financial mismanagement is also evident in the obtaining of loans from state lending banks by powerful individuals or through state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that are not repaid. Moreover, there is a recurring misappropriation of government funds earmarked for specific projects or civil service salaries for individual gain. At the bureaucratic level, payments are often made for political favors, particularly regarding employment or promotion, while a wide range of petty corruption is carried out by low-level civil servants and the police (Government of the LPDR, 2003).

Because Laos is a landlocked country with extensive land frontiers that are nearly impossible to fully monitor, it is perhaps not surprising that smuggling has become a primary concern for the state. The principal items smuggled out of the country include timber destined for Vietnam and Thailand, livestock for the Thai market, and wildlife primarily for China, though also for Thailand and Vietnam, where it is used for both internal consumption and on-shipment to Chinese diaspora communities (Nooren & Claridge, 2001; Fox, 2015).

Conversely, the most significant goods smuggled into the country comprise petroleum products, cigarettes, alcohol, and various manufactured items from Thailand, Vietnam, and China. This smuggling activity encompasses both legal goods, such as cigarettes and manufactured products and illegal contraband, including drugs and protected wildlife. While both types of illicit trade undermine state authority, it is the

smuggling of legal goods that results in a direct and significant loss of government revenue. Furthermore, smuggling operations involving Vietnam and China often entail deep-seated collusion between the Lao military and their Vietnamese or Chinese counterparts.

In the case of Thailand, the majority of smuggling activities occur across the Mekong River, which serves as the primary geographical border between the two nations. Much of this illicit trade is facilitated through deep-seated family connections, as many extended Lao families have members residing in Northeast Thailand. These cross-border networks are often sustained by the complicity of local militia and officials, who are either paid off to look toward the other side or are directly implicated in the operations themselves.

Historical attempts to interdict cross-Mekong smuggling in the vicinity of Vientiane through the deployment of the army ultimately proved to be a failure. While smuggling was initially reduced under military pressure, it returned to previous levels within a remarkably short period. This resilience can be attributed to two main factors: first, smugglers quickly identified and utilized new crossing points along the porous river border; and second, a *modus vivendi* was eventually established between the smugglers and the soldiers. This arrangement essentially redirected the flow of bribes to new recipients within the military ranks, ensuring the continuation of the trade under a revised structure of patronage.

Subsequently, political corruption and collusion are most likely to develop under authoritarian political regimes, where leadership cannot be freely criticized or replaced through established political means. Single-party states are particularly prone to developing entrenched cultures of corruption, as corruption often feeds directly on concentrated power. States where the preferences or makeup of the electorate ensure that a dominant party is repeatedly returned to office, such as in the cases of Japan, Malaysia, or Singapore face similar potential dangers. In these instances, the risk of systemic abuse necessitates that strong anti-corruption measures be institutionalized through law, a practice common in most established democracies.

Subsequently, political corruption and collusion are most likely to develop under authoritarian regimes, which cannot be freely criticized or replaced by political means. Single-party states are particularly prone to developing cultures of corruption, as corruption feeds on power. States where the electorate's preferences ensure a

dominant party is repeatedly elected such as Japan, Malaysia, or Singapore face similar potential dangers. In such cases, strong anti-corruption measures must be institutionalized through law, as is common in most democracies. While Singapore has successfully minimized corruption despite being dominated by a single party, it remains a notable exception; most other single-party states have been far less successful, even when stringent anti-corruption laws are enacted.

1.1.5 Indonesia

Indonesia possesses a diverse and complex political system involving a wide array of actors, institutions, and practices. A prominent feature of Indonesian politics is the prevalence of patronage, a form of exchange where political actors provide benefits or favors to supporters in return for loyalty or votes.

This patronage manifests in various forms, including the allocation of public sector jobs, government contracts, subsidies, licenses, or preferential access to services. Depending on the specific context, the actors involved, and the existing mechanisms for accountability and control, patronage can have significantly different impacts on the quality of democracy, governance, and national development.

According to several sources, patronage politics in Indonesia is fundamentally tied to the distribution of state resources, particularly within the natural resource sectors such as petroleum, minerals, forests, water, palm oil, and fertile land. This system is characterized by crony capitalism, collusion, and the "resource curse," where political favors are closely linked to the interests of elite classes (Sumiani, Haslinda, and Lehman, 2007; Lande, 1983; Datta, 2003; Rosser, 2007; Kristiani, 2020; Tanter, 1991; Varkey, 2012). Analysts identify the roots of Indonesian political patronage within the totalitarian regime of President Suharto, which relied on close ties between Chinese Indonesian business interests and military elites.

While the exploitation of natural resources has been a primary driver of revenue and development for Indonesia, it has simultaneously fostered conflict, corruption, and environmental degradation. Various political actors including elites, parties, candidates, and bureaucrats utilize their control over state resources to reward supporters, deter or punish opponents, and maintain their political dominance and legitimacy. In this sense, certain politicians may grant priority or provide special allocations of public housing,

public funds, or public grants to specific groups of voters such as civil servants, grassroots leaders, or ethnic minorities who are perceived as loyal supporters or potential recruits. Additionally, politicians may announce or implement various upgrading programs designed to improve the quality and value of existing public services or infrastructure, including roads, schools, and health facilities. These initiatives are often selectively targeted at constituencies where the ruling party faces stronger competition from opposition parties.

Some politicians may also use the threat of withholding or delaying these upgrading programs to persuade voters to support them, or as a means of punishing constituencies that vote for the opposition. Furthermore, politicians may influence or regulate the activities and agendas of various organizations within society including community organizations, religious groups, cultural associations, sports clubs, or social service agencies by granting or withholding public funds and imposing legal or administrative restrictions.

Beyond financial control, some politicians may co-opt or incorporate leaders and representatives from these groups into the party or state apparatus, offering them various benefits such as public appointments, awards, or scholarships. Consequently, the distribution of state resources is heavily influenced by political considerations and serves as a vital tool of patronage for specific political actors (Varkkey, 2012; Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

However, patronage politics in Indonesia faces significant limitations and challenges, including the rising expectations and demands of citizens, the increasing diversity and complexity of society, and growing competition and criticism from opposition parties and civil society. Additionally, there is a mounting need for transparency and accountability in the utilization of public resources. Consequently, patronage politics in Indonesia is not a static or monolithic phenomenon; rather, it is a dynamic and contested one that reflects the evolving political and social realities of the country.

The ties between the government and Chinese Indonesian business figures, known as "cukong," were established during the 1940s and 1950s, with the Indonesian military playing a pivotal role (Vatikiotis, 1999). These individuals served as informal financiers for the Suharto regime, facilitating the government's economic growth objectives. Because they possessed limited independent political influence, the cukong

depended heavily on the regime's support to maintain their enterprises, receiving special treatment and privileges in return.

The government provided these figures with various benefits, including tariff protection, exclusive licensing opportunities, simplified access to government contracts, and access to subsidized loans. Consequently, this arrangement allowed the cukong to expand their businesses and contribute to national economic development while providing essential financial assistance to the regime when required (Rock, 2017).

As the industrial sector became the new focus for development following the windfall from oil revenues, a two-stage process was initiated. This transition began with a shift from import-substituting industrialization toward export-oriented industrialization. Subsequently, the strategy moved toward establishing state-owned companies, upstream industries, and other essential sectors. To successfully develop diverse industries, including fertilizers, cement, paper, steel, and the engineering sector the government collaborated closely with Chinese Indonesian businesses while receiving significant foreign investment and aid (Thee, 2011 cited in Varkkey, 2014). This industrial progress was further complemented by extensive infrastructure development.

Suharto's regime was renowned for its transmigration policy and family planning initiatives, both of which were financially sustained by oil revenues. The transmigration policy played a pivotal role in supporting the expansion of plantation businesses throughout Indonesia, including crops such as coffee, coconut, palm oil, and cocoa. The government also promoted regional development through the "Instruksi Presiden" (Inpres) program, which provided grants to provincial, district, and sub-district governments for rural infrastructure development. Under this scheme, local governments were required to prepare formal plans and budgets, subsequently submitting detailed reports by the end of the fiscal year. This program aimed to enhance the quality and efficiency of local public administration through systematic grant reporting (Thee, 2011).

Meanwhile, in his pursuit of power, Suharto maintained connections with military elites by adhering to the *dwifungsi* (dual function) doctrine. This doctrine outlined the military's dual roles as both a security force and a sociopolitical organization, allowing military elites to become actively involved in national politics

and business enterprises. Generals secured prominent positions within the central administration in Jakarta and occupied leadership roles in every region and smaller district throughout the country. Simultaneously, in the business sector, major state-owned companies such as Pertamina, Tri Usaha Bhakti, and Berdikari were placed under the leadership of military officials (Pepinsky, 2008).

During Suharto's regime, the rentier state implemented three primary practices: repression, patronage, and extensive distributive policies. It is noteworthy that while national and local newspapers rarely discussed state repression, coverage of patronage was more prevalent. This patronage primarily focused on Suharto's relationships with Chinese Indonesian business figures and the military. National newspapers like *Indonesia Raya*, *Expo*, and *Jurnal Ekuin* highlighted the close network between these businessmen and the president, while pro-government outlets like *Berita Yudha* showcased military appointments to civilian positions (Thee, 2001; Pepinsky, 2008).

The third practice, large-scale distributive policies, received significant national attention, though coverage varied in tone. *Kompas* provided a more critical perspective, whereas *Abadi* featured limited reports. In contrast, *Berita Yudha* offered broad, positively worded coverage of these policies. Political patronage significantly impacts the quality of democracy and governance depending on accountability mechanisms. While Singapore is often viewed as a model of stability, it also exhibits features of political patronage regarding state resource distribution. The People's Action Party (PAP) has maintained hegemony since 1965 through electoral engineering, legal restrictions, media control, and the co-optation of elites, using state control to reward supporters and deter opponents (Datta, 2003; Hills, 2006; Vatikiotis, 1999).

In Singapore, a primary platform for political patronage is the management of public housing, a critical issue given that more than 80% of the population resides in flats built and subsidized by the Housing and Development Board (HDB). The HDB operates as a statutory board under the Ministry of National Development, led by a minister from the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). While the HDB allocates flats based on standard eligibility criteria such as income, family size, marital status, and citizenship it also maintains the discretion to grant priority or special allocations to specific groups.

These groups often include civil servants, grassroots leaders, or ethnic minorities, who are frequently perceived as loyal supporters of the PAP or as potential

recruits for the party. By exercising this discretion within a sector that affects the vast majority of the citizenry, the state ensures that the distribution of a fundamental resource remains aligned with broader political objectives. This strategic management of public housing serves as a key mechanism through which the ruling party maintains its social compact and reinforces its political dominance.

Moreover, the HDB implements various upgrading initiatives such as the Home Improvement, Lift Upgrading, and Neighbourhood Renewal Programmes to enhance flat quality and value. These programs are frequently announced during election campaigns and selectively targeted at constituencies where the PAP faces significant opposition. The ruling party also employs the threat of withholding or delaying these upgrades to persuade voters or punish opposition-leaning districts. Consequently, public housing distribution is driven by political considerations, serving as a strategic tool of patronage for the PAP (Chua, 1997; Loh, 2012; Ong, 2017).

On the other hand, political patronage in Singapore is frequently linked to the allocation of public funds and grants to various societal organizations, including community, religious, and cultural associations, as well as sports clubs and social service agencies. While these groups are vital for providing recreational services and fostering civic participation and social cohesion, their access to state funding is often conditional. Specifically, the distribution of these resources depends on the alignment or compliance of these organizations with the policies and interests of the PAP.

The PAP has established an extensive network of grassroots organizations including the People's Association, Community Development Councils, Citizens' Consultative Committees, and Residents' Committees which are state-funded and supervised. These entities are tasked with mobilizing and engaging residents, particularly during electoral periods. Furthermore, the PAP ensures its dominance by appointing members or supporters as leaders and advisors within these organizations, while systematically excluding or marginalizing opposition parties and candidates from these roles.

Furthermore, the PAP influences the agendas of societal organizations, such as religious groups and social service agencies, by granting or withholding public funds or imposing legal and administrative restrictions. The party also co-opts leaders from these groups into the state apparatus, offering benefits like public appointments, awards, or scholarships. Consequently, the distribution of public grants is shaped by

political motives, serving as a strategic tool of patronage for the PAP (Rodan, 2004; Tan, 2012; Lee, 2014).

The PAP utilizes its control over state resources including public housing, funds, and grants to reward supporters, deter opponents, and maintain political dominance and legitimacy across various societal segments. However, this system faces significant challenges, such as rising citizen expectations, an increasingly diverse and complex society, and growing criticism from opposition parties and civil society. Additionally, there is a mounting demand for transparency and accountability in the use of public resources. Consequently, political patronage in Singapore is not a static or monolithic phenomenon; it is a dynamic and contested one that reflects the country's evolving political and social realities.

1.1.6 Malaysia

Malaysia features an intricate political system where patronage is deeply linked to the distribution of state resources, specifically through the lens of coalition and ethnic politics. The modern foundations of this system emerged following the race riots of 13 May 1969. Historically, Malaysia was formed through cooperation between ethnic-based parties led by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) within the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, alongside the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). The BN maintained hegemony by utilizing state resources to reward supporters, punish opponents, and uphold political legitimacy. This patronage system served as a foundation for co-opting elites and civil society actors from various ethnic groups into the coalition by offering benefits such as public appointments, awards, and scholarships. However, the BN eventually faced challenges from alternative political visions. Internal conflicts and rising criticisms culminated in the 13 May 1969 clash between Malays and Chinese, a riot triggered by the 1969 general election results. In that election, the ruling coalition lost significant ground to opposition parties like the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Gerakan, which drew heavy support from Chinese voters. The 13 May riot profoundly reshaped Malaysia's social and political landscape, leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. His successor, Tun Abdul Razak, implemented the New Economic Policy (NEP) to increase the Malay share of the economy and the public

sector while reducing Chinese influence. This era also saw the restructuring of the Barisan Nasional (BN) to incorporate more ethnic parties, eventually triggering the formation of the Barisan Alternatif (BA) as a challenger to BN's dominance. Furthermore, the riots intensified racial polarization and tensions that persist today. As racialization became the foundation of social policy, the Bumiputera Congresses of 1965 and 1968 led by Malay elites pressured the government to intervene in the economy to address expanding inequality (Gomez, 1990).

The first cabinet under Tun Fuad Stephens lasted only until January 1965, following power struggles between UPKO and USNO within the Sabah Alliance in June and December 1964. Upon stepping down as Chief Minister, Tun Fuad Stephens transitioned to the role of Federal Minister of Sabah Affairs and Civil Defence. He was succeeded by Dato Peter Lo of the Sabah Chinese Association (SCA), who served as Chief Minister until Sabah's first direct state election in April 1967 (Institute for Development Studies, 1985).

In the 1967 state election, USNO won 14 seats, UPKO 12, and SCA 5, while independent Yap Pak Leong defeated former Chief Minister Peter Lo. Per the Sabah State Constitution, any party with a clear majority could nominate six additional assembly members. USNO moved swiftly to secure the support of the five SCA members, achieving a majority of 19 out of 32 seats. Consequently, Tun Mustapha was sworn in as Chief Minister by Tun Ahmad Raffae. During his tenure, Mustapha addressed poverty through a unique wealth distribution system established via the Sabah Foundation in 1967 (Institute for Sabah Development Studies, 1986; Mat Kib, 2012).

The Sabah Foundation established the Tun Haji Mustapha's Trust Fund to collect state revenue, primarily from logging activities, which was then distributed as shares to permanent adult residents of Sabah (Orlando, 2021). To combat rural poverty, the USNO government transitioned the state from a self-sufficient to a commercialized agricultural economy. This led to the creation of the Sabah Paddy Board (1967), the Sabah Land Development Board (1969), and the strengthening of the Lembaga Tabung Getah Sabah (LGTS) to guarantee rubber tappers' income.

By 1969, the establishment of the first rubber scrap factory expanded job opportunities for Sabahans (Orlando, 2021). To accelerate industrial and commercial growth under the New Economic Policy (NEP) and encourage native elite participation

in the corporate sector, the Sabah Economic Development Corporation (SEDCO) was formed in 1971. Furthermore, the administration recognized that the long-term eradication of state poverty necessitated a significant investment in education (Orlando, 2021).

Since 1966, the Sabah Foundation has been tasked with improving state education, as mandated by Enactment No. 8 of the Sabah Foundation Enactment (Long, 1978; Mat Kib, 2012). By late 1966, one million dollars in education grants were allocated, starting with annual \$130 scholarships for secondary students across Sabah. The foundation further eased parental burdens by providing textbook loans, milk programs, hostel facilities, and school uniforms (Mat Kib, 2012).

In 1976, the state government transitioned to the Parti Bersatu Rakyat Jelata Sabah (BERJAYA) led by Tun Fuad Stephens. Following his death in the "Double Six" tragedy, leadership passed to Tan Sri Harris Salleh, who prioritized poverty reduction. Under BERJAYA, the state's anti-poverty performance was notable; the poverty rate dropped from 58.3% in 1976 to 41.1% in 1979, and reached 29.2% by 1982 (Institute for Sabah Development Studies, 1986; Abdullah, Hadi & Mustapha, 1986).

After the State Legislative Assembly was dissolved following unprecedented political controversy in 1985, BERJAYA was succeeded by the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), led by the *Huguon Siou*, Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan (Orlando, 2021). The PBS faced a turbulent one-year term from April 1985 to May 1986. As an opposition-led state government, PBS encountered significant bias from the federal administration (Puyok, 2011 cited in Orlando & Suffian, 2023).

The state struggled to distribute resources because the federal government centralized control over state assets, a challenge that persisted until the fall of PBS to the Barisan Nasional (BN) in 1994. This period highlighted the vulnerability of state-level patronage when disconnected from federal backing, as the sweeping power of the center was used to undermine the financial and political autonomy of the Kitingan administration.

The 1994 to 2003 phase was marked by power transitions within the PBS and BN coalitions, culminating in the shift from Mahathir to Abdullah Badawi in 2003. Initially, the PBS lacked a smooth relationship with the UMNO-led federal government. This tension manifested when the PBS withdrew from the BN just days before the October 1990 general election to support Mahathir's rival, Tengku Razaleigh, who was

viewed as a genuine threat to UMNO's Malay vote monopoly. In response, UMNO expanded into Sabah, followed by its partner, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). Tun Mustapha left USNO, won a by-election as an UMNO candidate, and became UMNO's Sabah liaison chief. To bolster his patronage powers, Mustapha was appointed Federal Minister for Sabah Affairs in 1992—a portfolio vacant since the 1970s. Meanwhile, his son, Amir Kahar Tun Mustapha, assumed control of the USNO party (Khoong, 1991; Chin, 2013).

Within a few months of the 1990 parliamentary polls, Pairin was charged with three counts of corruption, while his influential brother, Jeffrey Kitingan, head of the Sabah Foundation, was detained without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for allegedly plotting Sabah's secession. Jeffrey was also charged with corruption involving substantial funds held in Hong Kong. Consequently, ties between Kota Kinabalu and Kuala Lumpur deteriorated rapidly as the federal government pointedly neglected the state. Since 1990, Sabah's economic growth has consistently trailed the national average, leading locals to describe the state's economic hardships as a "political recession" (Awang, 2023).

The PBS-led state government had sixteen months remaining in its term when Pairin dissolved the assembly in February 1994. Several strategic factors motivated this early election. First, Pairin's corruption trial concluded with a 1,800-ringgit fine—just below the 2,000-ringgit threshold that would have disqualified him from public office. This narrow escape was perceived by many as proof that the charges were politically motivated, leading the PBS to anticipate a "sympathy vote" against what was seen as a federal vendetta.

Second, the January 1994 release of Jeffrey Kitingan after two years of detention sparked rumors of a "deal" with Prime Minister Mahathir, positioning Jeffrey as a potential "bridge" between the state and federal governments. Third, Pairin framed the election as a referendum for Sabahans to protest federal plans to redraw the state's electoral boundaries (Institute for Development Studies, 1985). According to PBS, the federal plan to redefine electoral boundaries aimed to consolidate Muslim votes, thereby facilitating UMNO Sabah's rise to power. Strategically, PBS had staged a political "coup" in 1992 by enticing USNO to join its coalition, creating a bloc that controlled 41 of the 48 seats in the State Legislative Assembly, leaving UMNO Sabah with only seven. However, the federally controlled Registrar of Societies soon

deregistered USNO. This move forced a split: six USNO legislators defected to UMNO Sabah, while the remainder joined PBS to contest the 1994 polls as PBS candidates. This series of events underscored the intense legal and political maneuvering used by both state and federal actors to control the legislative majority in Sabah.

The Barisan Nasional (BN) continued utilizing patronage to maintain support, framing its legitimacy through the promotion of democratic values and social justice. The BN campaign centered on the theme that only they possessed the federal resources to restore "development." In the "A New Sabah" manifesto, BN promised significant infrastructure projects, the establishment of the state's first university, and the total eradication of poverty by the turn of the century, aiming to increase the income of all Sabahans.

To counter the PBS accusation that UMNO would "colonize" Sabah, the BN promised that the Chief Minister's post would remain with a Sabahan. To secure non-Muslim and non-Malay support, Mahathir introduced a rotation system where the Chief Ministership would rotate every two years between Malay/Muslim, Kadazan-Dusun, and Chinese leaders. This concession effectively neutralized the PBS argument regarding marginalization. Although the state demanded its abolition in 2001, the rotation system was only officially ended in 2004 under Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Following this, Sabah was governed by the BN for nearly 15 years under Chief Minister Tan Sri Musa Aman. During his tenure, the state government intensified the distribution of resources toward targeted groups. State budget records show that spending was heavily concentrated on the agenda of eradicating "pockets of poverty," further institutionalizing the role of the state as a primary distributor of wealth and patronage.

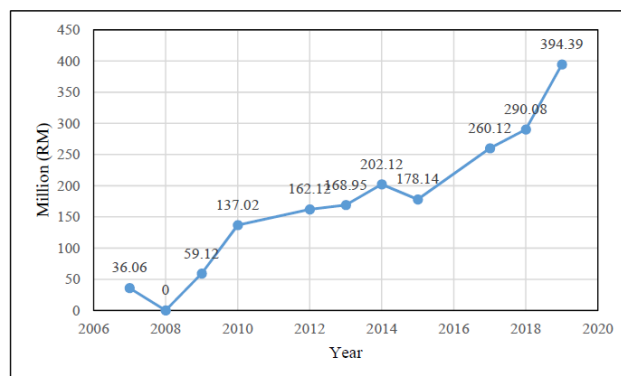


Figure 1.4 The Considerable Amount Of The State Anti-Poverty Programs 2003-2017

Despite historical friction between federal and state authorities, Sabah's administration has consistently focused on distributing resources through various government programs. At the district level, development initiatives specifically targeting the poor are classified as rural development projects. These are generally divided into two main categories: agricultural projects and basic amenities.

Agricultural projects typically include land schemes, crop subsidies, and technical assistance aimed at transitioning subsistence farmers toward commercial viability. Meanwhile, basic amenities projects focus on essential infrastructure such as rural roads, clean water supply, and electricity. This localized distribution of projects allows the government to maintain a direct presence in rural constituencies, ensuring that state resources are converted into visible improvements for the target populations.

1.2 Research Background

Poverty eradication programs are often analyzed as platforms manipulated by political elites to maintain power (Moore, 1999; Luckham et al., 2000; Brown, 2020; Anastacio, 2022). Poverty remains a deeply entrenched socio-economic issue that simultaneously hampers development and serves as a potent tool for political maneuver. Its persistence acts as both a symptom and a cause of systemic inequality, offering a critical lens to analyze power dynamics in societies—particularly those characterized by weak institutions or extractive frameworks (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

Poverty creates a powerful dependency between the disenfranchised and those in authority. Individuals lacking access to food, education, healthcare, and housing are highly vulnerable to external influences. Political actors frequently exploit this vulnerability, positioning themselves as benefactors who provide selective relief, particularly during election cycles. Rather than offering transformative change, such aid is often designed to maintain a cycle of dependency, ensuring enduring political loyalty through a clientelistic bond (Scott, 1972). Political actors manipulate poverty through patronage, distributing resources as rewards for political allegiance rather than based on merit. Analysts widely characterize poverty eradication programs as "products of political processes" rooted in the historical competition between major societal interests (Lipton, 1977; ADB, 2004; Brown, 2020; Orlando, 2021). Consequently, scholars argue that when political elites manage the transfer of state resources, they engage in a patron-client network, granting favors in exchange for electoral support.

Ultimately, the implementation of poverty policies is often dictated by the interests of these patronage networks rather than the objective needs of the poor.

In many cases, poverty eradication programs are deliberately underfunded or poorly implemented, thereby preserving the status quo. Politicians frequently employ promises of development projects or direct financial assistance as campaign strategies, effectively transforming poverty into a bargaining chip rather than addressing it as a systemic issue (Keefer & Khemani, 2005).

Moreover, poverty can be wielded to suppress dissent. Individuals in impoverished conditions often lack the resources to organize, voice opposition, or demand accountability from their leaders. This lack of agency ensures that political actors remain unchallenged, reinforcing cycles of marginalization and disenfranchisement. For instance, poverty-driven voter suppression, whether through intimidation or coercion, ensures that power remains concentrated in the hands of a select few (Bermeo, 2009; Orlando, 2021).

The manipulation of poverty by political actors is often facilitated by extractive institutions that prioritize the concentration of power and resources among elites. These systems exclude the majority from meaningful participation in governance or economic benefits. Rather than fostering inclusive growth, these institutions perpetuate inequality, ensuring that poverty remains a strategic political tool rather than a challenge to be resolved (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

This dynamic has far-reaching consequences. By exploiting poverty, political actors undermine democratic principles, perpetuate corruption, and delay meaningful development. Communities caught in this cycle remain trapped in vulnerability, unable to break free without systemic reforms and the creation of inclusive institutions that prioritize the well-being of all citizens over political expediency.

Ultimately, the true cost of poverty manipulation extends beyond economic stagnation to include the erosion of trust in governance, societal fragmentation, and a massive loss of human potential (Hickey & Bracking, 2005).

Addressing the manipulation of poverty requires transparency, accountability, and a firm commitment to empowering marginalized communities. Policies must be designed to eliminate the structural barriers that hinder social and economic mobility. This shift ensures that poverty alleviation becomes a genuine tool for empowerment rather than a mechanism for political control (World Bank, 2020).

As poverty fosters dependency on political elites particularly when state institutions fail to deliver services equitably, marginalized communities often turn to informal support systems. Politicians frequently exploit this vulnerability by positioning themselves as benefactors, providing selective benefits like food aid, cash transfers, or localized infrastructure in exchange for political loyalty. This process of clientelism effectively ties the survival of impoverished individuals to their political patrons (Scott, 1972).

In this way, poverty serves as a strategic mechanism through which elites consolidate their power. A more impoverished population leads to a greater reliance on these "gatekeepers" for access to essential resources. This dependency effectively discourages political dissent, fostering an environment where votes and loyalty are traded for immediate relief rather than systemic change or institutional accountability. Scholars argue the processes of transferring the poverty eradication programs at the state level linked with the institutional arrangement, it is emphasizing the roles of political elites as a mainly course to influence the efficacy and implementation of the policies and the government programs (Shamsul,1983; Cole, 1998; Hashim, 2002; Aziz, 2015; Hazis, 2015; Brown, 2020; Orlando & Suffian, 2020; Assadullah, Joseph & Chin, 2023). In this sense, the political elites are considered as a 'heart' to determine the successfulness or deterioration of the poverty eradication programs (Ghazali, n.d; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006b; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2011; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2017; Orlando & Suffian, 2023). To put it simply, the good practices of patron-network turn the state into blessing meanwhile the extractive practices of patron-network contribute to the worse and plenty paradox of poverty (Orlando & Suffian, 2020; Orlando, 2021; Orlando & Suffian, 2023). Poverty eradication programs in Malaysia are fundamentally designed around race-based criteria and embedded with political considerations. This structure involves state actors both in government and politics who hold the legitimacy to control substantial resources designated for these programs. Consequently, a persistent conflict exists regarding the process of transferring these resources to underprivileged groups, as the distribution is often contested by competing political and ethnic interests (Orlando & Suffian, 2020; Orlando, 2021; Orlando & Suffian, 2023).

Scholars emphasize that the allocation of state resources is deeply complicated by a long-standing "backer system" entrenched within the political structure (Wilson,

1960; Teehankee, 2022). This environment is characterized by complex networks of political clans and clientelistic ties, where political machinery undermines social policy governance. In these systems, control over state resources is often personalized, with elites treating public funds as private assets to be distributed among those appointed via the backer system (Varkkey, 2012; Hicken et al., 2019; Anastacio, 2023).

Reality demonstrates that political parties and the ruling class rely heavily on the conditional distribution of these material benefits defined as patronage to mobilize supporters and secure voters (Hicken, 2011; Soest, 2022). This creates a cycle where the delivery of social programs is not a matter of right or need, but a transactional reward for political loyalty, further solidifying the personalization of power.

Consequently, the existence of complex political clans and clientelist networks allows for the emergence of rent-seekers, who function as strategic brokers within the political hierarchy. These brokers bridge the gap between upper-tier patrons and a vast pool of clients. In this tiered structure, the rent-seeker acts as a client to the primary patron while simultaneously serving as a patron to "lower-tiered clients" by distributing benefits filtered down from the top.

Political parties, incumbents, and candidates rely heavily on these middlemen. Brokers do not merely deliver resources; they perform the dual role of targeting distribution to ensure maximum electoral impact and monitoring voter participation to verify that the "loyalty" purchased with state resources is actually delivered at the ballot box. This layered system allows top-level elites to maintain control over large populations without direct personal interaction, institutionalizing a chain of command based on material exchange.

The emergence of the rent-seeker as a middleman transforms the traditional patron-client dyad into a more complex triad or pyramidal network. While these relations grow increasingly intricate, the core essence remains political patronage: the strategic allocation of state resources to maintain power (Sachs & Warner, 1995; Fox, 2006). In this system, grassroots clients rarely interact with the top-tier patron; instead, they are connected via a sophisticated chain of command.

This clientelist architecture extends from federal and state heights down to the local village level. Allegiance and votes flow upward, while material resources are funneled downward through these layers. To ensure efficiency, patrons rely on local brokers ,notable figures such as village heads, landowners, or influential

businesspeople, who possess the community ties and reputation necessary to enforce political loyalty. These brokers serve as the vital link, ensuring that the distribution of state aid is effectively translated into sustained electoral support (Hicken et al., 2019; Anastacio, 2023).

As the patron network underpins the rent-seeker, it centralizes governance around a leader or elite with monopolistic control over rents, often resulting in predatory politics (Steiner, 2006; Anastacio, 2022; Orlando & Suffian, 2023). This elite structure rests on a foundation of patronage and nepotism. Consequently, the combination of patronage and a rentier system creates paradoxical societal effects: the illicit enrichment of political and economic actors, rampant corruption, and systemic mismanagement (Mailey, 2015; Stevens, 2015).

These dynamics ultimately foster deep-seated clientelism and stagnant economic development. In this environment, the state's resources are not used as tools for broad-based prosperity but as capital to maintain the elite's dominance, leading to the "poverty paradox" where resource-rich regions remain economically underdeveloped (Teehankee, 2019; Anastacio, 2022).

1.3 Problem Statement

Ideally, poverty eradication in Sabah should operate within a transparent, accountable, and merit-based governance system. In such a model, officials are appointed for their competence, and resources are allocated based strictly on socioeconomic needs, ensuring that development initiatives effectively reduce poverty (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Brown, 2020). However, the reality in Sabah reflects a governance environment deeply shaped by political patronage. Here, resource distribution, program implementation, and bureaucratic appointments are frequently prioritized based on political loyalty rather than merit or public interest (Orlando, 2021). This creates a stark divergence from the experience of Peninsular Malaysia; while redistributive policies under the NEP there contributed to measurable poverty reduction (Gomez, 2012), Sabah remains the poorest state in Malaysia. Data consistently shows several of its districts are the poorest in the nation, underscoring a persistent failure in translating state wealth into grassroots prosperity (DOSM, 2019; Orlando & Suffian, 2023). While existing literature acknowledges political patronage in Malaysia, research

has rarely addressed how patron-client networks specifically dictate the mechanics of poverty eradication in Sabah. Most studies have historically focused on government-linked companies (GLCs), political financing, and the broader rent-seeking interests of ruling elites (Varkkey, 2014; Weiss, 2020; Wong, 2023). This scholarly gap overlooks a critical reality: the disjuncture between the ideal of merit-based aid and the reality of patronage-led distribution.

This misalignment results in a misallocation of resources, exclusionary distribution, and the appointment of officials based on loyalty rather than competence factors long associated with state deterioration (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). As these dynamics intertwine with social welfare, they reinforce the "politics for staying poor" paradox, where poverty becomes an asset for political actors rather than a problem to be solved (Oliveros, 2013; Teehanke, 2023). Consequently, Sabah remains trapped in structural poverty, unable to develop inclusive or sustainable programs.

By exploring how patronage shapes the allocation and outcomes of these programs, this study aims to explain how such practices contribute to the persistence of poverty. In doing so, it fills a critical gap in Malaysian political science and provides the empirical basis needed for governance reforms aimed at genuine, effective poverty reduction

1.4 Research Questions

1. How do political patronage and the poverty eradication programs in Sabah intertwine?
2. How does the patron network influence the prioritization of interests in poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level?
3. How does the participation of rent-seekers at the Sabah state level impact state poverty?

1.5 Research Objectives

1. To explore how political patronage shapes the allocation, design, and implementation of poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level.
2. To analyse how patronage networks influence the prioritization of political and socio-economic interests within poverty eradication programs in Sabah.

3. To assess how rent-seeking behaviours embedded within patronage practices affect the effectiveness, and outcomes of poverty eradication programs in Sabah.

1.6 Significance of Study

This research significantly contributes to the academic understanding of political dynamics in the state of Sabah, Malaysia. By delving into the intricate relationship between political patronage, state resource allocation, and their collective impact on poverty, the study advances scholarly discourse on the unique political landscape of the region. The application of the neopatrimonialism theory provides a theoretical framework for analyzing informal behaviour and dynamics of power structures and clientelist relationships, adding depth to the field of political theories and their practical relevance. Furthermore, the investigation into the effectiveness of poverty programs and the roles of rent seekers enriches the literature on public policy, governance, and corruption studies. The study also makes a noteworthy contribution by incorporating the lived experiences and perspectives of diverse stakeholders, offering a nuanced understanding of how policies are perceived at the grassroots level. Moreover, the research has the potential to provide concrete policy recommendations, enhancing the practical applicability of its findings for policymakers seeking evidence-based approaches to poverty alleviation in the specific socio-political context of Sabah. Overall, this study contributes to both theoretical knowledge and actionable insights, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the political and socio-economic dynamics that shape poverty in Sabah. By exploring the intersection of political patronage and poverty eradication programs in Sabah, this research seeks to illuminate how political considerations sway the design, implementation, and ultimate outcomes of developmental efforts (Brown, 2020; Anastacio, 2023). This exploration is critical for understanding the broader implications of patronage on the efficacy and fairness of poverty alleviation strategies, which are often compromised by the need to maintain political support.

To address the existing scholarly gap, this research explores the nuances of patronage to determine how it influences policymaking, resource distribution, and governance. Most importantly, it aims to establish the causal link between these

entrenched patronage practices and the persistent state of poverty in Sabah. By doing so, the study moves beyond general observations of "bad governance" to provide a detailed map of how political survival is prioritized over socio-economic transformation.

This research aims to contribute to the existing literature by offering a more nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between political patronage and the "paradox of plenty" or persistent poverty in resource-rich regions. By delving into the rentier behavior exhibited by individuals within the patronage system, the study examines how the pursuit of political favors for personal gain impacts state anti-poverty programs. This focus emphasizes how such behaviors divert resources and administrative attention away from the genuine needs of the impoverished population (Khan, 2016).

Ultimately, this analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the structural challenges faced by anti-poverty programs when entangled with rentier behavior. By addressing institutional linkages and the influence of political networks, the study expands the limited literature on the intersection of patron networks and state welfare programs, offering a critical perspective on why traditional development models often fail in neopatrimonial contexts.

While prior studies by Gomez (1991; 2012), Varkkey (2004; 2014), and Gomez, Cheong, and Wong (2021) have established the foundational link between politics and business in Malaysia, this research fills a critical gap by analyzing how political patronage specifically exacerbates economic challenges and stalls development outcomes in Sabah. Beyond identifying the presence of patronage, the study aspires to uncover the long-term consequences of these networks on the state's trajectory, offering a more granular look at how resource misallocation hinders sustainable growth.

These insights are anticipated to provide valuable guidance for policymakers and scholars aiming to dismantle the barriers created by patronage. By addressing the structural challenges highlighted by analysts such as Khan (2016) and Brown (2020), this research seeks to foster a shift toward a more equitable development model, one that moves away from the "politics of survival" and toward long-term, merit-based economic stability (Johnson, 2017; Smith, 2018).

1.7 Scope of Study

Temporal Scope:

This study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing poverty eradication programs in Sabah as its primary case study. The temporal scope spans several decades, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of political patronage and the distribution of state resources. By focusing on the long-term trajectory of poverty-related programs, the research captures the cumulative effects of these dynamics on Sabah's socio-economic landscape.

Over the years, Sabah has undergone significant political, economic, and developmental shifts—from the early post-independence era through the "political recession" of the 1990s and into the modern era of neopatrimonialism. This extended timeframe makes Sabah an essential setting for examining how patronage dynamics are not static, but are continuously shaped and reshaped by changing federal-state relations and shifting elite alliances.

Regional Scope:

This research focuses exclusively on the state of Sabah, Malaysia, acknowledging its distinct political landscape and socio-economic characteristics. Sabah's complex ethnic composition, persistent economic disparities, and unique political history make it a compelling context for analyzing the relationship between political patronage, state resource allocation specifically poverty eradication programs and the role of rent seekers in shaping poverty outcomes. By concentrating on Sabah, the study aims to unpack the state-specific political dynamics that influence program implementation and outcomes, thereby offering a grounded understanding of how patronage structures operate within a region that consistently records some of the highest poverty rates in the country.

1.8 Definitions, Terminology and Concepts

1.8.1 Political Patronage/Patron Network

In political science, patronage refers to the distribution of jobs or favours in exchange for electoral support, and is closely associated with the idea of viewing the

economy as determining culture and politics (Gramsci, 1978). As such, patronage is often linked to political parties and voters. In this study, political patronage refers to situations in which political leaders or parties provide resources, particularly poverty eradication programmes, to individuals or groups in exchange for political support or loyalty. This form of patronage functions as a mechanism for consolidating power and building networks of support, as beneficiaries of the patron's resources are more likely to support them in elections or other political activities. It establishes a reciprocal relationship in which the patron offers material benefits while recipients provide political allegiance.

At the same time, patronage in this context denotes an unequal yet reciprocal relationship between parties, namely a powerful group and a relatively weaker group. Although the patron holds greater power in relation to the client, both parties recognise their mutual dependence for political survival (Sorauf, 1961; Weingrod, 1968; Bearfield, 2009; Gomez, 1999; Bayart, 2009; Kaarsholm & Hultin, 2002; Bardhan, 1984; Puthucheary & Othman, 2005; Titeca, 2006; Orlando, 2021).

1.8.2 Rent Seeker/Broker/Middleman

A rent seeker is defined as an individual or entity that engages in rent-seeking behaviour. Rent-seeking refers to the pursuit of economic gain through activities that do not contribute to the overall productivity or wealth of society. Instead, rent seekers attempt to obtain a share of existing wealth or resources by manipulating institutional or political frameworks. Such activities often involve lobbying for special privileges or securing contracts that provide economic advantages without corresponding increases in productivity or value creation (Krueger, 1974).

In this study, rent-seeking is understood to be connected to poverty eradication programmes when individuals or certain groups attempt to derive benefits from these programmes through unproductive means, such as influencing policies or manipulating resource distribution for personal gain rather than for the common good. In the context of poverty eradication initiatives, rent-seeking behaviour may undermine programme effectiveness and compromise fairness in the allocation of resources.

1.8.3 Rent Seeking

Rent-seeking generally refers to the efforts of businesses or individuals to secure state-allocated economic rents through legal means, such as lobbying, or illegal means, such as bribery. While certain forms of rent, including monopoly rents, may indicate inefficiency, other forms, such as rents accruing to innovators, subsidies to infant industries, or returns earned by owners of scarce natural resources, may reflect efficiency or the successful exploitation of growth opportunities.

The term ‘rents’ is commonly used to refer to excess returns or windfall gains that would not exist under competitive market conditions. Rents therefore encompass not only monopoly profits, but also resource transfers organised and sustained through political mechanisms (Khan, 1998; Hicken, 2011; Hill, 2002; Orlando, Suffian & Annuar, 2023).

1.8.4 Poverty

Poverty is often described as multi-dimensional, meaning that it is not solely associated with income or the lack of financial resources, that is, economic deprivation. Rather, it encompasses broader forms of exclusion experienced by individuals and groups who have limited access to basic human needs, including food, healthcare, shelter, nutrition, social inclusion, employment, cultural participation, psychological wellbeing, and freedom from ill-being (Sen, 1989; Sen, 1991; Sen, 1991; Sen, 2000). Scholars also conceptualise poverty as clear evidence of the interaction between formal and informal structures upon which disadvantaged groups depend for survival. In this sense, poverty is characterised by denial, powerlessness, voicelessness, discrimination, and restricted access to basic human needs. Put simply, this study views poverty as a condition that may be instrumentalised by powerful groups to maintain political dominance, as clients become dependent on patron-client relationships for continued access to resources and opportunities (Teehankee, 2020; Brown, 2020; Anastacio, 2022).

1.9 Rational of Study

Despite decades of poverty eradication initiatives in Malaysia, Sabah continues to record persistently high poverty rates compared to other states, raising important questions about the effectiveness of existing policy interventions. Official explanations frequently attribute these outcomes to structural disadvantages such as geographical constraints, limited infrastructure, and long-standing economic marginalisation. However, there remains insufficient understanding of the political and institutional factors that shape how poverty eradication programmes are designed, allocated, and implemented at the state level. This study is therefore motivated by the need to move beyond technocratic explanations of poverty and to examine the political processes that condition development outcomes in Sabah.

Existing literature on poverty alleviation tends to emphasise programme design, targeting mechanisms, and administrative capacity, often treating governance structures as neutral or external to policy outcomes. In contexts characterised by strong patron-client relations, such as Sabah, poverty eradication programmes operate within a political environment shaped by informal institutions and personalised networks of power. Political patronage, manifested through loyalty-based exchanges and discretionary control over resources, can play a decisive role in determining which communities benefit from state interventions and which remain excluded. Yet empirical studies that systematically examine how patronage dynamics influence poverty governance at the subnational level remain limited, particularly within the Malaysian context.

Furthermore, dominant approaches to poverty policy frequently understate the role of rent-seeking behaviour embedded within state institutions. When access to poverty eradication resources is mediated by political allegiance, development programmes risk becoming instruments of political survival rather than mechanisms for social transformation. Such practices may contribute to the persistence of extractive institutions, whereby resources are distributed in ways that reinforce elite dominance and perpetuate dependency relationships among beneficiaries. Understanding these dynamics is essential for explaining why substantial public investment in poverty reduction has not consistently translated into sustainable improvements in living conditions for vulnerable populations in Sabah.

This study is also timely in light of evolving federal-state relations in Malaysia, particularly ongoing debates concerning decentralisation, fiscal autonomy, and equitable development. Although federal initiatives provide the financial and policy framework for poverty eradication, state governments function as key intermediaries in implementation. Examining how state-level patronage networks shape the translation of federal policies into local outcomes offers valuable insight into the institutional constraints that undermine policy effectiveness. By focusing on Sabah, this research demonstrates how subnational political structures can either facilitate or constrain inclusive development.

By adopting a qualitative and interpretive approach, this study seeks to contribute to the broader literature on political economy and governance by integrating the concepts of political patronage, informal institutions, extractive institutions, and neopatrimonialism into the analysis of poverty eradication programmes. In doing so, it provides a grounded and context-specific understanding of poverty governance in Sabah. Ultimately, the rationale of this study lies in its potential to inform more accountable, transparent, and needs-based policy interventions, while offering theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of development governance in political systems shaped by patronage.

1.10 Organization of Chapter

Chapter One introduces the themes of political patronage and poverty eradication programmes in Sabah. It outlines the purpose of the study, presents the statement of the research problem, and explains the significance of the investigation. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature on political patronage and examines the development of the theoretical framework. This chapter provides the conceptual foundation necessary to explore the patronage networks underlying poverty eradication programmes at the state level.

Chapter Three presents a detailed explanation of the research methodology and the application of the chosen research philosophy. It outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical approach adopted in the study. Chapter Four reports and narrates the findings that emerged from the interview data collected from participants. The key themes identified through the analysis are presented systematically.

Chapter Five provides a comprehensive discussion of the findings, organised according to the major themes derived from the interview data. This chapter interprets the results in relation to the theoretical framework and existing literature. Chapter Six summarises the main research findings and draws overall conclusions from the study.

Finally, Chapter Seven presents the recommendations, outlines the limitations of the study, and highlights directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing literature relevant to understanding how political patronage, institutional weakness, and governance practices shape poverty eradication programmes in Sabah. It synthesises key concepts across political economy, institutional theory, and development studies to provide a comprehensive framework that supports this research. The themes are arranged to build a logical progression from Sabah's historical context to governance structures, and subsequently to theoretical debates that explain why poverty eradication programmes continue to underperform.

2.2 Historical Context of Poverty and Development in Sabah

Sabah has historically been marginalised in terms of political influence and resource allocation. Since joining Malaysia in 1963, Sabah's peripheral position, both geographically and politically, has often meant that development priorities have been determined by external actors, particularly federal authorities, rather than by local needs. This marginalisation has contributed to persistent social and economic disparities between Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia.

This structural imbalance is further reinforced by uneven federal–state power relations, where limited autonomy exists over resource control. Administrative control exercised by the federal government has contributed to difficulties in transferring state resources to underprivileged groups. This is evidenced by the abolishment of the Residency administrative system at the local level in 1976 (Chako, 2022).

Historically, the administrative system of Sabah was shaped by two major periods of governance: the Chartered Company Administration from 1881 to 1946 under the British North Borneo Company, and the British Crown Colony Administration from 1946 to 1963. While the British North Borneo Chartered Company operated primarily in the interests of its shareholders, it laid the foundation of Sabah's administrative structure during its six-decade rule. A Governor oversaw the administration of North Borneo and was advised by an Advisory Council consisting of

Company officials and one community representative. North Borneo was originally divided into two regions known as Residencies: the East Coast Residency, based in Sandakan, and the West Coast Residency, based in Jesselton, now known as Kota Kinabalu. Smaller areas were organised into provinces, including Alock Province, Clarke Province, Cunliffe Province, Dent Province, Dewhurst Province, Elphinstone Province, Keppel Province, Martin Province, Mayne Province, and Myburgh Province. All these provinces were directly connected to the residencies (G. Kitingan & William, 1989; Britannica, 2021). Each Residency was presided over by a Company official, and within each division there were provinces administered by a magistrate-in-charge.

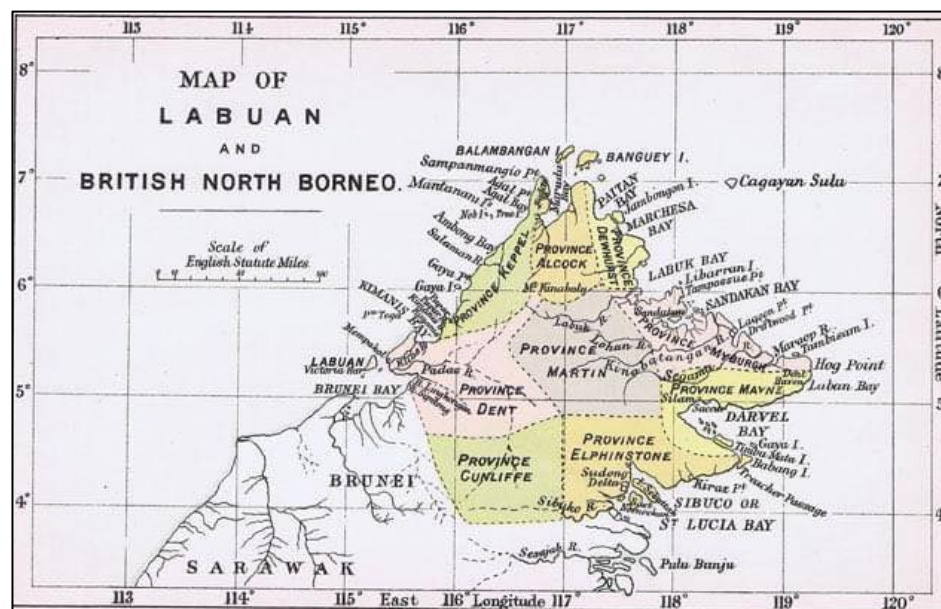


Figure 1.5 Maps Of British North Borneo

As settlements expanded in North Borneo, additional Residencies were established. Under British Crown Colony rule, a Resident, who headed a Residency, served as the link between the Chief Secretary, the head of government departments, and the District Officers within the Residency. A District Officer supervised district administration and was responsible for revenue collection, maintenance of law and order, and the settlement of disputes concerning boundaries and ownership. A Resident performed a similar range of duties to District Officers, except over a wider geographical area and, more importantly, with responsibility for training officers who would serve in the administration.

The concept of the Residency and the position of Resident continued after Sabah joined Malaysia. Around 1979, the position of Resident was abolished (Jabatan Perkhidmatan Komputer Negeri, 2021), as the Berjaya government regarded the Residency System as a colonial legacy. Today, Sabah is divided into Divisions, which replaced the Residencies, and each Division comprises Districts (Kitingan & William, 1989; Rutter, 1922; The State Attorney-General's Chambers, 2010; 2016).

The abolishment of the Residency System in Sabah reshaped the dynamics of administrative authority and contributed to the evolving nature of state–federal relations. Prior to its dismantling, the Residency System, rooted in colonial administrative structures, provided localised governance mechanisms that allowed district-level leaders greater discretion in managing resources and responding to community needs. Although imperfect, the system offered administrative proximity and contextual understanding in decision-making. Its abolishment consolidated greater authority within centralised state and subsequently federal institutions, reducing the influence of local governance structures that had previously been more responsive to local socio-economic realities.

This centralisation of administrative authority enabled the federal government to exert stronger influence over development priorities, funding distribution, and bureaucratic appointments. As federal control expanded, the governance environment became increasingly susceptible to political patronage, where resource allocation and public service delivery were closely tied to political loyalty and coalition maintenance. This shift weakened the capacity of district-level institutions, which became heavily dependent on federal directives and funding channels, thereby limiting their autonomy to design interventions that genuinely addressed localised poverty. Development agendas increasingly reflected top-down political interests rather than grounded assessments of community needs, reinforcing disparities between urban and rural districts.

Within this environment, patronage politics emerged as a dominant mechanism through which development benefits were distributed. Political actors leveraged federal administrative control to direct infrastructure projects, welfare assistance, and poverty eradication programmes towards specific constituencies, often as a means of securing electoral support. This entrenched unequal development outcomes and created cycles of dependency among marginalised communities, who relied on politically mediated

access to resources rather than institutionalised, rights-based development frameworks. The weakening of local administrative autonomy, exacerbated by the abolishment of earlier decentralised systems, created conditions in which poverty became intertwined with political calculations and elite bargaining.

Consequently, the interplay between federal administrative dominance, diminishing local autonomy, and patronage-based governance has profoundly shaped Sabah's socio-economic landscape. Structural poverty persists not merely due to resource shortages, but because distribution mechanisms are embedded within political networks that prioritise loyalty over equity. Without strong local institutions capable of independent planning and accountability, development programmes risk continuing to reproduce historical inequalities. Rebalancing administrative authority by strengthening local governance capacities and insulating resource allocation from political patronage will be essential for breaking the entrenched link between political dependency and poverty in Sabah.

North Borneo, formerly known as Sabah, adopted the Reconstruction and Development Plans for the periods 1948–1955 and 1956–1960 following the devastation of the Second World War. The state received grants from the British colonial administration, welfare schemes, the Colombo Plan, United Nations agencies, and private foundations (Ongkili, 1972; Institute for Development Studies, 1986). Malaya later achieved independence from Britain and introduced its own Malaya Five-Year National Development Plan. In the mid-1950s, political parties and leaders began to emerge in Sabah. At the same time, Sabah expanded its economy through exports of timber, rubber, and copra, while Britain anticipated granting independence to its colonies in Borneo, namely Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei. Consequently, it became necessary for Sabah to formulate its own socio-economic development plan after independence.

Although the authority to devise five-year plans began in 1956, implementation proved difficult due to a lack of trained personnel (Ongkili, 1972). As the state economy improved, Sabah adopted its own Six-Year Development Plan (1959–1964) prior to independence in 1963 (Lim, 1986; Sullivan, 1981). However, the plan required substantial funding, while British expenditure on its colonies remained limited. The longer six-year duration reflected implementation challenges and the need for an extended development phase (Cole, 1998).

The First Sabah Six-Year Development Plan (1959–1964) continued after independence and incorporation into Malaysia on 16 September 1963. Increased funding and improved treatment of its colonies indicated that Britain was under pressure from the United Nations to rebuild and modernise both its present and former colonies. The plan aimed to promote economic growth, develop human resources, modernise infrastructure, and reduce social inequalities (Lim, 1986).

At that time, pressing social concerns were concentrated in education and health services, particularly in rural areas. Before 1963, Sabah had more missionary and privately run schools than government schools. Of the 519 schools in Sabah, only 146 were government schools, 121 were mission schools, 116 were Chinese schools, and the remaining 136 were categorised under other systems. Of these, 489 were primary schools, 30 were secondary schools, and one was a technical school (George, 1981). This trend continued even a decade after independence. With regard to girls' education, parents often adhered to the norm that girls should remain at home, resulting in limited encouragement for school attendance. Nevertheless, the number of girls attending school gradually increased compared to earlier periods. With the growth of the timber industry, plans were introduced to improve the educational system in preparation for Sabah's future needs.

In health services, further improvements were required to address tropical diseases. At the same time, the birth rate was rising while the death rate was declining. The ratio of doctors, nurses, and hospital beds remained below standard, and many services needed to be expanded into rural areas. There was significant scope for improving medical services. Government campaigns were also required to educate the public about tropical diseases and to address misconceptions regarding traditional cures.

In addition to government funding, Sabah received assistance from the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Like Malaya, Sabah inherited the British administrative and legal systems up to the district level. However, native laws and customary administration were preserved to handle matters such as inheritance, marriage, and family disputes. The social structure remained largely organised along ethnic and regional lines. The Chinese, primarily engaged in trade, resided mainly in urban areas, while Bumiputeras and other indigenous groups lived predominantly in rural areas. The rural population consisted largely of farmers, while those in coastal

areas depended on fishing. There was also a rural labour force working on British plantations.

The pre-independence Sabah Development Plans were largely draft documents, representing departmental estimates of expenditure rather than comprehensive development strategies. Lim (1986) argues that these plans lacked explicit economic targets and internal consistency. Consequently, whether Sabah adopted a Six-Year or Five-Year Plan during this period was of limited practical significance. Ongkili (1972) contends that Sabah adopted the same Five-Year Planning system as Malaya following the Reconstruction and Development Plan (1948–1955), whereas Lim (1986) maintains that Sabah only adopted a Six-Year Plan for the period 1959–1964. It therefore remains unclear whether the 1948–1955 Plan was extended due to implementation problems or replaced by two five-year plans, as suggested by Ongkili.

However, it is evident that Sabah implemented a Six-Year Development Plan for 1965–1970. Ongkili (1972) also highlights implementation difficulties arising from a shortage of trained manpower and labour. Nevertheless, the pre-independence plans contributed to economic growth through the export of primary commodities such as rubber, copra, and timber.

Following independence through Malaysia in 1963, Sabah continued with its Six-Year Development Plan (1959–1964) but received greater funding from the Federal Government in Kuala Lumpur compared to the colonial administration. These funds were directed primarily towards economic and social infrastructure development. The Peninsular Malaysian rural development system was also introduced in Sabah. Subsequently, the Second Sabah Six-Year Development Plan (1965–1970) was incorporated into the First Malaysia Plan (1966–1970).

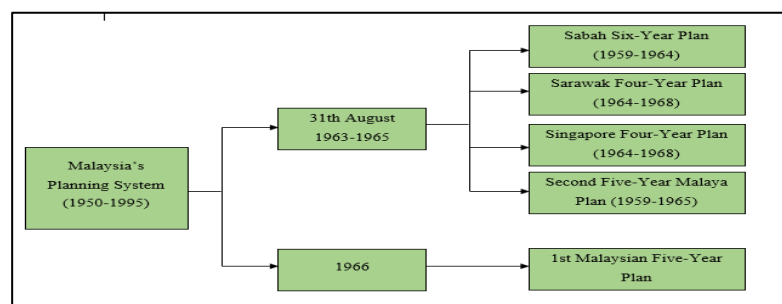


Figure 1.6 Malaysia's Planning System (1950-1995)

Following the Alliance Party's victory in the general election, the foundation for the future planning system in Malaya, formerly known as Malaysia, was established. However, there was a lack of qualified and experienced officials to set up and drive the machinery for planning and coordinating economic development. As a result, a British expatriate, Oscar Spencer, was appointed as the Economic Secretary to the Economic Committee of the Executive Council. This agency was responsible for formulating economic policy and preparing development plans. The Economic Committee was established in April 1956 to replace the planning office, which had previously operated under the direct control of the Federal Treasury.

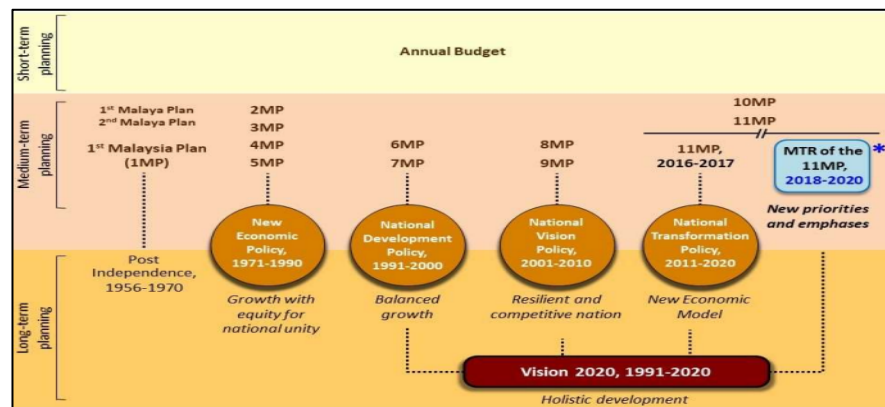


Figure 1.7 Malaysia's Planning System (1950-2020)

The First Malaya Plan was formulated based on the experience of the Draft Development Plan (DDP) (1950–1955) and was largely influenced by top-level bureaucrats, including British expatriates. The DDP primarily focused on initiatives to rebalance the economy. British colonial policies in Malaya were associated with the 'divide and rule' approach, whereby the economy depended heavily on rubber exports and economic activities were divided along communal lines. To address these economic imbalances, diversification of the economy was promoted with the aim of creating greater employment opportunities in the future (Rudner, 1975; Cole, 1998).

In the post-independence period, the threat of communism and the declaration of the Emergency may have influenced the British to modify their 'divide and rule' policy in Malaya in order to counter communist influence (Turnbull, 1974; Turnbull, 1975; Cole, 1998). During the London meetings held between December 1956 and January 1957, Malaya formulated the Malaya Five-Year Plan and presented it to Britain

to justify the need for financial assistance for an independent Malaya. The Plan was approved in October 1956, with an allocation of \$1,138.5 million. The priorities listed included: (1) rubber planting, mining, port construction, agricultural modernisation, and the stimulation of industrialisation; (2) education, improvement of health services in rural areas, and urgent water supply schemes; (3) housing, transportation, communications, and electrical power; and (4) public administration. The allocation of expenditure for the planned programmes included transportation at 19.3 per cent, communication at 5.9 per cent, electric power at 7.9 per cent, improvement of urban amenities at 15.8 per cent, and subsistence agriculture at 7 per cent, with the remaining balance allocated to broader economic development investments.

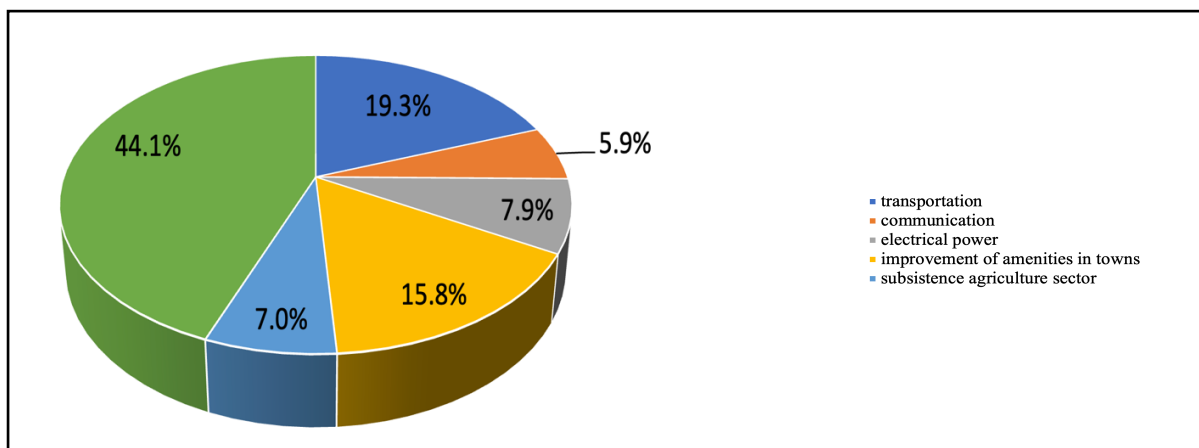


Figure 1.8 Allocation Expenditure For Malaya Five-Year Plan 1956

The socio-economic programmes implemented under the Plan aimed to promote political and economic stability and demonstrated positive performance. In the education sector, the Inter-Communal Education Committee under Tun Razak played an important role in designing an educational system that promoted national integration, nation-building, and development among Malaysia's diverse ethnic communities. Malaysia's education policy aimed to ensure that children had access to primary education by 1960 (Rudner, 1975). As a result, the increasing number of students created a need for additional funding to construct more classrooms in 1958. By 1960, the additional expenditure requested was approved by the Treasury to encourage children from poorer backgrounds to attend school.

Under the Second Malaya Five-Year Plan (1961–1965), improvements were introduced, including the extension of the planning machinery to Sabah and Sarawak after the plans of the two East Malaysian states were incorporated in 1963 (Cole, 1998). The Second Malaya Plan allocated RM 5,050 million. Of this amount, RM 2,150 million was allocated to federal projects and public enterprises, while RM 2,900 million was designated for private sector investment. The national plan was financed through foreign loans and by liquidating assets, particularly in response to fluctuations in the prices of rubber and tin. The primary objective of the Second Malaya Five-Year Plan was to improve the standard of living of the rural population while attempting to achieve balanced economic development.

The results indicated expansion in social development, including education, public health, housing, and urban and rural utilities. Rural electricity services reached approximately 9,949 households in 1956 and increased to 12,000 in 1960. By June 1963, the Central Electricity Board recorded a further increase to 6,606 households (Cole, 1998). Other development projects considered effective in assisting the rural poor included rural roads (RM 163,773), land development (RM 161,707), and drainage and irrigation (RM 120,615).

Although RM 92 million was allocated for educational programmes for rural children, the poor condition of health and medical services in rural areas prompted the government to allocate RM 39,390 for the establishment of 27 health centres, 93 sub-centres, and 406 midwifery clinics. To accelerate rural development and enhance research and development in agriculture, FELDA, RISDA, and the Agriculture College of Serdang, now known as Universiti Putra Malaysia, were established in June 1963.

The central bureaucracy of the Malaysia Five-Year Plan was located in the National Operations Room in Kuala Lumpur. It functioned as a nerve centre for planning operations aimed at addressing poverty, ill health, and illiteracy. Economically, Malaysia faced difficulties in financing the Plan due to fluctuations in international prices of its major exports, rubber and tin. Politically, Malaysia was confronted with tensions involving Indonesia. Moreover, maintaining national unity and integration in a plural society was a delicate challenge. Improving the standard of living of the population remained a central objective. The Plan outlined five objectives, similar to those of the Second Malaya Plan, including promoting integration among the people and states of Malaysia through a development strategy explicitly designed to

enhance the welfare of all (First Malaysia Plan 1966–1970).

In addition to the Five-Year Plan, Malaysia adopted a 20-year perspective plan with long-term targets, including: (a) achieving a per capita income of RM 1,500 by 1985; (b) creating 2.4 million new jobs; (c) achieving a more equitable income distribution; (d) improving education, health services, and housing; (e) strengthening infrastructure to support economic growth; and (f) promoting a healthier population. These objectives were considered achievable through economic diversification, high levels of investment, and increased savings. The First Malaysia Plan incorporated both the Sarawak Second Five-Year Plan (1964–1968) and the Sabah Second Six-Year Plan (1965–1970).

Certain programmes were revised to suit the newly formed Federation of Malaysia. With expanded territorial boundaries and rapid population growth, greater financial resources were required for socio-economic development. Malaysia, consisting of Malaya (50,840 square miles), Sabah (28,490 square miles), and Sarawak (48,340 square miles), had a total area of 127,670 square miles. At the commencement of the First Malaysia Plan, the population stood at 8.052 million in Malaya, 520,000 in Sabah, and 835,000 in Sarawak, totalling 9.411 million. Communication and infrastructure, particularly in Sabah and Sarawak, remained underdeveloped. The economies of Sabah and Sarawak continued to depend largely on primary commodities such as timber, agriculture, and fisheries.

As Malaysia faced a deficit in its international balance of payments, one measure adopted was to reduce food imports. This was offset by increasing agricultural production in sparsely populated hinterland areas. Despite the deficit, Malaysia encountered little difficulty in obtaining foreign loans due to favourable prospects under the First Malaysia Plan. Growth rates were particularly strong in manufacturing sectors such as tobacco products, chemicals, machinery, metal and non-metallic minerals, basic metals, food and beverages, wood and rubber products, transportation equipment, construction, iron ore, and tin.

Consequently, Malaysia's GDP rose to RM 8,078 million in 1965, reflecting a growth rate of 6.4 per cent. At the same time, private and public consumption increased due to rising living standards and capital formation, which grew at 2.8 per cent annually. Demand for motor vehicles, radios, and electricity increased significantly. Although projections for GNP and domestic prices were favourable, Malaysia had to contend

with population growth and fluctuations in export commodity prices. Addressing these challenges was essential to improving living standards.

As public and private expenditure of RM 4,550 million was financed through deficit spending, the government sought to ensure effective use of funds. A development administration unit was established under the Prime Minister's Department, and a central purchasing system was introduced to minimise wastage (Cole, 1998). However, many government projects were implemented to meet minimum standards, which sometimes compromised quality and neglected long-term impacts. Of the RM 3,810 million allocated for socio-economic development, the majority was directed towards agriculture and rural development.

The government sought to encourage public participation in implementing planned programmes. However, adherence to free enterprise ideology resulted in widening income disparities, as wealth accumulated among the affluent while rural populations continued to experience poverty. Reliance on the private sector to drive economic improvement did not fully achieve the intended outcomes. The government underestimated the inherent tension between state responsibilities and free enterprise principles. In some cases, foreign companies repatriated profits rather than contributing significantly to domestic revenue through taxation.

Thus, even in the early post-independence period, Malaysia faced challenges associated with free-rider problems. In Sabah, socio-economic development during the First Malaysia Plan remained significantly behind Peninsular Malaysia. In education, mission schools were often preferred by well-off families, as they provided education up to the secondary level and enabled students to obtain the Cambridge School Certificate. For the Cambridge High School Certificate, students were required to relocate to Kota Kinabalu. Many Chinese families enrolled their children in Chinese primary schools before transferring them to English secondary schools. Although some Islamic schools were established, most Muslim children received religious education informally from village teachers.

Due to the limited availability of quality government schools, the Sabah Foundation sponsored selected secondary students to pursue studies in Peninsular Malaysia. Overseas scholarships were limited and accessible primarily to well-off families, particularly among the Chinese community. Consequently, disparities in educational attainment emerged between Bumiputeras and other communities in Sabah,

reflecting broader social trends in Malaya, where Bumiputeras were often stereotyped as economically and educationally backward.

In the 1969 General Election, the Alliance lost its two-thirds parliamentary majority in Malaya, limiting its legislative capacity. Tensions between Chinese and Malay communities during the election campaign culminated in the May 13 racial riots in Kuala Lumpur. Parliament was suspended, and elections in Sabah and Sarawak were postponed, although unrest did not spread to these states. Many rural residents in Sabah and Sarawak were unaware of the disturbances, partly due to government control of the media. The Internal Security Act and Sedition Act were used to restrict discourse deemed threatening to communal unity.

When elections resumed in Sabah and Sarawak in mid-1970, the Alliance secured 16 parliamentary seats in Sabah. In Sarawak, the Alliance coalition initially won 9 of 24 seats but later formed a two-thirds majority government after the Sarawak United People's Party joined the coalition. During the suspension of Parliament, measures were implemented to restore stability. Tun Abdul Razak assumed the premiership, the Department of National Unity was established, and goodwill committees were organised to promote communal harmony. The Rukunegara was adopted in mid-1970 to foster national unity and promote a democratic, liberal, progressive, and just society. At this stage, Malaysia introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP).

When Parliament resumed after the Alliance secured the required majority, the NEP was implemented. It aimed to safeguard and promote the interests of Malays and indigenous groups in Malaya, Sabah, and Sarawak. The NEP was given a 20-year timeframe, from 1971 to 1990, to achieve its dual objectives of eradicating poverty and restructuring society. As it marked the beginning of active state intervention to advance Bumiputera interests, it attracted criticism from non-Bumiputera communities. One of its targets was to achieve 30 per cent Bumiputera participation in the private sector by 1990.

Under the Second Malaysia Plan (1971–1975), the NEP was operationalised. Similar to earlier plans, it sought to address shortcomings identified in previous development efforts. However, in the aftermath of the racial riots, the Plan adopted the slogan of “A Just Society,” reflecting one of the principles of the Rukunegara. Its

objectives incorporated the broader goals of the NEP, which may be summarised as follows:

Table 1.3

The NEP Objectives (The Development of Malaysian Entrepreneurship, 2009)

The NEP Objectives	
1	The Two-Pronged Objectives Of NEP To Eradicate Poverty And Restructure Society
2	The Modernisation Of Rural Lives
3	The Rapid And Balanced Growth Of Urban Activities
4	Creation Of A Malay Commercial And Industrial Community,
5	Partners In All Aspects Of The Economic Life
6	Better Opportunities And Additional Resources

Facing the issue of poverty during the Second Malaysia Five-Year Plan, the government sought to ensure that development and economic growth would benefit all, particularly the poor, who were expected to have a fair share of economic progress. Income redistribution was pursued through improved public services for basic needs, subsidies, and education for all eligible children, up to university level. Bumiputeras were given priority in admission to local universities and in the award of scholarships. Quotas were also established for Bumiputera admission in fields of study where they were underrepresented.

With improved education, the government argued that Bumiputeras would become more competitive and would provide the government with the skilled manpower necessary to implement planned development programmes. Due to pressing needs in education, the Second Malaysia Plan projections indicated that education expenditure would rise to RM 350.8 million in 1980 compared to RM 25.8 million in 1969. Restructuring did not entail taking from one community and giving to another. Rather, it aimed to build a just society in which no single group monopolised the economy. This required the government to participate actively in the economy. Consequently, Malay privileges were no longer restricted to land, ownership laws, government employment, and the distribution of government services. The

restructuring of society was expected to result in a broader transformation of Malay society, whereby Bumiputeras would participate more actively in economic development and urbanisation.

The Second Malaysia Plan also had a clearer planning rationale through the adoption of the growth zones concept. For example, in regional planning and land development in Pahang Tenggara, poorer regions were integrated into growth zones. This concept had been overlooked during the First Malaysia Plan. For instance, the Jengka Triangle development was not particularly successful because it was isolated from economic growth zones. Opening land with limited economic growth potential did not help settlers improve their standard of living, which caused many to leave. The growth zones concept emerged after the mid-term review of the Plan in 1973 and was adopted in Johore Tenggara and Pahang Tenggara land development. However, federal land development plans were constrained because state governments had jurisdiction over most suitable land. State governments typically preserved land with strong revenue-earning potential for their own projects.

The NEP was integrated into both government programmes and private enterprises. In the public sector, the quota for Malays in administration, diplomatic services, and education was exceeded. Rapid development increased the need for more specialised training for Bumiputeras and for more universities. Nevertheless, economic growth alone did not resolve rural poverty. Rural Malays were strongly embedded in their culture, and development imposed from above had limited impact. Democratisation of the development process may have enabled more active participation. However, Sabahans had not experienced direct rule from Sultans, who were perceived to be more receptive to change. Traditions and culture were often viewed as obstacles to development. Despite these constraints, the Second Malaysia Plan was successful in promoting economic growth.

The decline in oil prices also highlighted that Malaysia could not rely on the export of raw materials to sustain economic growth. Economic diversification and the industrialisation efforts under the First Malaysia Plan therefore needed to be intensified. Malaysia's GDP grew by 7.4 per cent, exceeding the target of the Second Malaysia Plan, which was 6.8 per cent. However, within poverty eradication and restructuring programmes, one negative outcome was the emergence of a "subsidy mentality" among Bumiputeras, rather than stronger self-reliance. The final two years of the Second

Malaysia Plan also coincided with heightened student unrest in universities, particularly concerning social inequality and poverty.

The Third Malaysia Five-Year Plan (1976–1980) showed good prospects for Malaysia. Investments in economic diversification began to yield results, supported by a strong global economy that increased demand for Malaysian exports. Malaysia produced new manufactured goods, particularly in food processing, electrical goods, rubber products, plywood, and chemical products. By the time of the Third Malaysia Plan, there were 50 industrial estate schemes and nine free trade zones in Peninsular Malaysia. These facilities attracted transnational corporations from the United States and Japan, partly due to rising costs in their home countries. They were also drawn by Malaysia's relatively cheap but educated labour. Women were employed in large numbers in factories throughout Peninsular Malaysia, and by 1980 their numbers reached 80,000. However, with inflation running at 7 per cent, the government needed to balance expenditure with earnings.

Public campaigns on inflation were launched, including the slogan “grow your own food”. Of the public sector expenditure of \$18.6 billion, 25.5 per cent was allocated to agriculture, 9.5 per cent to mining, manufacturing, and commerce, 16.6 per cent to social development, 36.5 per cent to infrastructure development, administration, and the environment, and 11.9 per cent to defence and security. Poverty eradication programmes accounted for 38.2 per cent of total development expenditure. The states targeted included Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu, Malacca, Sabah, and Sarawak.

The private sector became a partner to the public sector as required by the NEP. Private sector investment reached 26.8 billion out of the 44.2 billion investment target. The Third Malaysia Plan was financed through local and foreign loans, which was risky if financial and monetary systems were mismanaged. Other challenges included the need for additional staff and experts in new fields arising from industrialisation. For example, environmental protection experts were required with the enforcement of the Environment Quality Act. Based on the overriding objectives of the NEP, the Third Malaysia Plan objectives were: (1) reducing the incidence of rural poverty; (2) reducing the incidence of urban poverty; (3) enhancing quality of life; (4) ensuring equal shares irrespective of ethnicity in all walks of life; (5) achieving 30 per cent Malay ownership in economic assets, 40 per cent non-Bumiputera ownership, and 30 per cent foreign ownership; (6) fostering entrepreneurship among Bumiputeras; (7) encouraging and

supporting private and foreign investments; (8) promoting further mobilisation of human and other economic resources for development; and (9) developing and expanding the social and physical infrastructure of the economy to sustain these objectives.

The Third Malaysia Five-Year Plan aimed to increase productivity so that Malaysia would have a strong economic base for future generations. At the same time, it possessed many untapped resources in Sabah, Sarawak, Johor, and Pahang. The most promising of these was the exploration of petroleum and gas on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula and the west coast of Sabah and Sarawak. Infrastructure development and the establishment of growth centres in Sarawak did not require substantial expenditure, as it was largely a matter of making improvements. Finally, effective promotion strategies were needed to support Malaysian-made goods.

Meanwhile in Sabah, the NEP led the federal government to take further action in the state during the Chief Ministership of Tun Mustapha. Tun Mustapha was alleged to have abused his power and was seldom in Sabah.¹⁹ As a result, Harris, the State Finance Minister, resigned to form the BERJAYA Party. The party was later led by Tun Fuad, who resigned as Head of State in order to do so. Following the State Elections in April 1976, USNO won 20 seats and BERJAYA won 28 seats, ousting Tun Mustapha (USNO) from power. Under the new BERJAYA state government, the NEP began to make its presence felt in Sabah.

For example, Kojasa Enterprise, a state-owned shop, was established to offer lower prices, provide better services, and undercut Chinese shopkeepers. It operated several branches in Sabah. Many public and statutory bodies were also established to assist Bumiputeras in starting their own businesses. Nevertheless, by 1980, Bumiputeras were still unable to take charge of the economy despite government subsidies. Bumiputeras who were awarded government contracts often subcontracted them to Chinese businesses that possessed larger capital resources and greater business experience. This encouraged co-operation between Chinese and Bumiputeras, but it undermined the objective of developing successful Bumiputera entrepreneurs.

In many cases, Bumiputeras became “sleeping partners”, waiting for their shares once payment claims were ready. This practice was commonly termed “Ali Babaism”. In Sabah, a number of government statutory bodies established to support Bumiputeras operated at a loss due to inefficiency and mismanagement. For example,

in 1980, losses incurred by the Sabah Land Development Board were estimated to exceed \$30 million. Due to these losses, the Chief Minister, Datuk Harris, decided that a private agency, the Sime Darby Group, would take over the management of the Sabah Land Development Board (SLDB) on 21 July 1981. On 11 August 1981, Harris amended the Inquiry Commission Ordinance Chapter 16, which governed the conduct of officials in statutory bodies. The amendment allowed a surcharge to be imposed on officials who abused public funds. Harris' speech on the amendment stated:

“Large sums of public funds which have been allocated to statutory authorities and other Government sponsored agencies have been mismanaged. Millions of ringgit have been wasted and many projects have not succeeded to the extent we have hoped”. (Campbell, 1986)

When Mahathir assumed the Malaysian premiership following Hussein's retirement on 16 July 1981, he introduced reforms and measures and pushed strongly to implement the NEP. This followed a mid-term review of the TMP, which indicated that the target of 30 per cent Bumiputera participation would not be achieved by 1990. Mahathir had been a strong supporter of Tun Razak in formulating the NEP, and the mid-term review provided an opportunity to advance new ideas based on his experience as Minister of Trade and Industry, with the aim of transforming Malaysia into a newly industrialised country. However, Malaysia was also facing recession and falling prices for its major exports during this period.

Subsequently, the Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981–1985) had to be financed through 46 per cent foreign borrowing, including RM 4.6 billion in 1982, with 54 per cent coming from domestic sources (Hua, 1983). In addition, Malaysia borrowed from the World Bank for specific projects and purchases. Between 1982 and 1985, Mahathir introduced policies such as Clean, Efficient and Trustworthy Administration Through Leadership, as well as the Look East Policy, Malaysia Incorporated, Privatisation, the National Industrial Policy, the National Agricultural Policy, and the Assimilation of Islamic Values in Administration. These policies reflected changes under Mahathir's administration, which will be discussed further in this thesis. Due to the recession and the weak performance of the NEP, he also launched a campaign against what he regarded as the Bumiputeras' “subsidy mentality”. In line with the Look East Policy, Malaysia sought assistance from Japan and Korea to achieve the objective of becoming a newly industrialised country. Most industrial projects during the Third Malaysia Plan

and the first two years of the Fourth Malaysia Plan were awarded to Japanese and Korean firms. State-led industrialisation placed significant pressure on national financial resources. Despite proposals to institutionalise honest and efficient administration, industrialisation programmes were affected by blunders, unaccounted losses, corruption, fraud, scandals, conflicts of interest, debt, money politics, and mismanagement.

Much of the industrial development promoted by the Heavy Industries Corporation of Malaysia, including Perwaja, cement, and the Proton car projects, incurred losses. The RM 1 billion Proton project was criticised as economically unfeasible. Expenditure on industrialisation increased government debt and led to budget cuts affecting other programmes under the Fourth Malaysia Plan. Public expenditure was estimated to have fallen from RM 1,027 million in 1983 to RM 984 million. The education, defence, and home affairs budget was reduced by 16 per cent to RM 548 million. Much of the expenditure was directed towards industrial projects undertaken mainly by Korean and Japanese companies. As debt increased, state intervention, restrictions, and reforms also expanded. The first such intervention, which triggered protest from interest groups, was the amendment of the Societies Act 1981.

This amendment enabled the government to shape and restrict political association and participation. Independent trade unions were replaced by in-house unions in accordance with the Japanese model. Notably, Japanese workers received higher remuneration than Malaysian workers. Through such measures, the government restricted workers from demanding higher wages. Mahathir's policies also marked an important stage in indirectly encouraging a closer relationship between business and politics, which drew criticism from opposition parties and interest groups. The Malaysia Incorporated Policy promoted such collaboration between the public and private sectors, which required disciplined management, particularly in corporate finance.

The Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986–1990) was the final opportunity for Mahathir's government to achieve the NEP objectives of poverty eradication and societal restructuring. The recession from 1982 to 1986 underscored the importance of human resource development in achieving economic growth. A well-trained labour force, particularly among Bumiputeras, was viewed as important for increasing productivity and redistributing income.

During this period, many industries, including MNCs, employed cheap female labour in large numbers for factory work. The recession also limited the achievement of NEP objectives. There were episodes of labour unrest, political corruption, favouritism in the award of privatised projects, and mismanagement. Allegations from interest groups highlighted mismanagement, discrimination, labour unrest, and the award of privatised government projects to UMNO politicians. These developments also demonstrated that economic factors played a significant role in national unity. Public criticisms of Mahathir's policies suggested a growing awareness of human rights, freedom, equality, and democracy.

Due to mismanagement, economic development and growth benefited only a few opportunists, while the poor became poorer. Malaysia needed individuals, particularly Bumiputeras, who could manage and regenerate wealth. Moreover, greater reliance on domestic revenue and savings, and reduced borrowing to finance the Fifth Malaysia Plan, required managerial, administrative, and scientific expertise to improve productivity. Expert knowledge was regarded as central to economic growth, including marketing new products, utilising resources effectively and efficiently, and increasing investment rates. These measures were expected not only to overcome recessionary effects, but also to create employment, stimulate industrial activity, and encourage greater corporate ownership among Bumiputeras. They also aimed to reduce unemployment and related problems arising from the global recession. The overall strategies for achieving economic growth under Mahathir's policies included privatisation, efficient economic management, mobilisation of the agricultural sector, stimulation of industrial development, greater emphasis on research and development, further human resource development, improved spatial planning, development of urban centres, and increased female participation in development.

The Fifth Malaysia Plan re-emphasised the importance of positive values in national development. These included values considered crucial to national unity, a strengthened work ethic, entrepreneurial spirit, religious values, and a clean environment. They were emphasised in response to corruption and mismanagement associated with previous plans, which had damaged Malaysia's international image. In addition, privatisation projects involving large amounts of capital required competent and reliable individuals to manage and administer them.

The Bumiputera Malaysia Finance Ltd. scandal in 1983, involving a transaction of approximately US\$580 million, taught Mahathir's government a serious lesson. Economic recovery came in 1987, with growth of 5.2 per cent, driven by improvements in the world economy and rising Malaysian exports such as electronics, the Proton car, sawn logs, sawn timber, palm oil, and petroleum. Jomo et al. (1989) argue that recovery was linked to a growth in the world trade cycle, but would not have been as strong without diversification of exports and rapid industrialisation.

In the late 1980s, Malaysia faced political challenges, including the deregistration of UMNO due to internal disputes. Public demonstrations emerged against favouritism in the award of privatised projects, low wages, rural poverty, and industrialisation. These events led to arrests under the Internal Security Act, which was used as a last resort to manage political opposition and unrest. Meanwhile in Sabah, Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) gained power in mid-1985 after defeating the National Front government led by BERJAYA under Harris. Under Harris, many development projects and public enterprises were implemented hastily. Sabah experienced strong economic growth, but observers often viewed it as fragile. His administration was also associated with inefficiency, mismanagement, and corruption. Several issues contributed to PBS's success, including demands to increase Sabah's share of oil and gas income in Labuan.

One prominent issue involved Harris' decision to turn Labuan Island, part of Sabah, into a Federal Territory. The Federal Territories, including Kuala Lumpur and Labuan, were constitutionally created for administrative purposes. In addition, persistent rural poverty became an increasingly significant political issue in Sabah. Nevertheless, Datuk Harris Salleh developed Sabah extensively and introduced social changes during his nine years in office. He followed a development pattern similar to that adopted in Peninsular Malaysia in line with the NEP implemented in 1970.

Harris was often remembered as a Chief Minister in a hurry, possibly due to attempts to meet NEP targets. During his rule, Sabah received federal assistance and experienced the early development of modern industries such as shipping, oil and gas in Labuan, car assembly, and a paper mill. The Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986–2000) incorporated recommendations from the Report of the Cabinet Committee to review the implementation of the Education Policy (1979), which had identified significant changes in Malaysia's education system. For example, pre-school regulations were enacted, granting the government authority to supervise, control, co-ordinate, train

teachers, develop curricula, and upgrade the quality of pre-school education.

A nationwide study in 1984 showed that 279,000 children aged four to six attended pre-school education. These centres and nurseries were operated by the Ministry of Rural Development and private agencies, including churches, religious bodies, social organisations, and individuals. The new primary school curriculum introduced in 1983 required teachers to teach manipulative skills, known as “kemahiran hidup”, to familiarise students with basic practical skills in addition to standard subjects. However, the class-teacher ratio under the new curriculum worsened slightly.

In secondary education, measures under the Fourth Plan sought to increase rural student participation in science streams through residential science secondary schools and MARA Junior Science Colleges. Nevertheless, enrolment in vocational schools increased only marginally from 12,500 in 1980 to 13,700 in 1985. This suggests that attitudes towards vocational education remained restrained, similar to patterns in Malaya in the 1960s. In 1985, primary schools recorded 2.2 million students and 92,200 teachers, a ratio of 24:1. In secondary schools, there were 918,400 students, 40,300 college-trained teachers, and 16,600 graduate teachers, a ratio of 16:1.

Teacher shortages persisted in science, physics, chemistry, mathematics, English, and Bahasa Malaysia, alongside an excess in social science subjects. Consistent with NEP objectives, Bumiputera participation in tertiary education increased. Bumiputeras taking diploma and degree courses in local institutions increased and eventually outnumbered Chinese students. In 1985, Bumiputeras constituted 94.5 per cent of 25,046 diploma students, compared to 4.9 per cent Chinese students. Among 37,838 degree students, Bumiputeras accounted for 63.0 per cent, compared to 29.7 per cent Chinese students. At independence in 1963, Malaysia’s only university was the University of Malaya. By the Fifth Plan, Malaysia had established the University of Science, National University, University of Agriculture, University of Technology, International Islamic University, and Northern University of Malaysia.

Bumiputeras were also provided with preparatory courses after secondary education before entering diploma and degree programmes in engineering and science. Beyond education, social developments included youth, sports, social welfare, and information and broadcasting. The overall objective was to inculcate positive values oriented towards community development, self-reliance, and nationhood. However, most social development achievements were concentrated in Kuala Lumpur and

surrounding regions. In states such as Sabah, social development was limited, and projects related to sports, culture, and youth did not reach the levels of professionalism typical in Western contexts. Professional sports were largely limited to football, horse racing, and golf, although awareness of social development was increasing. Expenditure increased in areas such as culture (\$12.50 million), community development (KEMAS) (\$48.47 million), Aborigines Department (\$60.65), youth (\$26.00 million), sports (85.48 million), and social welfare services (\$34.00 million).

The growth of the timber industry since Tun Mustapha's rule also produced wealthy Chinese timber tycoons. The timber industry created limited employment for rural populations, as cheap labour was recruited from Indonesia and the Philippines. While politicians and their Chinese partners gained large areas of timber land, rural farmers remained confined to small paddy plots. Their land titles were protected under native laws, but had less value in the land market than ordinary titles. As a result, a small wealthy class emerged in Sabah. In addition, Bumiputera graduates sponsored by the Sabah Government for overseas and local university studies began to become established in their careers, contributing to the emergence of a new middle class in Sabah.

During BERJAYA rule under Datuk Harris (1976–1985), which maintained strong federal alignment, many NEP programmes were extended to Sabah. Economic diversification began, boosting Sabah's economy and creating new jobs. By the time a new state government led by Datuk Pairin under PBS was formed in mid-1985, the incidence of poverty in Sabah, based on the Household Income Survey in 1984, had declined to 33.1 per cent.

Under PBS, the Sabah Action Blueprint (SAB) was launched in 1987 to provide a conceptual framework for guiding economic development. The Sabah Five-Year Plan (1986–1990) revived earlier Sabah planning efforts, with further economic diversification as a central objective. Although the SAB resembled the Malaysia Plans and the NEP, it provided a better strategy for addressing local economic issues that had been overlooked by the federal government. This reflected differences in culture and livelihoods between Sabahans and Sarawakians, and populations in Peninsular Malaysia.

Furthermore, West Malaysians who occupied many senior positions in central planning agencies were not familiar with Sabah's conditions. However, the SAB had a major weakness in that it failed to integrate social development with economic growth. In addition, ministerial committees were headed by politicians with limited business experience. Pang et al. (1990) argue that many ministries were not fully committed to implementing the SAB, possibly due to limited leadership experience in economic development and a dependent population. Rising poverty during PBS rule reflected the weak performance of the SAB. The SAB also lacked clear targets, making it difficult to assess, and it became largely a budget spending plan.

For example, under BERJAYA, the incidence of poverty declined to 33.1 per cent in 1984 from 58.3 per cent in 1976. However, by 1987 the incidence of poverty had increased to 35.3 per cent. Poverty in Sabah in 1987 was worse than in Sarawak, which showed a continuous decline. This suggests that a change of government had a negative effect on poverty eradication programmes in Sabah (Cole, 1998).

The Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–1995) was introduced after Malaysia recovered from the recession. Prior to the Plan, and with the NEP ending in 1990, the National Economic Consultative Committee was formed to discuss the future economy of Malaysia. It was argued that planning should consider inflation, development costs, growth, redistribution of income and wealth, national unity, and social progress. Future redistribution policies would consider ethnic groups, regions, and the interests of the 14 states. The overall objective of the Sixth Malaysia Plan was to build a united, socially just, and resilient nation. An allocation of RM 104 billion was provided for infrastructure, social development, and defence. The allocations were divided as follows:

Table 1.2

The Budget Allocation in Sixth Malaysia Plan

Communication Sector	73 million
Energy Sector	979 million
Infrastructure and Development	19 billion
Transportation	10.76 billion

Commerce and Industry	5.75 million
Education	8.5 billion
Health	2.25 billion
Agriculture Development	9 billion
Armed Forces	6 billion
Security	1.5 billion
Combat Poverty	600 million
Others	41.402 billion

Following the General Election, BN won at the federal level, although it lost the state of Sabah to Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) and the state of Kelantan to Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). The parliamentary results also showed that DAP gained more seats in Penang and Kuala Lumpur. PAS and Semangat 46, a new party formed by former UMNO Vice President Tengku Razaleigh, won all parliamentary seats in Kelantan, although two MPs later defected to the National Front after the election. During the election, these opposition parties formed a new coalition, “Gagasan Rakyat”, to challenge BN. However, after failing to wrest power from the National Front, Gagasan Rakyat appeared to lose public support and subsequently disbanded.

Following the October 1990 general election, a new cabinet line-up was appointed, featuring several new faces and younger leaders. Vision 2020 was introduced with the aim of transforming Malaysia into a fully industrialised country by the year 2020. The Vision identified nine challenges, namely: national unity; a free, calm, confident, and strong society; a democratic nation; a moral and ethical society; a liberal society; a progressive society that utilises science and technology; a caring society; economic justice; and a competitive, active, stable, and dynamic society. These challenges affected society broadly, including individuals, particularly Bumiputeras who were still viewed as lagging behind and living in traditional ways. Although some of these challenges were not new to well-off Chinese and Bumiputeras, unity, individual development, morality, and democracy remained among the most difficult challenges, regardless of ethnicity and social position in a multi-ethnic society.

In line with Vision 2020, reforms began with the government machinery, particularly the Civil Service. First, civil servants were awarded a pay rise in 1990, as demanded by their union CUEPAC, and a new philosophy was adopted in line with Vision 2020 and the industrialisation agenda. The New Remuneration Scheme (SSB) emphasised quality and productivity, and civil servants were evaluated annually based on these criteria. Inefficient civil servants were allowed to opt for early retirement at the age of 40. This policy aimed to promote a culture of excellence among civil servants based on seven core values: quality, productivity, innovation, discipline, integrity, accountability, and professionalism.

The pyramid-shaped organisational structure was reduced and a flatter structure introduced to cut staff and facilitate faster information flow. At the same time, the National Trust Share Scheme awarded bonuses and dividends to Bumiputera shareholders at the end of 1990. To enable all Malaysians to invest irrespective of ethnicity, two new trust schemes were introduced in 1990, namely Bumiputera Trust Share, for Bumiputeras, and National Trust Share, for all Malaysians. The former scheme was guaranteed against market fluctuations, while the latter was not. These developments supported the BN campaign in the 1990 general election and helped counter some opposition allegations against government policies. Although the National Trust Share Scheme enabled non-Bumiputeras to participate, Bumiputeras could invest in both schemes. These schemes therefore provided incentives for Bumiputeras, but also resulted in discrimination against other ethnic groups.

In Sabah, PBS, which had won the July 1990 state election for the third time since 1985, continued to raise concerns about deteriorating state rights (Institute for Sabah Development Studies, 1986). This issue gained PBS support among Sabahans, especially non-Malays. In the October 1990 Parliamentary General Election, PBS was accused of undermining BN after withdrawing from the BN coalition. The decision was made after seats were allocated among BN parties and candidates were nominated. PBS won all 14 seats it contested, with limited opposition, while the rival BN party, USNO, was allocated only six seats. Prior to this, political friction had already emerged between PBS leaders and the UMNO-dominated federal government, particularly on religious and development issues in Sabah.

PBS had little choice but to confront perceived bias from the federal government (Puyok, 2011 cited in Orlando & Suffian, 2023). As state development funding depended on federal allocation, the federal government could exert pressure by reducing per capita development allocations under the Sixth Malaysia Plan (Sixth Malaysian, Plan, 1996). Although RM 2.307 billion was allocated to Sabah, representing an increase of RM 50 million compared to RM 2.253 billion under the previous Malaysia Plan, the percentage change of minus 1.8 per cent indicated a significant reduction compared to the 13 states and the Federal Territory (Puyok, 2011). The RM 2.307 billion allocation accounted for approximately 6.45 per cent of the total federal allocation of RM 35.757 billion, excluding interstate projects.

Based on Figure 1.9, the incidence of poverty in Sabah was among the highest in Malaysia in 1984, after Perlis, Kedah, and Kelantan. Sabah's per capita income at the time was RM 1,638, the lowest among less developed states, compared to Perlis (RM 2,808), Kedah (RM 2,085), Sarawak (RM 2,014), and Kelantan (RM 1,791).

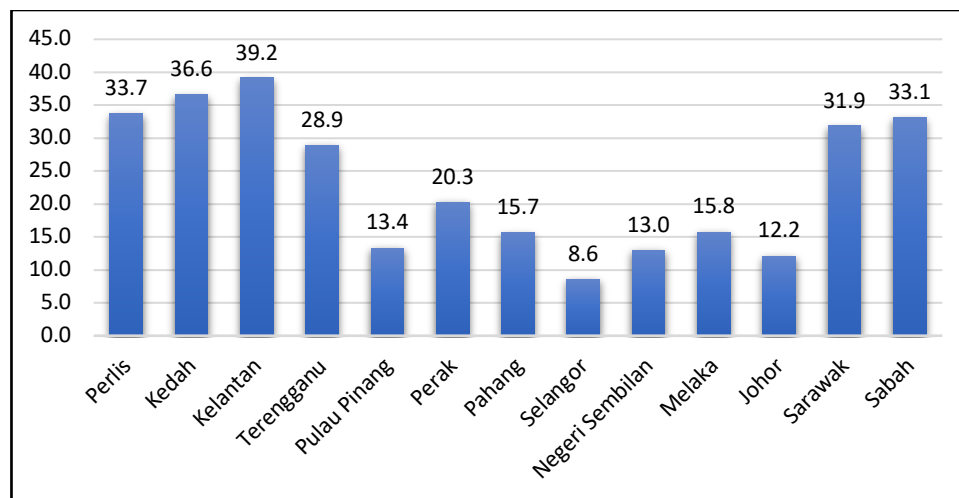


Figure 1.9 Incidence of Poverty by State, 1984 (%)

During the Seventh Plan period, there were setbacks due to the economic crisis in 1997–1998. Despite these challenges, there was significant overall progress in achieving equitable growth, particularly in poverty eradication, income distribution, and employment restructuring. However, in terms of restructuring equity ownership, there was a decline in Bumiputera ownership in the corporate sector.

After the Sabah political crisis ended in 1994, UMNO-BN ruled Sabah following BN's victory in the state election. The state practised a rotation system in

which the Chief Minister was appointed every two years. Consequently, Sabah lost a degree of autonomy in governing the state. From 1994 onwards, federal power expanded through greater political control and interference at the state level. As a result, Sabah's finances became largely dependent on, and controlled by, the federal government. The primary objective of the Seventh Plan was to significantly reduce poverty levels in Malaysia. The targets were to reduce hardcore poverty to 0.5 per cent and overall poverty to 5.5 per cent by the year 2000. To achieve this, the government played a leading role in implementing poverty eradication initiatives.

Various measures were adopted, including promoting income-generating projects, providing essential amenities to improve quality of life, and implementing programmes to instil positive values among the poor. Key government agencies, including the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA), and the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA), contributed to a special scheme focused on eradicating hardcore poverty.

The private sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also played a significant role by complementing government efforts. The combined impact of these initiatives, together with rapid economic growth between 1995 and 1997, contributed to substantial progress in poverty reduction throughout the Plan period.

Between 1995 and 1997, there was a notable reduction in poverty in Malaysia. The poverty rate fell from 8.7 per cent in 1995 to 6.1 per cent in 1997. This improvement was accompanied by a 25 per cent decline in the number of poor households, from 365,600 to 274,200. However, the economic crisis in late 1997 and 1998 negatively affected poverty reduction efforts, and the incidence of poverty increased to 8.5 per cent in 1998. With economic recovery in 1999, the poverty rate improved again, declining to 7.5 per cent. These fluctuations reflect the sensitivity of poverty outcomes to broader economic conditions, where downturns tend to increase poverty and recoveries can contribute to reduction.

In 1999, agricultural workers recorded the highest incidence of poverty at 16.4 per cent. Households headed by elderly individuals aged 65 years and above, as well as female-headed households, also experienced relatively high poverty rates, at 22.7 per cent and 16.9 per cent respectively. Poverty reduction during the Plan period can be attributed to economic growth and targeted programmes aimed at increasing

productivity and improving living standards. These included modernising and commercialising the smallholder subsector, land consolidation, replanting schemes, promoting rural-based industries, and expanding access to essential services such as education, healthcare, clean water, and electricity. Urban-based programmes, including squatter resettlement and low-cost housing projects, also contributed to improving the living conditions of the urban poor.

Hardcore poverty declined during the Plan period, largely due to rapid growth before mid-1997 and intensified implementation of the Development Programme for the Hardcore Poor (Program Pembangunan Rakyat Termiskin, PPRT). The incidence of hardcore poverty fell from 2.1 per cent in 1995 to 1.4 per cent in 1999. Similar reductions occurred in both rural and urban areas. Rural hardcore poverty declined from 3.6 per cent in 1995 to 2.4 per cent in 1999, while in urban areas it fell from 0.9 per cent to 0.5 per cent.

Throughout the Plan period, the PPRT focused on income-generating projects such as petty trading, cottage industries, livestock, aquaculture, and commercial food crop production. The programme also provided training and improved basic amenities for hardcore poor households. During this period, the government reviewed the Amanah Saham Bumiputera (ASB)-PPRT scheme by introducing a four-year grace period for RM5,000 interest-free loans. This enabled participants to receive the full annual dividends and bonuses. As of 30 April 2000, a total of 153,500 hardcore poor individuals benefited from this loan scheme, amounting to RM767.2 million in total assistance.

Land development agencies such as FELDA, FELCRA, and RISDA also played an important role through a special scheme aimed at eradicating hardcore poverty. The scheme provided financial assistance to families headed by a disabled member or a senior citizen aged 60 years and above. Eligible families received RM50 per person per month, up to a maximum of RM250 per family. This assistance supported 7,000 families categorised as hardcore poor. FELDA assisted 5,000 families, while FELCRA and RISDA supported 1,000 families each.

Following the 1998 economic crisis, the government expanded social programmes and enhanced the provision of essential services and amenities. Allocations for programmes such as PPRT were increased. An additional RM100 million was added to the initial RM200 million budget for AIM (Agensi Inovasi

Malaysia), while an additional RM200 million was allocated to a micro-credit programme for petty traders and hawkers in urban areas. A further RM200 million was allocated for improving rural infrastructure, including schools, clinics, potable water supply, and electricity. To moderate rising prices of food and essential items, the government implemented measures and promoted the “Buy Malaysian” campaign. These initiatives helped reduce inflationary pressures and provided some relief to poor and hardcore poor households, cushioning them from the effects of the crisis.

During the Plan period, all ethnic groups recorded increases in household income, contributing to an improvement in income distribution. Mean monthly gross household income rose from RM2,020 in 1995 to RM2,472 in 1999, reflecting an average annual growth rate of 5.2 per cent. This increase was largely associated with expanded employment opportunities. Bumiputera mean household income grew at an average annual rate of 5.5 per cent, reaching RM1,984 in 1999. For the Chinese community, mean household income increased by 4.6 per cent per year to RM3,456 in 1999. As a result, the Bumiputera-Chinese income disparity ratio narrowed from 1:1.80 in 1995 to 1:1.74 in 1999. However, the Bumiputera-Indian disparity ratio increased slightly from 1:1.33 to 1:1.36, largely due to the higher income growth rate of 6.0 per cent per year recorded by the Indian community during the Plan period.

Continuing efforts were also made to increase Bumiputera ownership of corporate equity and enhance their control of companies by strengthening their capacity to manage businesses effectively. Programmes included training, technical advice, hands-on experience, and opportunities for capable Bumiputera individuals to participate in the corporate sector. Bumiputera institutions and trust agencies played important roles in mobilising resources and facilitating the acquisition of effective equity ownership. However, the 1998 economic downturn affected the restructuring of ownership and control within the corporate sector.

In absolute terms, Bumiputera ownership of share capital at par value increased by 12.6 per cent per year, rising from approximately RM37 billion in 1995 to RM59 billion in 1999. Nevertheless, the Bumiputera share of corporate equity declined from 20.6 per cent in 1995 to 19.1 per cent in 1999. The agriculture, construction, and transportation sectors recorded the highest proportions of Bumiputera equity ownership at 28.5 per cent, 26.5 per cent, and 24.2 per cent respectively. However, Bumiputera ownership in manufacturing remained relatively low at 12.5 per cent in 1999.

In contrast, non-Bumiputera equity ownership rose substantially from approximately RM78 billion to RM125 billion, although their overall share of corporate equity declined from 43.4 per cent in 1995 to 40.3 per cent in 1999. The Chinese share of capital ownership fell from 40.9 per cent in 1995 to 37.9 per cent in 1999, while the Indian share remained at 1.5 per cent.

The period from 2001 to 2003 also recorded progress in poverty eradication and income distribution. Poverty incidence declined from 7.5 per cent in 1999 to 5.1 per cent in 2002, while the number of poor households decreased by 25.6 per cent to 267,900 households. Excluding welfare recipients, the estimated poverty rate in 2002 was 4.5 per cent. All states recorded a decline in poverty, with Kuala Lumpur registering the lowest incidence at 0.5 per cent, while Sabah continued to record the highest at 16.0 per cent.

Rural poverty declined from 12.4 per cent in 1999 to 11.4 per cent in 2002, with the highest incidence among agricultural, hunting, and forestry workers at 14.5 per cent. Rural households headed by elderly persons and female-headed households also recorded high poverty rates at 28.6 per cent and 25.7 per cent respectively. Urban poverty declined to 2.0 per cent in 2002, attributed to income-generating programmes and initiatives such as squatter resettlement and low-cost housing. A Cabinet Committee on Urban Poverty was established to address urban poverty and protect low-income households from economic downturns.

Poverty incidence remained highest among Bumiputeras, despite declining from 10.2 per cent in 1999 to 7.3 per cent in 2002. Poverty rates among Chinese and Indians also declined over the same period. Efforts to uplift the Orang Asli community continued, focusing on resettlement, economic and social development programmes, and human resource development through education and skills training.

Hardcore poverty incidence declined from 1.4 per cent in 1999 to 1.0 per cent in 2002, with rural areas recording a slightly higher rate than urban areas. Elderly-headed and female-headed households recorded higher hardcore poverty rates. The Skim Pembangunan Kesejahteraan Rakyat (SPKR) remained important in generating income and fostering positive values among hardcore poor households, benefiting approximately 150,000 households. NGOs and the private sector also contributed through skills training and financial support.

Income distribution improved, with the proportion of lower-income households declining from 33.1 per cent in 1999 to 25.9 per cent in 2002. The middle-income group expanded to 47.9 per cent of households. Mean monthly gross household income increased from RM2,472 in 1999 to RM3,011 in 2002. Bumiputeras and Chinese recorded growth rates of 6.2 per cent and 7.4 per cent per annum respectively. However, this contributed to a widening Bumiputera-Chinese income disparity ratio, although the Bumiputera-Indian ratio decreased. Rural household income increased only marginally, while urban household income rose more substantially, widening the rural-urban income disparity ratio.

Focusing on Sabah, on 7 February 2001, CINTANUSA submitted a memorandum to Yang Dipertua Negeri, Tun Sakaran Dandai, demanding the abolition of the rotation system for the post of Sabah Chief Minister. However, the Prime Minister at the time disagreed and decided to maintain the rotation system. Despite several parties seeking its abolition, Dr Mahathir Mohamad upheld his commitment to rotate the position among leaders of the major communities in Sabah. The system allocated two terms to UMNO and one term to other component parties in each rotation. While some expressed disappointment, others viewed the decision as fair, recognising the role of different communities in supporting BN.

The issue continued until 27 March 2004, when Sabah's 10-year rotation system, under which the Chief Ministership rotated every two years, was abolished, as announced by the fifth Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. This decision followed requests from leaders of BN component parties in Sabah to end the rotation among the three main groups, namely Malay Muslims, Kadazans, and Chinese. The rotation system had been introduced by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1994 to address concerns relating to representation and inclusivity. However, over time it was perceived as undermining continuity in economic planning and development. Several former Chief Ministers argued that the two-year term was insufficient to implement policy changes and carry out long-term economic plans.

With the rotation system abolished, UMNO-BN gained stronger authority to govern the state. The transition was assumed to enable the state to focus more on development and governance without the constraints associated with the rotation system. Several BN component parties, including Parti Bersatu Sabah, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the Sabah People's Party (SAPP), UPKO, and PBRs,

supported the decision to end the rotation system after discussions and consultations. They believed that it would allow them to concentrate on their respective roles and responsibilities without continued debate over rotation. Overall, the abolition of the rotation system was viewed as a step towards improving economic planning and development in Sabah by providing greater stability and continuity in governance.

Sabah also received increased attention from the federal government in terms of financial allocation. Under the Ninth Malaysia Plan, federal allocation to Sabah was substantially increased to RM 16,908 million, which also included private financial initiatives.

During the Ninth Plan period, the Malaysian government renewed its emphasis on addressing socio-economic imbalances. Allowing inequalities to persist could negatively affect growth, national unity, and societal stability. The approach to addressing these imbalances focused on capacity building and raising competitiveness, taking into account lessons learned from past implementation and increasing global competition. Key priorities included the eradication of hardcore poverty and the reduction of overall poverty. Efforts were directed at reducing inter- and intra-ethnic inequalities by narrowing rural-urban and regional gaps and addressing disparities in employment, income, and wealth. Special attention was given to vulnerable groups such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, single mothers, and orphans.

The Ninth Plan targeted halving the incidence of overall poverty to 2.8 per cent and eliminating hardcore poverty by 2010. Specific programmes were pursued to address poverty among particular groups, including pockets of urban and rural poor, Bumiputera minorities in Sabah and Sarawak, and the Orang Asli. Efforts to reduce poverty among women, particularly in rural areas and in Sabah and Sarawak, were also prioritised. Special programmes were developed for poor women in urban areas, with emphasis on single mothers.

During the Plan period, the government strengthened national machinery and institutional capacity for the advancement of women. Efforts were made to meet the 30 per cent quota for women in decision-making positions in the public sector and to provide more opportunities for women in the premier category of the public service. Gender mainstreaming became a focus, ensuring that gender considerations were routinely incorporated into major sectoral policies and programmes. A gender-related

development index was to be developed to indicate the level of gender equality in the country.



Figure 2.0 The Strategic Thrust and Game Changers

Thrust 1, enhancing inclusiveness towards an equitable society, aimed to ensure that all groups could participate in the economy and benefit from prosperity, regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or geographical location. Under the inclusive development approach, the thrust emphasised providing equitable opportunities for households to improve income and wellbeing, while simultaneously addressing income inequality. Specifically, the thrust focused on uplifting households in the bottom 40 per cent income group (B40), empowering communities, transforming rural areas, accelerating regional growth, and enhancing the Bumiputera Economic Community (BEC).

During the review period, overall income inequality declined further as B40 households recorded higher monthly incomes. The 2016 Family Wellbeing Index, which measures the wellbeing of Malaysian families, also improved moderately. The quality of life in rural communities was enhanced through the provision of basic infrastructure and services, alongside improved economic opportunities. Efforts to reduce regional disparities also resulted in higher inflows of investment and the creation of more job opportunities across the five regional economic corridors. Initiatives and programmes to strengthen the BEC led to higher Bumiputera participation in entrepreneurship and skilled occupations. Despite this progress, challenges remained in enhancing inclusiveness among the rakyat. These included low levels of economic participation among B40 households, limited Bumiputera ownership of financial and

non-financial assets, a growing ageing population, and persistent disparities between states and regions, as well as between urban and rural areas.

Thrust 2, improving wellbeing for all, sought to raise the standard of living and quality of life of the rakyat, regardless of socio-economic background or geographical location. In this regard, emphasis was placed on improving access to quality healthcare, providing affordable housing, implementing crime prevention and road safety programmes, and promoting social cohesion, national unity, and active lifestyles. The provision of quality healthcare at affordable cost improved overall health status and wellbeing. Affordable housing programmes, particularly public housing, contributed to increased home ownership among poor, low-, and middle-income households. Crime prevention initiatives reduced index crime and improved perceptions of safety.

Initiatives to improve road safety reduced accident rates. Various programmes were also implemented to promote social cohesion and national unity. In this context, the Kuala Lumpur Southeast Asian (SEA) Games 2017 attracted more than 10,000 volunteers, bringing together Malaysians from diverse backgrounds. In addition, extensive community participation in sports activities, alongside the inspiring performance of national athletes at international competitions, encouraged greater public involvement in sports. Nevertheless, concerns remained in improving wellbeing, particularly escalating house prices, a growing burden of disease, increasing numbers of new drug addicts, and the threat of cybercrime.

Thrust 3, accelerating human capital development for an advanced nation, aimed to produce human capital with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to succeed in a globalised economy. Malaysia continued to record full employment with improving labour productivity. Intake into Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes increased through sustained promotion and supporting initiatives. A harmonised accreditation system was developed and incorporated into the revised Malaysian Qualifications Framework. The Pembangunan Sumber Manusia Berhad Act 2001 was amended to expand coverage to additional services subsectors, thereby increasing the number of employees eligible for training under the Human Resources Development Fund. Enrolment in primary and secondary education, as well as across all levels of study in institutions of higher education (IHE), also increased. More public universities were granted autonomy status, reaching 17 out of 20 public universities. However, several issues continued to hinder human capital development,

including inadequate job creation in skilled categories, reliance on low-skilled foreign workers, and graduate underemployment.

At the same time, the TVET landscape remained fragmented, as programmes were offered by multiple institutions including agencies under different ministries, state skills development centres, and private institutions. Many programmes were similar, yet operated under two different accreditation standards, with limited specialisation. In addition, Malaysian student performance in two international assessments, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), remained below average, raising concerns about the quality of basic education. Research, development, and innovation activities were also uncoordinated and fragmented, partly due to weak collaboration between public IHE and research institutions, as well as industry.

Thrust 4, pursuing green growth for sustainability and resilience, highlighted the importance of natural resources and environmental sustainability in ensuring continuous economic growth and strengthening resilience against climate change and disasters. New legislation, policies, and action plans were introduced, while existing financing mechanisms were strengthened to support the uptake of green initiatives. Efforts were undertaken to promote sustainable consumption and production (SCP) across economic sectors, including the implementation of Government green procurement (GGP) to stimulate growth of the green market. Measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change and to reduce disaster risks were also strengthened. Total installed renewable energy capacity increased during the review period. The Malaysian Carbon Reduction and Environmental Sustainability Tool was adopted to encourage green building construction. The establishment of the National Disaster Management Agency further strengthened disaster risk management. In addition, the National Policy on Biological Diversity, 2016–2025, was formulated to support conservation and sustainable resource use, and more terrestrial, inland water, coastal, and marine areas were gazetted as protected areas. Nonetheless, challenges remained, including governance-related weaknesses, limited green technology and products, degradation of natural resources, and continuing environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, and disaster risks.

Thrust 5, strengthening infrastructure to support economic expansion, aimed to provide an enabling environment for growth by improving access to essential services,

utilities, and amenities. Infrastructure investments contributed to a more integrated transport system, improved logistics efficiency, expanded broadband coverage and quality, and increased access to clean water and electricity.

Two major infrastructure projects were completed during the review period, namely Mass Rapid Transit 1 (MRT 1) and Light Rail Transit 2 (LRT 2). PETRONAS' floating liquefied natural gas offshore Bintulu, Sarawak, was commissioned in 2016, and Regasification Terminal 2 in Pengerang, Johor, was completed in 2017 to enhance energy security. However, infrastructure development continued to face challenges, including limited coordination in the transport and energy sectors, financial sustainability issues in water services, and regulatory constraints affecting broadband infrastructure. Although the public transport network improved, modal share remained low, partly due to inadequate first- and last-mile connectivity and reluctance to shift from private vehicles to public transport.

Thrust 6, re-engineering economic growth for greater prosperity, outlined strategies to accelerate growth through high-value and knowledge-intensive activities. Most sectors recorded growth, and the manufacturing sector exceeded its targeted growth rate, driven mainly by the electrical and electronics, chemicals and chemical products, and transport equipment subsectors. Services sector growth was supported by wholesale and retail trade, underpinned by improved consumer sentiment and market conditions. Growth in construction was driven by large petrochemical, transport, and utility projects. Productivity gains were recorded in many sectors, partly due to the adoption of new machinery and innovative technologies. However, volatility in global commodity prices and adverse weather conditions contributed to slower growth in agriculture.

During the review period, value-added growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) at 6.2 per cent exceeded national GDP growth of 5.1 per cent, driven mainly by wholesale and retail trade, and food and beverages subsectors. SMEs also contributed positively to employment growth in services, manufacturing, and construction. Nevertheless, SME contributions to GDP and exports remained relatively small. Persistent challenges such as complex regulatory frameworks, low productivity, reliance on low-skilled foreign workers, and low technology adoption remained significant concerns. Gaps in specialised skills needed to leverage technological advancement also persisted. Internationalisation efforts were constrained by limited

understanding of overseas markets, weak networks, and insufficient competitiveness.

Since the 1970s, the Malaysian government has prioritised poverty eradication regardless of ethnicity, contributing to a sharp decline in poverty rates from 49.3 per cent in 1970 to 3.8 per cent in 2009. The policy focus later shifted towards raising income levels of the bottom 40 per cent households, regardless of ethnicity or location, through targeted support and resources. This includes specific attention to ethnic minorities, Orang Asli communities in Peninsular Malaysia, and Bumiputera communities in Sabah and Sarawak.

In 2009, bottom 40 per cent households recorded monthly household income below RM 2,300, with 1.8 per cent categorised as hardcore poor, 7.6 per cent as poor, and 90.6 per cent as low-income households. Mean monthly income for the bottom 40 per cent in 2009 was RM 1,440. There was also a shift in income distribution compared to 1990, with fewer households earning below RM 500 or between RM 500 and RM 999, and more households concentrated within the RM 1,000 to RM 1,499 and RM 1,500 to RM 2,000 ranges.

Approximately 73 per cent of bottom 40 per cent households were Bumiputera, largely concentrated in six states: Johor, Kedah, Perak, Sabah, Sarawak, and Selangor. These households often faced limited economic mobility due to lower skill levels, remote locations, and lower qualifications. Government plans adopted a three-pronged strategy to improve livelihoods among bottom 40 per cent households. First, it aimed to build capabilities and increase income-generating potential through education and entrepreneurship. Second, it addressed immediate living standards by improving access to basic amenities. Third, tailored programmes were implemented for specific groups with different needs.

The policy objectives included reducing poverty incidence to 2.0 per cent by 2015, increasing mean income of bottom 40 per cent households from RM 1,440 in 2009 to RM 2,300 in 2015, improving income inequality through reductions in the Gini coefficient, and increasing the proportion of bottom 40 per cent households with SPM qualification and above. The Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016–2020) represented the final phase towards achieving a developed and inclusive nation in line with Vision 2020. The Plan emphasised people-centred growth and wellbeing. The Mid-Term Review covered progress in 2016–2017 and outlined socio-economic policies for 2018–2020, taking into account government priorities following the 14th General Election. The Plan

emphasised good governance, transparency, and the wellbeing of the rakyat, and outlined six strategic thrusts and six game changers to address social, economic, and environmental challenges while supporting economic growth.

The strategic thrusts covered enhancing inclusiveness, improving wellbeing for all, accelerating human capital development, pursuing green growth for sustainability, strengthening infrastructure to support economic expansion, and re-engineering economic growth for greater prosperity. Collectively, these thrusts aimed to ensure equitable opportunities, expand access to quality healthcare and affordable housing, strengthen human capital, enhance environmental sustainability, and improve infrastructure performance. Despite positive progress, persistent issues included limited Bumiputera ownership of assets, uneven regional development, pressures on wellbeing such as housing affordability and health burdens, and structural constraints affecting productivity and innovation.

2.3 Social Policy and Alleviation of Poverty

In the early stages of poverty reduction in Malaysia, several policies were introduced from an economic perspective. From the early 1970s, the Malaysian government introduced a series of poverty eradication policies, comprising the New Economic Policy (NEP) from 1970 to 1990, the National Development Policy (NDP) from 1990 to 2000, and the National Vision Policy (NVP) from 2000 to 2020. Poverty programmes were later implemented under the Government Transformation Programme (GTP), introduced by the sixth Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Najib Tun Razak, in April 2009. The GTP comprised National Key Result Areas (NKRAs). One objective of the NKRAs was to raise the standard of living among lower-income households (Malaysia, 2011). Under the NKRAs, several programmes were introduced, including 1AZAM, BR1M, PPRT, and KR1M.

The 1AZAM programme, which stands for *Akhiri Zaman Miskin*, aimed to assist poor and hardcore poor households to increase income by building capabilities and creating employment opportunities. There were four main components under 1AZAM, namely AZAM Tani, AZAM Niaga, AZAM Khidmat, and AZAM Kerja. AZAM Tani involved support for income generation through short-term agricultural activities, such as vegetable cultivation. This programme was implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Women, Welfare and Development of

Sarawak, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry of Sabah. AZAM Khidmat provided employment opportunities suited to participants in the services sector. Participants were trained to develop specific skills, such as reflexology, grooming, sewing, and baking, to facilitate income generation. This programme was administered by the Ministry of Women Development, Family and Community, the Ministry of Women, Welfare and Development of Sarawak, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry of Sabah, in collaboration with Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM). AZAM Kerja focused on job placement for poor and hardcore poor participants based on qualifications and skills. This programme was conducted by the Ministry of Human Resources, the Ministry of Women, Welfare and Development of Sarawak, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry of Sabah. Finally, AZAM Niaga, conducted by Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) in collaboration with the Ministry of Women Development and Community, the Ministry of Women, Welfare and Development of Sarawak, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry of Sabah, provided a microcredit scheme to enable participants to start small businesses (Malaysia, 2011).

In addition, the government provided cash assistance to poor and hardcore poor households under Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BR1M) (Malaysia, 2012). Lagarde, Haines and Palmer (2009) define cash assistance as a tool to increase household income. In Latin America, similar schemes are referred to as Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT) and are used to assist families living in extreme poverty. BR1M was one of the Malaysian government's initiatives under the Government Transformation Programme (GTP). The former Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Najib Tun Razak (2012), stated that RM2.6 billion in BR1M assistance would be distributed to lower- and middle-income households through the Inland Revenue Board. Each eligible household received a RM500 cash voucher on a one-off basis. The first BR1M application period ran from 10 December 2011 to 10 January 2012, and payments were issued from 15 January 2012 to 15 March 2012. Eligible applicants were households earning RM3,000 and below per month and those listed in e-Kasih. According to the Ministry of Finance (2012), there were 4,123,713 BR1M applicants as of January 2012.

In improving access to healthcare, the Malaysian government introduced the 1Malaysia Clinic, which aimed to expand healthcare access for poor people and lower-income households (Family, Health Development Division 2015). The establishment of 1Malaysia Clinics required RM10 million under the Malaysia 2010 budget. The

public charge was RM1, and more than 50 1Malaysia Clinics were opened across Malaysia.

The government also introduced Kedai Rakyat 1 Malaysia (KR1M), enabling citizens to purchase groceries at prices estimated to be 30 per cent to 40 per cent lower than conventional stores (Performance management Delivery Unit, 2012). KR1M was also listed under the NKRAs. KR1M outlets were established in both rural and urban areas. KR1M was designed as a small minimart supplying essential goods such as rice, flour, sugar, and cooking oil (Malaysia, 2013). By 2013, 40 KR1M branches had been opened across all states in Malaysia.

Perumahan Rakyat Termiskin (PPRT) was another key programme highlighted in the Seventh Malaysia Plan (Mohammed, 2016). The programme provided housing assistance for poor households living in rural areas. PPRT received a budget of at least RM797 billion as announced in the Seventh Malaysia Plan. It was coordinated by Jabatan Perumahan Negara through the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. By January 2010, 9,361 housing units had been constructed in Sabah, involving RM601 billion in expenditure (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 2010).

In Sabah, several state-level programmes were also introduced to address poverty. Under the Sabah Development Corridor (SDC), announced in the Ninth Malaysia Plan, one of the main visions was to reduce poverty and achieve a zero per cent poverty rate by 2010 (Sabah State Budget Report, 2009). These programmes were coordinated by the Sabah Ministry of Rural Development through the Skim Pembangunan Kesejahteraan Rakyat (SPKR). Among the programmes listed under the SDC in the fight against poverty was Mini Estet Sejahtera (MESEJ).

Mini Estet Sejahtera was proposed at the state level in early 2007, with the objective of helping poor households sustain income by creating employment opportunities. The programme was implemented in 30 locations in Sabah with the highest poverty rates (Sabah State Budget Report, 2007). Mini Estet Sejahtera (MESEJ) focused on agriculture, micro-enterprises, and aquaculture. In its early phase, the programme received RM36.06 million from the Sabah state government (Sabah State Budget, 2007). By 2017, there were 52 Mini Estet Sejahtera (MESEJ) projects in Sabah (Sabah State Budget, 2017). The Pembangunan Ekonomi Setempat (PPES) programme was introduced by the Sabah state government on 18 November 2016 during the Sabah state budget presentation in the Sabah State Legislative Assembly. PPES received a

grant of RM2.2 million (Sabah State Budget, 2017). Malaysia has been known by several names historically. Between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, Malaysia was known as British Malaya (Mohd Nor, Azhar & Ibrahim, 2015). It was later called the Malayan Union in 1946, before being renamed the Federation of Malaya in 1948. On 16 September 1963, a larger federation was formed, comprising states in Peninsular Malaysia together with Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore, and this federation was called Malaysia. However, Singapore left Malaysia on 9 August 1965. Under British colonisation, British economic policy encouraged the large-scale influx of non-Malay immigrants. This was associated with labour trafficking involving Chinese and Indian workers. Many subsequently remained in Malaya as the country was rich in economic resources such as tin, coal, and gold. In addition, the generous and tolerant attitude of the Malays towards immigrants was also exploited by the British to facilitate continued migration into the Malay Peninsula (Christopher, 1988; Dhaoudi, 2001; Mohd Nor, Azhar & Ibrahim, 2015; Embong, 2018; Sivalingam, 2020).

The Malay population and immigrant communities were administered separately by the British under the divide-and-rule policy, which further weakened unity in Malaya prior to independence (Christopher, 1988; Dhaoudi, 2001; Mohd Nor, Azhar & Ibrahim, 2015; Embong, 2018; Sivalingam, 2020). Chinese immigrants were brought in mainly to work in tin mines, while Indian immigrants were recruited to work on rubber plantations. These groups were allowed to maintain their identities and were kept socially separate from the indigenous population. Indigenous communities were largely excluded from commercial and economic activities developed by British colonial policy. However, many indigenous people remained comfortable with traditional lifestyles as subsistence farmers or fishermen (Hirschman, 1987).

This situation contributed to the stability of British colonial rule (Mohd Nor, Azhar & Ibrahim, 2015). During the Second World War, Malay communities increasingly recognised that large-scale migration had adverse effects on the political economy of the Malays. The influence of Malay rulers gradually declined, and regionalism weakened unity among Malays. After the war, Malays increasingly demanded recognition of their rights as natives, which had long been neglected. These demands were raised prominently during the First and Second Bumiputra Congresses of 1965 and 1968, where the group called for stronger government intervention to assist Malays, for reorganisation of the economic system, and for greater Malay participation

in capital accumulation, including resource transfers at a later stage (Puthucheary, 1989).

Recognising Malay weaknesses in capitalist pursuits, and given UMNO's dominance in the Alliance, the government was viewed as a mechanism to ensure greater Malay control over national economic wealth. Pressure from elite Malays contributed to policy changes to strengthen government assistance. Under the First Malaysia Plan (1966–1970), a special allocation of \$124 million was made for MARA and the Malay bank (Maybank), as Bumiputera institutions, alongside the establishment of RIDA to support small business projects in trade, industry, and transportation, to encourage Malay participation in business and the wider economy. This approach reflected concerns that most of the poor at the time were Malays. However, these developments contributed to dissatisfaction among foreign and non-Malay business communities, especially the Chinese. Chinese protest was reflected in voting patterns during the 1969 general election, resulting in a reduction in parliamentary seats won by the Alliance, although it still formed the federal government.

Following the Alliance's loss of its majority in Perak, Penang, and Kelantan, the May 13, 1969 riots prompted the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to declare an Emergency (Malaysia, 1969; Puthucheary, 1989; Gomez, 1991). The clashes reflected tensions between non-Malays, who were increasingly dissatisfied with government policies, and Malays, who were frustrated by slow economic progress (Gomez, 1991). In response, the government formulated a “two-pronged strategy” through the New Economic Policy (NEP), incorporated in the Second Malaysia Plan and presented to Parliament on 11 July 1971. The NEP aimed to restructure society and eradicate poverty across ethnic groups (Gomez, 1991; Mat Zin, 2011; Hatta & Ali, 2013; Orlando, 2021).

Malaysia reduced national poverty over the subsequent decades through the implementation of the NEP. Within ten years of its introduction, the national poverty rate reportedly declined from 49.3 per cent to 16.5 per cent, and Malaysia was increasingly recognised in Southeast Asia as a successful case of poverty reduction. The NEP focused on poverty eradication through income generation, expansion of education and training facilities, employment creation, modernisation of rural life, and improvements in living standards (Economic Planning Unit, n.d.).

Provision of services to the poor was also implemented through government partnerships with the private sector and NGOs. In rural areas, new land development,

regional development, and in-situ development programmes became key instruments for restructuring and reducing rural poverty and regional imbalances.

2.3.1 New Land Development and Resettlement

Post-1970 agricultural land development was largely undertaken by government agencies. The Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) successfully opened more than 600,000 hectares of land for agriculture between 1970 and 1990 (Ngah Preston & Asman, 2010). Other agencies, including Regional Development Authorities (RDAs), State Economic Development Corporations (SEDCs), the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA), and the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA), also participated in land development. Private sector involvement remained limited, as state agencies were prioritised under the NEP to ensure Bumiputera participation, and high palm oil prices in the 1970s and early 1980s generated strong returns on state investment.

However, as palm oil prices and other agricultural commodity prices fell in the mid-1980s and remained low for several years, new agricultural land development became increasingly privatised. FELDA, despite its success in land schemes for Malay smallholders, was not allocated further land under the Sixth Malaysia Plan and subsequent periods, except in Sabah. This was not only due to scarcity of suitable agricultural land, but also because resettlement costs in FELDA schemes became increasingly expensive and continued to rise.

According to the Sixth Malaysia Plan, the average cost of resettling a family under FELDA schemes increased from RM49,700 in 1986 to RM55,000 in 1990, compared to RM26,500 in 1976 (Government of Malaysia, 1991). Given prevailing commodity prices and the existing settler loan repayment system, new FELDA schemes were unlikely to generate favourable net incomes for settlers. More importantly, rapid industrialisation in Malaysia increased demand for cheap labour, thereby intensifying competition for workers. The expansion of FELDA schemes further strained labour supply, while large plantations were also adversely affected by labour shortages, as they were unable to offer wages competitive with those in the industrial sector.

In Sabah, several agencies were involved in large-scale land settlement development, including the Sabah Land Development Board (SLDB, established in

1969), Sabah Forestry Development Authority (SAFODA), Sabah Rubber Fund Board (SRFB), the State Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport (MCYS), and FELDA (Yap et al., 1988). By the end of the 1980s, approximately 94,000 hectares of land had been developed, mainly planted with oil palm, benefiting around 7,000 settlers (Ngah, 2020).

In Sarawak, new land development was less significant compared to in-situ development, largely due to issues related to land regulations. Resettlement schemes were often undertaken for security reasons, such as the Rajang Security Command Schemes (RASCOM), which aimed to resettle Iban communities in the Kanowit and Sibu areas to counter communist insurgency. Other schemes were linked to major infrastructure projects, including the Wong Irup Dam near Lubok Antu and, later in 1999, the Sungai Asap resettlement scheme for Orang Ulu communities (Kenyah, Kayan, Ukit, Kajang, and Punan) affected by the construction of the Bakun Dam.

Although the Sungai Asap resettlement scheme promised improved prospects for younger generations, it posed significant adaptation challenges for older settlers whose livelihoods were traditionally based on hunting, gathering forest products, and shifting cultivation—activities not easily replicated in the new settlement areas.

Sarawak possesses substantial land reserves for future development and had targeted the conversion of approximately one million hectares into oil palm plantations by 2010, primarily through public–private sector partnerships. The Lembaga Pembangunan dan Lindungan Tanah (PELITA) was established to expedite the development of rural land under Native Customary Rights (NCR). Through joint-venture arrangements with private sector partners, PELITA had facilitated the development of approximately 247,000 hectares of land, of which around 27,000 hectares had been planted (Abdullah, 2005).

However, the long-term success of such schemes depended on economic returns for developers and meaningful participation of native communities in employment opportunities created. In oil palm plantations, productivity is highly dependent on effective management and workforce discipline, which may not align with the socio-cultural practices of indigenous communities accustomed to flexible livelihoods centred on subsistence activities.

2.3.2 Orang Asli Regrouping Schemes

In Peninsular Malaysia, the Orang Asli consist of three main ethnic groups: the Senoi, the Proto-Malay, and the Negrito, with a total population of about 120,000 in the year 2000. The majority were Senoi (living in Perak, Pahang, Kelantan, and Selangor) and Proto-Malay (largely found in Pahang, Johor, Terengganu, and Negeri Sembilan). Efforts to develop Orang Asli communities can be traced back to 1953 with the establishment of the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA).

The development of Orang Asli settlement schemes began in 1977 and involved regrouping Orang Asli communities into centralized villages within or close to their traditional homelands. These schemes included the provision of basic facilities such as primary schools, health clinics, housing, and income-generating activities, including rubber and oil palm cultivation (Nicolas, 2000). In some schemes, crop cultivation was carried out in collaboration with FELCRA, which managed plantations under a cooperative system. In total, 18 regrouping schemes were developed across Peninsular Malaysia, involving approximately 10,000 Orang Asli.

JHEOA also implemented various programmes ranging from entrepreneurship development to the provision of infrastructure and human capital development initiatives. While there have been notable improvements in the living conditions of the Orang Asli, their overall standard of living and socioeconomic achievements remain significantly behind those of other communities. Persistent poverty, low educational attainment with high dropout rates, and the continued prevalence of infectious and parasitic diseases—such as malaria, tuberculosis, cholera, measles, whooping cough, and scabies—remain key indicators of underdevelopment.

There is considerable variation in living conditions among Orang Asli communities. Those residing near urban centres are generally better equipped with facilities and more exposed to modern lifestyles. In contrast, communities in remote and inaccessible areas continue to rely on traditional livelihoods based on subsistence farming, hunting, and the gathering of forest products. In one extreme case, the Jahai community in the Royal Belum Forest Reserve (Perak) chose to maintain a traditional way of life, refusing to relocate to the regrouping schemes provided and declining to send their children to school.

2.3.3 The Regional Development Authorities

On a broader scale, and within a comprehensive rural development strategy, several statutory Regional Development Authorities (RDAs) were established to implement development initiatives in resource frontier areas, particularly virgin forest regions located in the less-developed parts of Peninsular Malaysia, such as the southeast of Pahang, southeast of Johor, the south of Kelantan, and the central parts of Terengganu. Most RDAs, especially those associated with new town development, were established in the 1970s, shortly after the launch of the NEP.

In addition to the primary objectives of poverty eradication and societal restructuring, the RDAs were mandated to: redress economic and structural imbalances between regions; utilise the resource endowments of less-developed states for national economic growth; strengthen agricultural and industrial development in lagging regions; redirect development and growth to less-developed areas; and promote rural urbanisation through the establishment of new towns in agricultural regions (Quazi, 1987).

Three decades after their establishment, more than 40 new towns had been developed. Twenty-three were located in the Pahang Tenggara Development Authority (DARA) region, twelve in the Johor Tenggara Development Authority (KEJORA) region, five in the Terengganu Tengah Regional Development Authority (KETENGAH) region, and one each in the Jengka Regional Development Authority (JENGKA) and the South Kelantan Development Authority (KESEDAR) region. These towns were primarily developed by the RDAs and FELDA. In contrast, the Penang Regional Development Authority (PERDA) and the Kedah Regional Development Authority (KEDA) were not involved in new township development; instead, they focused on in-situ rural development projects, including improving the physical conditions of existing settlements and promoting rural industrialisation.

Several factors contributed to the limited success of urban-based economic activities in these new towns, including competition with established urban centres, locational disadvantages, inadequate infrastructure and facilities, shortcomings of the growth centre concept, and capital leakages or “trickle-up” effects that disproportionately benefited large urban centres and major capital owners (Ibrahim, 1993; Norizan, 1992; Ghani, 1991; Wong, 1989; Muda, 1989).

Wong (1989), in evaluating the resource frontier strategies of DARA and KESEDAR, observed that these frontier economies, which relied heavily on rubber and oil palm production, generated relatively limited value-added within the regions themselves. These commodities were closely tied to global markets and primarily served the interests of national metropolitan centres. The development initiatives under DARA and KESEDAR did not significantly enhance Malay urbanisation nor substantially reduce regional inequalities. Although many FELDA settlers experienced improved living standards after relocation, the benefits were largely confined to first-generation settlers, as limited non-agricultural employment opportunities were created within the regions.

Overall assessments of new township performance in frontier regions suggest that many failed to generate sustained economic growth. The development of agriculture and resource-based activities did not produce the anticipated “propulsive force” necessary to strengthen the towns’ economic bases. These activities did not create meaningful “trickle-down” effects, as they sourced few inputs from local small enterprises and primarily produced for export rather than domestic consumption. Furthermore, many new towns suffered from locational disadvantages and inadequate infrastructure, limiting their ability to attract industrial investment.

In 1992, the government undertook a review of the role and position of RDAs. The findings indicated that RDAs had, to some extent, reduced regional development disparities, particularly in agricultural development, communication networks, and social services. However, they were less successful in stimulating service sector growth, attracting private investment, and establishing viable new growth centres. With the shift in development paradigms in the 1990s towards private sector-led growth, the government decided to gradually dissolve certain RDAs. In April 1999, the Cabinet approved the privatisation of DARA to Teras Dara Konsortium and JENGKA to Warisan Jengka Holdings Sdn Bhd. Other RDAs continued operations but with reduced emphasis on new land development, focusing instead on upgrading existing settlements and community development

2.3.4 In-situ Rural development

Rural development activities in existing rural areas, implemented by agencies

established in the 1960s to support traditional sectors, were often fragmented and lacked effective coordination. Agencies such as the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA), Agricultural Bank of Malaysia (BPM), Farmers' Organization Authority, and the Department of Agriculture Development operated independently within their respective mandates. Although coordination was attempted at the district level through District Development Committees, the impact remained limited due to small-scale implementation, manpower shortages, insufficient qualified staff, and an unclear development focus. Financial and human resources were dispersed across state and district branches, making it difficult to concentrate on priority areas.

Consequently, a more integrated approach to rural development was introduced, focusing on comprehensive poverty eradication in traditional village regions where poverty was concentrated. Large-scale Integrated Agricultural Development Projects (IADP) were implemented under the Ministry of Agriculture. These included the Kemubu Agricultural Development Authority (KADA), Muda Agricultural Development Authority (MADA), the Kemubu and Besut Irrigation Schemes, as well as the Northwest Selangor and West Johor Schemes, largely developed in the 1970s.

The IADP approach involved an integrated package of capital-intensive measures, including irrigation systems, farm mechanisation, high-yield crop varieties, and supporting infrastructure and services. Its objectives were to increase agricultural productivity and farmers' incomes, modernise agriculture, improve extension services, uplift rural living standards, and encourage collective organisation among farmers.

Positive outcomes were recorded, including increased paddy production, higher farmer incomes, expanded employment opportunities both on- and off-farm, and reductions in poverty levels within IADP areas (Maimunah & Bahaman, 1992). However, despite improvements in productivity, the benefits were unevenly distributed. Larger landowners and wealthier farmers tended to gain more from the schemes, while landless peasants and smallholders benefited marginally and often remained in poverty. Farmer participation was largely passive, limited to adopting new technologies and receiving government subsidies (Chamhuri & Nik Hashim, 1988; Shukri, 1992). Courtenay (1988) further observed a decline in paddy cultivation due to farmer withdrawal and significant out-migration from paddy-growing districts, highlighting structural limitations of the IADP approach.

In Sabah, in-situ development programmes were implemented by agencies such

as the Department of Agriculture, the Rural Development Corporation (KPD), the Sabah Rubber Fund Board (SRFB), the Department of Veterinary Services and Animal Industry (DOVSAI), the Department of Fisheries (DOF), and the Department of Drainage and Irrigation (DID). The KPD played a leading role in initiating programmes ranging from crop diversification, aquaculture, livestock development, socio-economic initiatives, mini-irrigation projects, commercial farming, and agricultural processing and marketing.

While overall performance was encouraging in terms of production and land area under cultivation, Zulkifli (1992) noted insufficient attention to human development aspects, particularly skills in project operation and management. This contributed to the failure of some non-traditional crop projects. Furthermore, socio-cultural factors—such as traditional beliefs, customs, institutions, values, and community needs—required careful consideration to minimise conflict and ensure effective community participation in development programmes.

In Sarawak, in-situ development initiatives were undertaken by the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Drainage and Irrigation, and the Sarawak Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (SALCRA). The Department of Agriculture managed various schemes for small farmers, including Rubber and Coconut Planting Schemes, the Pepper Subsidy Scheme, Agricultural Diversification Scheme, Assistance to Padi Planters Scheme, Livestock Development Subsidy Scheme, and Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Development Programme.

The Rural Growth Centre (RGC) programme, under the Sarawak Ministry of Rural and Land Development, incorporated infrastructure development, economic activities, service centres, and human development components. Implementation involved agencies such as DID, Sarawak SLDB, and the Sarawak Land Custody and Development Authority (LCDA).

Subsidy schemes contributed to improved living standards for many farmers, reduced reliance on swidden agriculture, and encouraged intensified farming practices through subsidised fertilisers, pesticides, and improved inputs. Farmers diversified into cash crops such as pepper, cocoa, fruits, and vegetables, and some developed fishponds (King, 1992). However, similar to other in-situ development programmes, these initiatives were unable to generate sufficient employment for the expanding rural labour force. Youth migration became prominent, particularly after completion of secondary

education, with many migrating to towns in Sarawak, Peninsular Malaysia, and Singapore in search of employment opportunities.

2.4 The Studies of Political Patronage

Political patronage is synonymous with the relationship between patron and client (Foster, 1963; Gramsci, 1972; Kopecky, Meyer, Panizza, Scherlis, Schuster & Spirova, 2015; Brown, 2020; Orlando & Suffian, 2023). It has traditionally been associated with Mediterranean and Latin American contexts, where it is embedded within cultural norms and political practices (Foster, 1963; Wolf, 1966; Campbell, 1964; Weingrod, 1968; Powell, 1970; Bayart, 1996).

Patronage is commonly conceptualised as a dyadic tie—a two-party relationship—operating through an exchange of “interests” between patron and client. Political patronage is linked to the influence of the patron, who provides protection or social security for the client’s survival (Foster, 1963; Bayart, 1996; Titeca, 2005; Faccio, 2006; Brown, 2020; Orlando & Suffian, 2023). From a functionalist perspective, patronage may serve as a foundation for driving development and stimulating economic growth. However, critical analysts argue that political patronage contributes to state deterioration by fostering extractive institutions (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2001; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006a; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2017; Orlando & Suffian, 2023).

Thomson (2004) defines patronage as the centralisation of power in “an individual to whom all within the system owe their position,” essentially describing “an exchange relationship between unequals” (Boas, 2001). It represents a political regime characterised by the personal use of public resources and preferential—rather than meritocratic—appointments. As Fredslund (2000) notes, such practices may be interpreted by the international community as manifestations of corruption and illegitimate behaviour.

Previous research has critically examined political patronage as a significant influence on government policies and programmes (Titeca, 2005; Oliveros, 2013; Kopecky et al., 2015; Khan, 2015; Brown, 2020; Qasem et al., 2021; Orlando, 2021; Scruton, 2021). Studies of patron networks in ASEAN contexts, including India, Thailand, South Korea, and Malaysia, suggest that patronage often operates through

exchanges that resemble corruption and may adversely affect economic performance (Khan, 1998). These analyses highlight asymmetrical power relations in which dominant actors shape the preferences and interests of weaker parties. Comparative research between Malaysia and Singapore similarly demonstrates how ruling political parties may exercise sweeping control over resource distribution, potentially resulting in corruption, nepotism, and social exclusion (Gramsci, 1972; Khan, 1998; Varkey, 2004; Varkey, 2014). Such patron networks frequently involve the distribution of rewards, resources, and benefits to selected groups and political supporters (Godfrey & Wilson, 1945; Lynch, 1964; Powell, 1970; Gramsci, 1972).

Political scientists and political economists have long argued that patron-client exchanges reflect disparities in wealth, power, and status. Nevertheless, in the Malaysian context, much of the scholarship on patronage has focused on government-linked enterprises (GLCs), political financing reform, pork-barrel politics, partisanship, rent-seeking, and the interests of ruling parties. Research directly linking political patronage to poverty eradication programmes remains limited.

The existing literature does not sufficiently examine how political patronage contributes to the paradox of plenty or poverty paradox (see Gomez, 1991; 1997; 2004; 2012; Varkey, 2004; 2014; Gomez et al., 2021; Camba, Gomez, & Cheong, 2023; Tee, 2020; Abas & Zainudin, 2021; Gist & Wahab, 2021; Hoang, 2022; Azmi, 2023; Puyok, 2018; Ivy & Puyok, 2021; Aspinall & Hutchcroft, 2022; Yeoh, 2023; Wong, 2023; Simanjuntak, 2019; Wagner, 2019; Dettman & Gomez, 2020; Weiss, 2020; Aspinall, Weiss, Hicken & Hutchcroft, 2022; Radue, 2022; Wong, Owuamalam & Williams, 2023; Weiss, 2023; Gomez & Jomo, 1999; Murniati & Thompson, 2019; Osman & Gomez, 2020; Murniati, 2019; Gomez, 2019; Weiss, 2020; Mahyem, 2021; Jia Qie, 2021; 2022; Mav, 2021; 2022; Hoang, 2022; Ali, 2022; Ramadhani, 2022; Khai, 2023; Tapsell, 2020; Ufen, 2020; Siddiquee & Zafarullah, 2022; Braham, Peretti & Belkacem, 2023; Abdullah, Joseph & Chin, 2023; Wong, 2023). Although these studies acknowledge the existence of political patronage, they provide limited insight into how the allocation and transfer of state poverty eradication programmes may be shaped by patronage networks and potentially perpetuate poverty.

The complexity of patronage raises broader questions about corruption, meritocracy, bureaucratic institutionalisation, development, state-building, and political ideology. A central question remains: when and where is patronage most

prominent? Political patronage has become increasingly intertwined with the implementation of anti-poverty programmes, raising concerns about their efficacy and fairness (Smith, 2018; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2008; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Brown, 2020). Conventionally, patronage is associated with private wealth-seeking behaviour by individuals representing the state, or the misuse of public resources for private gain (World Bank, 1997; Orlando, 2022). Scholars argue that patronage constitutes a major contemporary governance challenge, distorting public policy and undermining poverty reduction efforts (Amundsen, 1997; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Brown, 2020; Teehanke, 2023; Titeca, 2005; Oliveros, 2013; Kopecky et al., 2015; Khan, 2015; Qasem et al., 2021; Orlando, 2021; Scruton, 2021).

Research examining patron networks in Malaysia has highlighted the dynamics of power in controlling resource distribution, linking such practices to corruption, nepotism, and social exclusion (Scott, 1972; Khan, 1998; Varkkey, 2004; Varkkey, 2014). These networks often concentrate rewards and benefits among selected political supporters (Godfrey & Wilson, 1945; Lynch, 1964; Powell, 1970; Scott, 1972). However, studies explicitly connecting political patronage to state anti-poverty programmes in Malaysia remain scarce.

The characterisation of “limited numbers of studies” is therefore justified, particularly in the context of Sabah and its poverty eradication programmes. Much of the scholarship on political patronage in Malaysia concentrates on Peninsular Malaysia, reflecting its economic and political dominance within the federation (Khoo, 2019). Sabah, despite its complex socio-economic and political landscape, is comparatively underrepresented in political economy research (Majid & Bakar, 2021). Although poverty in Sabah has been widely studied, most analyses focus on infrastructure deficits and economic inequality rather than the specific role of political patronage in shaping poverty eradication efforts (Lim & Lee, 2020). This gap is compounded by Sabah’s unique historical and ethnic dynamics, including federal–state relations, elite politics, and development fund allocation, which require context-specific analysis (Rahman, 2022). Additionally, political sensitivities, limited transparency, and restricted access to official data have constrained deeper academic investigation (Chin, 2018). While global studies explore the relationship between political patronage and poverty, they often fail to account for Sabah’s distinct federal structure, resource politics, and local governance dynamics (North et al., 2009). Accordingly, the assertion of limited

studies is well-founded and underscores the need for focused research examining how political patronage influences the design, allocation, and implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Sabah. Such research would not only fill a critical gap in the literature but also contribute to broader debates on development, governance, and institutional theory.

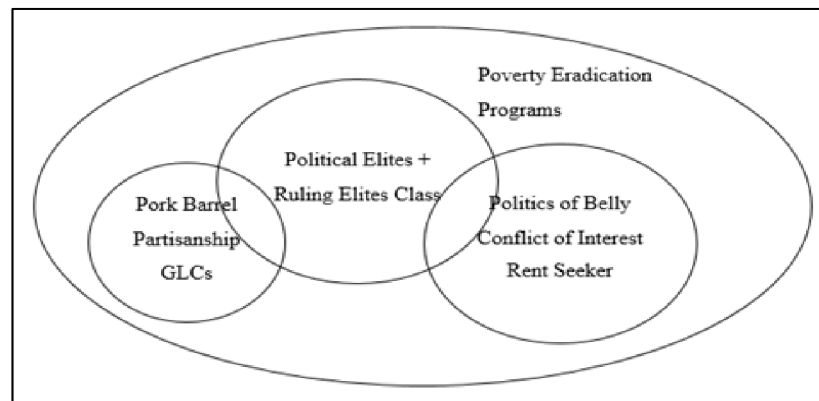


Figure 1.5 The Modes Studies of Political Patronage in Malaysia

From broader global perspectives, particularly in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and ASEAN, large scale studies have examined political patronage as part of a wider phenomenon often described as the politics of staying poor, where political structures and elite networks perpetuate poverty rather than alleviate it. These analyses commonly link patronage systems to institutional weakness, resource capture, and the distortion of redistributive policies.

However, within the Malaysian context, political patronage has largely been examined through theoretical lenses and empirical discussions focusing on government enterprises, political financing reform, pork barrel politics, partisanship, government linked companies, rent seeking practices, and the interests of ruling political parties. While these studies provide important insights into elite power structures and state business relations, they rarely conceptualise poverty programmes themselves as potential sites of political distortion, meaning as mechanisms through which patronage may reproduce dependency or sustain poverty.

This limitation reveals a significant gap in existing Malaysian scholarship. The dominant body of research has not sufficiently examined how poverty eradication programmes may be shaped, redirected, or selectively implemented through patronage

networks. The absence of systematic analysis on how anti poverty initiatives intersect with political patronage, particularly in contexts such as Sabah, suggests a missing dimension in the study of Malaysia's political economy. Addressing this gap is crucial for understanding whether poverty programmes function purely as developmental instruments or whether, in certain contexts, they also operate within a broader logic of political consolidation and resource control.

Table 1.3

The Studies on The Political Patronage from the National Perspective

Concept/forms of Political Patronage	Latin America ¹	Europe ²	Africa ³	Asia ⁴
Pork Barrel & Vote buying	Brazil Argentina Mexico Venezuela	Austria Denmark German Iceland Italy French	Uganda Ghana Somalia South Africa	Indonesia Thailand Japan Malaysia Singapore Korea India Pakistan Turkey
Politics of Belly, government business	Dominican Republic Paraguay Uruguay	Ireland Netherlands Norway Spain	South Africa Uganda	Indonesia Malaysia Singapore Korea
Politics of Bosses & Crony Capitalism	Venezuela Brazil Colombia Chile	Norway Bulgaria Italy Greece Switzerland	South Africa Ghana	Indonesia Malaysia Singapore India Pakistan

Politics	for	Bahamas	German	Somalia	Indonesia
Staying Poor		Honduras	Hungary	Uganda	China
		Panama	Romania	Ghana	Korea
		Brazil	Portugal		India
		Venezuela	Spain		

2.5 Poverty as Catalyst of Patronage

Poverty acts as a powerful enabler of political patronage, creating conditions of dependency and vulnerability that allow political actors to consolidate their power. In societies where poverty is widespread, individuals and communities often lack access to basic needs such as education, healthcare, and employment. This economic insecurity fosters reliance on external sources for survival, including informal networks of support led by political patrons. By positioning themselves as providers of essential resources, political actors exploit the dependency of impoverished populations, reinforcing clientelist relationships that prioritize immediate relief over systemic change.

One of the primary ways poverty fuels patronage is by creating a transactional relationship between patrons and clients. Impoverished individuals, whose urgent needs outweigh long term considerations, are more likely to accept conditional benefits in exchange for political loyalty. In many developing countries, vote buying is a common practice in which political actors offer cash, food, or short term assistance to secure electoral support. This practice is particularly effective in poor communities, where immediate material benefits are prioritized over governance reforms or policy platforms. As studies have shown, impoverished voters often perceive these exchanges as legitimate and necessary given their circumstances (Schaffer and Schedler, 2007).

Furthermore, poverty limits the capacity of individuals to organize and advocate for systemic reforms. Impoverished communities often lack the resources, education, and time required to engage meaningfully in political processes or challenge exploitative systems. This lack of agency enables patronage networks to operate with minimal resistance, as individuals become resigned to the status quo. Political elites exploit this condition by using their control over resources to maintain loyalty and

suppress dissent. In many cases, poverty alleviation programs themselves become tools of patronage, with benefits distributed based on political allegiance rather than need. Such practices perpetuate inequality, as those outside the patronage network are excluded, deepening their marginalization.

Poverty also exacerbates the structural conditions that sustain patronage. In rural or underdeveloped regions, where state institutions are weak or absent, political patrons fill the gap by providing access to services and opportunities. These patrons position themselves as intermediaries between the state and the community, further entrenching their influence. This dynamic reinforces dependency and discourages grassroots movements that might advocate for inclusive policies or institutional reforms. Land distribution, infrastructure development, and social welfare programs are frequently mediated by local elites who prioritize their networks over equitable allocation.

The role of poverty as a catalyst for patronage is also evident in its psychological effects. Poverty can foster a sense of fatalism among marginalized groups who may believe that systemic change is unattainable. This mindset reinforces the perception that patrons are benevolent providers rather than actors embedded in unequal systems. The visibility of patronage based assistance, such as cash transfers or localized development projects, strengthens this perception and creates an appearance of progress while masking deeper structural failures. As a result, impoverished populations may remain loyal to patrons even when these relationships reproduce long term dependency.

Breaking the cycle of poverty driven patronage requires a multifaceted approach. Strengthening state institutions to ensure equitable access to resources and services is essential to reducing reliance on political intermediaries. Transparent and accountable governance mechanisms are necessary to ensure that public resources are distributed based on need rather than political considerations. Empowering marginalized communities through education, economic opportunity, and meaningful political participation can reduce vulnerability to patronage networks. By addressing both the structural and psychological drivers of poverty, governments can disrupt the conditions that enable patronage to thrive and promote more inclusive development.

In conclusion, poverty serves both as a symptom and as a cause of political patronage, creating a cycle of dependency that perpetuates inequality and undermines democratic governance. By exploiting the vulnerabilities of impoverished populations, political actors reinforce their power while delaying substantive reform. Addressing

this linkage requires systemic change that prioritizes long term development and empowers marginalized groups to challenge exploitative structures.

Poverty plays a dual role in sustaining patronage systems. First, it creates vulnerability, making impoverished individuals and communities more dependent on informal sources of support. In contexts where state institutions fail to provide services equitably, political patrons emerge as providers of last resort, offering selective assistance in exchange for political loyalty (Berenschot, 2011). This dependency is often strategically cultivated by political actors who exploit poverty to maintain their power base. Studies in Southeast Asia and Sub Saharan Africa demonstrate how poverty driven reliance on patrons weakens citizens' ability to demand structural reform (Hickey and Bracking, 2005).

Second, poverty ensures the persistence of patronage by limiting the agency of marginalized groups. Impoverished populations often lack the resources, education, and organizational capacity to challenge entrenched systems. This lack of agency sustains a cycle in which patronage remains a mechanism of political control (Tilly, 2003).

Although political patronage is frequently associated with developing countries, it is also present in developed nations, including Western Europe. In these contexts, patronage tends to manifest in more subtle and institutionalized forms, often linked to social welfare policies, political appointments, or preferential allocation of public resources. While poverty rates in Western Europe are lower than in many developing regions, marginalized and economically vulnerable populations may still be influenced by patronage networks. Italy provides an illustrative case.

Italy has long been recognized for entrenched patronage networks, particularly in the southern regions where economic disparities and poverty are more pronounced compared to the north. Patronage in Italy has historically been linked to a fragmented political landscape in which competing parties and local elites consolidated power through clientelist relationships. This dynamic was especially visible during the post war period when the Christian Democrats maintained dominance through extensive patronage networks (Putnam, 1993).

In southern Italy, where unemployment rates are higher and economic opportunities more limited, political patrons have often mediated access to public employment, housing, and social welfare benefits. This system fosters dependency by prioritizing political loyalty over equitable development. Public sector employment

historically functioned as a key instrument of patronage, with job allocation frequently influenced by political connections rather than merit (Golden, 2003).

The distribution of welfare benefits further illustrates this dynamic. In certain areas of southern Italy, access to social assistance has been shaped by political considerations, with benefits allocated preferentially to individuals or communities demonstrating loyalty (Golden and Picci, 2005). Such politicization undermines program effectiveness and perpetuates inequality by excluding those outside dominant networks.

Weak institutions and limited transparency have facilitated the persistence of patronage in Italy. Regional and local governments have faced accusations of mismanaging public funds and diverting resources toward politically connected actors. European Union structural funds intended for development have, in some cases, been misallocated, reducing their impact on poverty reduction (Charron et al., 2015). The influence of organized crime in southern regions has further reinforced parallel patronage systems by providing services and employment in exchange for loyalty, thereby deepening dependency (Gambetta, 1996).

The Italian case demonstrates that political patronage and poverty are not confined to developing contexts but operate in institutionalized forms within developed democracies. Patronage exploits economic vulnerability and sustains cycles of inequality. Institutional reform, transparency, and equitable allocation are therefore critical for mitigating its effects.

In China, despite substantial poverty reduction since the late 1970s, regional inequalities and governance challenges remain. Political patronage operates within the framework of centralized rule under the Communist Party of China. While central authorities design poverty alleviation policies, local governments implement them, creating discretion in allocation. Informal networks of loyalty and reciprocal obligation influence promotions, resource distribution, and project approvals (Tsai, 2007). In underdeveloped western provinces such as Xinjiang, Tibet, and Guizhou, local officials function as intermediaries controlling access to poverty alleviation funds and infrastructure projects. Although targeted poverty reduction initiatives have improved living standards, research suggests that resource allocation may sometimes be influenced by local patronage networks, with benefits directed toward politically connected groups rather than the most vulnerable (Li et al., 2012; Zhao and Zhang,

2018).

China's fiscal decentralization has further expanded local discretion in development spending. Infrastructure and rural development projects may be approved based on personal relationships rather than developmental impact. Funds intended for the poorest communities may be redirected toward politically strategic areas or projects that enhance the reputations of local leaders (Li et al., 2012).

These comparative cases reinforce the broader argument that poverty does not merely coexist with patronage but sustains and legitimizes it. Without institutional safeguards and equitable governance, poverty alleviation initiatives risk being absorbed into patronage systems rather than dismantling them.

Similarly, the allocation of land rights and compensation for land acquisitions is often influenced by political patronage. In many rural areas, local officials control land use decisions and compensation schemes, creating opportunities for corruption and favoritism. Marginalized farmers and ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable in these processes, as they often lack the political connections necessary to secure fair treatment (Whiting, 2011).

The persistence of patronage within China's governance system carries significant implications for poverty reduction and regional development. Although national poverty rates have declined substantially, regional disparities remain pronounced. Western provinces, which are home to many ethnic minority communities, continue to lag behind the more developed eastern regions in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Patronage driven governance can intensify these disparities by diverting resources away from the most disadvantaged areas and reinforcing unequal development patterns.

Patronage also undermines transparency and accountability in poverty alleviation programmes. Corruption scandals involving the misuse of poverty reduction funds have eroded public trust in local authorities and underscored the need for stronger oversight. These challenges are particularly acute in areas where local elites dominate governance structures, limiting the capacity of marginalized communities to advocate for equitable resource allocation (Zhao and Zhang, 2018).

The Chinese government has acknowledged the governance risks posed by patronage and corruption. Anti corruption campaigns initiated under President Xi Jinping have targeted local officials implicated in the misuse of poverty alleviation

funds, signaling efforts to strengthen administrative discipline. Reforms aimed at improving transparency, including public disclosure of poverty alleviation budgets and project outcomes, have also been introduced to enhance accountability.

However, addressing the structural foundations of patronage requires deeper institutional reform. Strengthening mechanisms for community participation in local decision making can empower marginalized groups and reduce dependence on political intermediaries. Enhancing central oversight over local fiscal allocation may also help limit discretionary abuse. China's experience illustrates that even within a centralized political system, poverty and patronage can intersect in ways that reproduce inequality. Although significant progress has been made in poverty reduction, the continued influence of informal networks of loyalty and favoritism demonstrates the complexity of ensuring equitable development. Sustained reform efforts combining anti corruption measures, institutional strengthening, and community empowerment remain essential for promoting inclusive growth and preventing the re entrenchment of dependency.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

The shaping and distribution of poverty programmes in Malaysia are closely linked to path dependency and informal practices. Patronage has been embedded in the formation of economic hegemony in Malaysia, becoming institutionalised as a culture, norm, and practice that shapes economic growth. The configuration of patronage differs across national contexts in terms of its role in enhancing economic development. In Malaysia, patronage has been largely institutionalised through government enterprises.

Most theories used to explain political patronage across countries emphasize its role as a foundation of national development in regions such as Europe, Asia, ASEAN, and Malaysia. In contrast, studies in Latin America often conceptualise patronage in terms of control, misconduct, abuse of power, and the concentration of authority associated with "big men" or bosses, commonly analysed through the lens of neopatrimonialism. As this research seeks to explain patron networks within the Malaysian context, it adopts Neopatrimonialism theory to examine how patron networks operate and persist within government programmes, particularly poverty eradication initiatives.

Analysts frequently highlight the role of "big men" as political actors who hold legitimate authority through democratic election. However, once in power, these actors

may centralise control, expand their influence, and consolidate authority. Research suggests that the presence of dominant leaders often gives rise to brokers who operate within patronage networks. In political science literature, brokers are commonly understood as part of the administrative machinery of government, tasked with delivering services and distributing public resources. Nevertheless, their role may shape unequal exchanges between patrons and clients (Scott, 1972; Khan, 1998; Bayart, 1998; Gomez, 1999; Titeca, 2005; Oliveros, 2013; Kopecky et al., 2015; Brown, 2023; Orlando, 2021; Orlando & Suffian, 2023).

Neopatrimonialism theory explains governance systems marked by the dominance of personalised relationships and patron client networks. Political leaders may use formal authority to distribute resources and privileges to loyal supporters, potentially resulting in corruption, favoritism, and reduced transparency. In this sense, Neopatrimonialism provides a useful framework for analysing the distribution of poverty programmes in Malaysia, particularly in Sabah. The theory helps connect historical path dependency and informal practices that have shaped governance patterns. It also offers insight into how personalised patronage networks evolve as embedded cultural and normative practices that influence economic hegemony.

By emphasising the roles of “big men” and brokers, Neopatrimonialism aligns with the power dynamics involved in resource allocation. It addresses issues of corruption, favoritism, and transparency that are central to understanding how patronage networks affect poverty programmes. For this research, the theory offers a structured approach to examining how patron networks function within state led development initiatives and how they influence poverty alleviation efforts in Malaysia.

However, Neopatrimonialism theory has been criticised for making broad generalisations about governance in developing countries, often overlooking the diversity and complexity of local realities (Hyden, 2006). Such generalisations may oversimplify political and governance landscapes by portraying practices as uniform across contexts. Critics argue that this approach underestimates the influence of historical, cultural, and institutional variation in shaping governance dynamics (Englebert, 2000). Governance is not solely determined by informal networks but is embedded within specific cultural norms, traditions, and societal structures (Jessop, 2002).

Another critique concerns the theory’s strong emphasis on informality. By

focusing extensively on personalised patronage networks, Neopatrimonialism may risk overgeneralising governance practices in developing countries and underestimating the role of formal institutions, bureaucratic reforms, and policy frameworks (Khan, 2010). These criticisms highlight the importance of applying the theory in a context sensitive manner. In the Malaysian case, especially in Sabah, Neopatrimonialism must be adapted to account for federal state relations, institutional arrangements, and the specific political economy of poverty programmes, rather than assuming a uniform model of patronage across all developing contexts.

2.7 Neo-Patrimonialism

Neopatrimonialism describes a political system in which formal institutions coexist with patrimonial practices, leading to the concentration of power in a single leader or a small elite group. While formal rules and bureaucratic structures ostensibly guide state functions, in practice these systems are characterized by the dominance of personal relationships, loyalty, and patronage (Bratton & van de Walle, 1994). One defining feature of neopatrimonialism is the personalization of power, whereby political authority is centralized in a leader who uses state resources to maintain loyalty and reinforce control.

Additionally, patron-client networks play a central role, as political relationships are often grounded in personal loyalty rather than merit or adherence to legal-rational authority (Erdmann & Engel, 2007). A significant consequence of such systems is the blurring of public and private domains, where leaders frequently treat state resources as personal property, thereby undermining the distinction between personal rule and institutional governance. This interaction between formal and informal practices renders neopatrimonial systems particularly complex and often results in weak institutional development and governance inefficiencies, especially in post-colonial states. Several gaps remain within the neopatrimonialism framework, highlighting the need for theoretical integration to strengthen its explanatory capacity. One significant limitation is its insufficient attention to context-specific adaptations. The theory does not adequately explain why neopatrimonial practices persist in certain contexts while diminishing or transforming in others. This shortcoming points to the need for deeper analysis of the historical, cultural, and socio-political factors that shape

the endurance or evolution of such systems (Erdmann & Engel, 2007).

The limitations of neopatrimonialism, particularly its restricted focus on the mechanisms and dynamics of power, may be addressed by integrating institutional theory, which provides a comprehensive lens to examine how power is embedded, exercised, and sustained within both formal and informal systems of governance. Institutional theory, with its emphasis on rules, norms, and structures that guide behavior, offers a robust explanation of how power operates within and alongside formal institutions. By incorporating insights from Historical Institutionalism (HI) and Sociological Institutionalism (SI), two key strands of institutional theory, the explanatory strength of neopatrimonialism can be significantly enhanced.

Historical Institutionalism (HI) emphasizes the role of power in shaping institutional development through path dependence and critical junctures. This perspective assists in explaining how historical legacies and power configurations create and entrench neopatrimonial systems. In Sabah, for example, the historical concentration of political and economic power in the hands of local elites established a foundation for patron-client networks that persist today. HI demonstrates how early power asymmetries continue to shape institutional practices, influencing the allocation of resources and the prioritization of poverty eradication programs. By integrating HI, the neopatrimonialism framework becomes better equipped to account for the temporal dimensions of power and to show how past institutional arrangements influence the persistence or transformation of patronage systems over time.

Sociological Institutionalism (SI), in contrast, examines the normative and cultural dimensions of power within institutions. SI highlights how power is legitimized through shared norms, values, and social expectations. In the context of Sabah, cultural norms surrounding loyalty, reciprocity, and communal obligations reinforce the informal exercise of authority by political patrons. SI explains how these norms embed informal patronage practices within formal institutions, producing a dual governance structure in which power operates through both official channels and informal networks. This perspective strengthens the neopatrimonialism framework by illustrating how power is not only imposed but also socially constructed and reproduced through cultural practices, making it resilient to reform efforts. Institutional theory further addresses gaps in neopatrimonialism by examining how power is distributed and contested within formal governance structures. By focusing on how formal

institutions allocate authority and resources, institutional theory clarifies the conditions under which informal practices, such as patronage and rent-seeking, are able to thrive. For example, weak institutional oversight or inadequate accountability mechanisms may enable local elites in Sabah to manipulate poverty eradication programs for personal or political gain. Institutional theory thus provides a framework for analysing how governance weaknesses empower informal networks and sustain neopatrimonial practices, offering a detailed understanding of the interaction between formal rules and informal power dynamics.

The integration of institutional theory into the neopatrimonialism framework addresses its limitations by foregrounding the centrality of power in both historical and socio-cultural contexts. This combined approach explains why neopatrimonial systems endure in certain settings and highlights the structural and relational mechanisms through which power is exercised and maintained. By drawing on institutional theory's emphasis on power dynamics, the enhanced framework offers a more nuanced analysis of how political patronage, patron networks, and rent-seeking behavior shape governance and policy outcomes. This integration provides valuable insights into the persistence of inequality and inefficiency in Sabah's poverty eradication programs and informs strategies aimed at strengthening transparency, accountability, and equity.

The limitations of neopatrimonialism, particularly its limited engagement with context-specific adaptations, may also be addressed through the combined application of Sociological Institutionalism and Historical Institutionalism. This integration offers a more comprehensive theoretical lens for explaining why neopatrimonial practices persist in certain contexts while diminishing or evolving in others. Sociological Institutionalism focuses on cultural norms, social practices, and shared understandings that shape institutional behavior, thereby illuminating how patronage systems are legitimized and reinforced within specific societies. In Sabah, norms of reciprocity, communal solidarity, and loyalty to local leaders create conditions that allow patronage networks to embed themselves within formal governance structures. SI helps explain why such cultural values sustain neopatrimonial practices in poverty eradication programs, as they align with personalized modes of resource allocation and authority. Historical Institutionalism, meanwhile, emphasizes the role of historical legacies and path dependence in shaping institutional trajectories. HI accounts for how Sabah's colonial experience, post-independence federal arrangements, and state-building

processes have entrenched patronage systems over time. For instance, historical policies that positioned local elites as intermediaries between the state and the population have generated enduring informal power structures that resist reform. By incorporating HI, the analysis demonstrates how these historical trajectories create structural conditions that perpetuate neopatrimonial practices, particularly within poverty alleviation initiatives.

Together, SI and HI enrich the neopatrimonialism framework by addressing its shortcomings and enabling a more context-sensitive understanding of how cultural and historical factors interact to sustain or transform patronage systems. This integration also clarifies the dual nature of governance in Sabah, where formal institutions coexist with informal practices that shape the implementation and outcomes of poverty eradication programs. By bridging these theoretical perspectives, the analysis fills important gaps in the understanding of neopatrimonial systems and offers practical insights for designing more inclusive and equitable governance reforms.

Another key limitation of neopatrimonialism lies in its underdeveloped engagement with formal institutions, particularly the interaction between neopatrimonial practices and institutional configurations such as extractive or inclusive frameworks. Although neopatrimonialism emphasizes personalized authority and informal patron-client networks, it often neglects how these practices intersect with, reshape, or undermine formal institutional structures that are central to state capacity and governance (Bratton & van de Walle, 1994). Furthermore, the theory's tendency to associate neopatrimonialism broadly with poor governance and underdevelopment may result in generalizations that overlook sector-specific variations across education, healthcare, infrastructure, and other domains. This leaves unresolved questions regarding the precise mechanisms through which neopatrimonial systems affect development outcomes (Erdmann & Engel, 2007). Finally, the influence of global forces, including external funding and international norms, remains insufficiently examined within the neopatrimonialism framework. Given that many neopatrimonial states are integrated into the global economy and rely on international aid or foreign investment, understanding how these external pressures reinforce or challenge neopatrimonial governance is essential (Bach, 2011). Addressing these gaps through theoretical integration, particularly with institutionalist approaches and related governance frameworks, is therefore justified. Such integration enhances the

explanatory scope of neopatrimonialism and bridges the divide between traditional and modern governance theories, offering a more comprehensive framework for analysing governance in transitional and developing states.

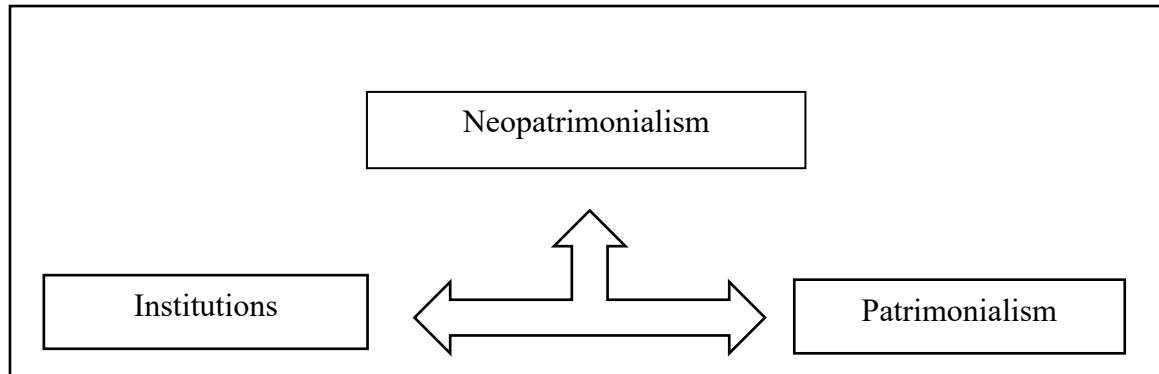


Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework Suggested

Figure 2.1 presents the framework used to explore the coexistence of patron networks behind the distribution of poverty programs at the state level. The guiding theory is neopatrimonialism. This framework proposes an investigation into the dynamics of political patronage and poverty programs at the Sabah state level. Neopatrimonialism serves as the foundation for explaining informal power dynamics and patron network relationships within the state's political landscape.

Neopatrimonialism, as coined by Eisenstadt in 1973, is synonymous with a process of resource distribution that gives rise to patron client networks based on a powerful individual or party and a weaker client (Scott, 1972; Scott & Kerkeviet, 1975; Bratton, 1994; Bratton & van de Walle, 1994; Berman, 1998; Cornwell, 2005; deGrassi, 2008; Francisco, 2010; Von Soest, 2021; Orlando & Suffian, 2023; Orlando, 2023). The term gained prominence in the early 1990s, particularly after several publications at the end of that decade and preceding years. By the early 2000s, political scientists, policy makers, and development practitioners widely employed neopatrimonialism to interpret governance, social, and economic developments in OECD and other regions (deGrassi, 2008; Von Soest, 2021).

Integrating institutionalism, patrimonialism, and neopatrimonialism provides a robust theoretical foundation for analysing political patronage, patron networks, and rent seeking behaviour in Sabah's poverty eradication programs, while addressing key theoretical gaps in existing literature. Institutionalism, as articulated by North (1990), emphasizes the role of formal structures, rules, and incentives in shaping governance

and policy outcomes. It offers insight into how poverty alleviation programs are designed and implemented within state systems. However, institutionalism often assumes that rules are applied neutrally and tends to underplay the influence of informal practices, thereby leaving a gap in explaining how political elites manipulate formal structures for personal gain.

Patrimonialism, rooted in Weber (1968), focuses on personalistic and hierarchical power structures in which loyalty and allegiance override meritocratic principles. It is particularly useful for understanding how political elites in Sabah cultivate clientelist relationships by selectively distributing resources to maintain patronage networks. Nevertheless, traditional patrimonialism does not fully explain how such personalistic systems adapt and persist within modern state structures, especially where formal institutions coexist with entrenched informal practices. Neopatrimonialism, as discussed by Bratton and van de Walle (1997), bridges these gaps by demonstrating how formal state institutions are overlaid with informal patronage practices, creating a dual governance system. In Sabah, this perspective reveals how poverty eradication programs that are formally governed by rules may be subverted to serve political and personal interests, thereby blurring the boundary between public and private resources.

Incorporating patrimonialism into the neopatrimonialism framework is essential to address its theoretical limitations, as it provides foundational insight into the origins, mechanisms, and persistence of informal governance practices underpinning neopatrimonial systems. Patrimonialism, as conceptualized by Weber (1968), emphasizes authority rooted in loyalty, kinship, and personal allegiance rather than legal rational principles. This perspective clarifies how patron client relationships operate, particularly in contexts where formal institutions coexist with informal practices.

In Sabah, patrimonialism offers a historical lens for understanding how pre colonial leadership structures and kinship based governance shaped contemporary patronage networks. These historical foundations demonstrate path dependence and help explain why informal practices endure. Patrimonialism also highlights how power is exercised and maintained through relational dynamics, including loyalty, reciprocity, and selective distribution of resources. This complements neopatrimonialism by illustrating how such practices become embedded within formal programs, including

poverty eradication initiatives, where elites may use state resources to reinforce personal networks. It further addresses cultural dimensions often overlooked by neopatrimonialism, explaining how norms of loyalty and communal obligation sustain patronage networks in Sabah. By providing a localized and relational understanding, patrimonialism strengthens the explanatory power and policy relevance of the framework.

Despite its strengths, neopatrimonialism has been criticized for its broad application and insufficient specificity in distinguishing varying degrees of formal and informal influence (Mkandawire, 2015). This creates a gap in explaining the mechanisms through which these dual systems interact, particularly where institutional frameworks are evolving but remain vulnerable to elite capture. Integrating institutionalism, patrimonialism, and neopatrimonialism addresses these limitations and offers a comprehensive lens for examining the research objectives. Institutionalism highlights how formal poverty eradication policies may create opportunities for manipulation, while patrimonialism explains how loyalty based networks influence program beneficiaries. Neopatrimonialism integrates these perspectives by revealing how state resources are appropriated by rent seeking actors operating within formal systems but driven by informal allegiances.

In this study, neopatrimonialism focuses on the role of bigmen as political leaders, representing a key factor in determining democratic practices. Similar to clientelism and presidentialism, neopatrimonialism describes the systematic concentration of political power in the hands of one individual, defined by the extent to which the political leader is free from constraints imposed by other institutions or actors (Mkandawire, 2015; McDonald, 2021; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997).

Within Malaysia's unicameral state system, the Chief Minister can be identified as a critical patron in driving state development. However, as North (1998) argues, the behaviour of political actors is shaped by institutional constraints. These constraints present challenges in implementing poverty programs at the Sabah state level.

Acemoglu and Robinson distinguish between inclusive and extractive institutions. Inclusive institutions create equal opportunities, protect property rights, and encourage participation in economic and political life. These institutions contribute to poverty reduction by expanding access to education and economic activity. In contrast, extractive institutions concentrate power and wealth in the hands of a few,

limiting opportunities for the majority and perpetuating poverty. Therefore, institutional forms play a decisive role in either reducing or sustaining poverty.

As Sabah is reported as the poorest state in Malaysia, the governance system may be understood as falling into a patrimonial trap. The practices of neopatrimonialism may reinforce extractive institutions and lead to a reversal of fortune, where neopatrimonialism, extractive institutions, and patrimonialism intersect and collectively deviate from ideal governance structures. Together, these concepts illustrate how deviations from transparency, inclusivity, and accountability may perpetuate inequality and hinder development.

Institutionalism provides a broader lens that goes beyond formal rules such as constitutions and policies, encompassing informal constraints such as norms, values, and conventions (Lowndes, 2010 cited in Suffian, 2019). Institutions, understood as metarules, include fundamental norms and conventions governing economic actors within a specific context (Hollingworth, 2000; Peter, 2005; Peterson, 2010; Hall & Taylor, 1996; Lowndes, 2010). Hall and Taylor (1996) identify three paradigms of new institutionalism: historical, sociological, and rational choice institutionalism.

Historical institutionalism defines institutions as formal and informal procedures and norms embedded in organizational structures, emphasizing path dependence and power asymmetries (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Thelen & Steinmo, 1992; Suffian, 2018). Sociological institutionalism characterizes institutions as both formal rules and informal norms shaping meaning and behaviour (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Scott, 2001). Rational choice institutionalism, grounded in economic reasoning, views institutions as frameworks that shape strategic behaviour through incentives and constraints (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Lowndes, 2010). However, rational choice institutionalism may oversimplify motivation by assuming utility maximization, neglecting historical and normative influences (Steinmo, 2008; Levi, 1997).

Therefore, this study adopts historical and sociological institutionalism to explore informal institutions linking political patronage and state anti poverty programs in Sabah. By combining these perspectives, the analysis recognizes that actors' behaviour is constrained by institutions while preferences are socially constructed (Braathen, 1996; Suffian, 2018). This integration offers a context specific understanding of institutional design and policy continuity.

Exploring how patron networks shape the interests of state anti poverty programs in Sabah reveals a complex interaction between informal power structures and public policy objectives. In a neopatrimonial system, political leaders may use poverty programs to consolidate support within patron client networks. Resource allocation may thus prioritize loyalty rather than need. Implementation, monitoring, and evaluation may be influenced by these informal dynamics, potentially compromising fairness and effectiveness.

Scholars argue that powerful leadership and stable domestic rents are integral to the developmental capabilities of a neo patrimonial state (Kelsall & Booth, 2010; Evans et al., 1985; World Bank, 1997; Naumayer, 2002 cited in Von Soest, 2021). However, where institutions are weak or corruption is entrenched, the state's capacity to sustain growth and development is constrained (Oluwatobi et al., 2015). Although neo patrimonial systems may, under certain conditions, support developmental outcomes, regime corruption can produce chronic poverty, instability, and inequality (Mahagaonkar, 2008).

Neo patrimonial systems combine patron networks, strong political leaders, and the use of public resources for political legitimation, entrenching personalistic authority within formal institutions (Coppedge et al., 2020). Clientelism, patrimonialism, and regime corruption thus constitute core mechanisms shaping such systems. Patronage, defined as the targeted contingent distribution of resources in exchange for political support (Coppedge et al., 2020), illustrates how domestic resource allocation affects development prospects (Kelsall & Booth, 2010). Where rents are channelled toward narrow objectives, economic growth and development may be impeded (Yates, 1996; Mahdavy, 1970). Excessive centralization or absence of formal constraints can undermine economic growth (Kelsall & Booth, 2010; Fukuyama, 2005; Englebert, 2000a). In Sabah's anti poverty programs, rent seeking behaviour within patronage networks may influence allocation, leading to preferential treatment and resource capture. Such dynamics risk distorting program priorities and reducing effectiveness.

In sum, the intricate linkage between patronage, rent seeking, and patrimonial governance underscores the importance of understanding how informal networks shape state anti poverty initiatives in Sabah. Addressing these dynamics is essential for promoting fairness, transparency, and effectiveness within neopatrimonial governance structures.

2.8 Summary

This emphasis on elite interests and actions shaping both formal and informal structures in Malaysia has dominated earlier scholarship (McDonald, 2021) and is therefore integral to the analytical approach adopted in this thesis. Importantly, both neopatrimonialism and institutionalist schools of thought converge on a key premise central to this study, namely that outcomes arising from informal institutions are inherently case specific (Arriola, 2009). Kelsall and Booth (2010), Booth and Golooba Mutebi (2012), Hirvi and Whitfield (2015), Mkandawire (2015), and Behuria, Buur, and Gray (2017) similarly argue that, depending on the configuration and operation of patron networks, patronage can either support development or deepen governance failures and socio economic vulnerability within a given state.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The quality of qualitative research is ultimately determined by the coherence of its findings. Alignment between the research questions and the chosen research methods in the overall research design is essential to generate meaningful data and produce credible findings. Therefore, it is important to select an appropriate method that adequately addresses the research questions.

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to address the research questions established in the previous chapter and to complement the analytical framework. As anti poverty programs in Malaysia are deeply embedded in historical events, political interference, diffusion of power, and path dependence, an appropriate method must be capable of exploring the relationship between political patronage and anti poverty programs. For this reason, this study adopts a qualitative research design.

In this chapter, the researcher explains the application of the research philosophy, research approach, and research strategy. It also details the methods used for data collection, the sampling technique, the data analysis procedures, as well as the measures taken to ensure validity and reliability. Finally, the chapter discusses the ethical procedures observed during data collection

3.2 Research Paradigm

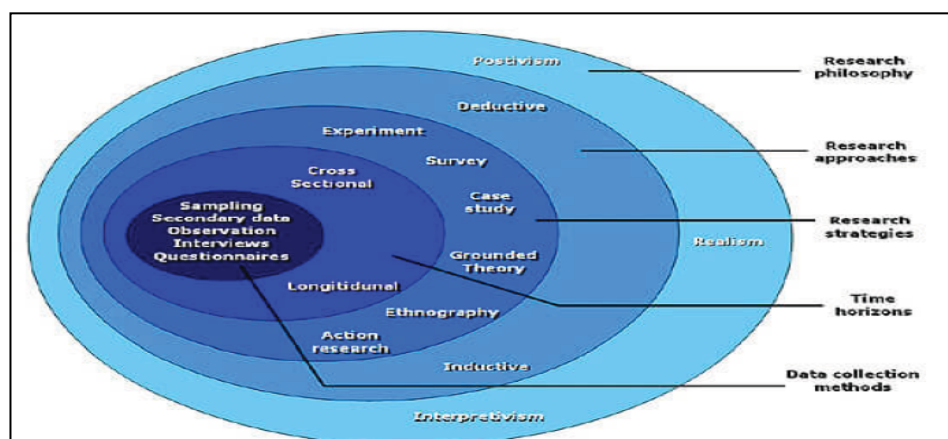


Figure 2.2 Sauder, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009

Among the many ways of explaining, theorizing, and categorizing research methods, the most fundamental approach is to examine them through their underlying philosophy (Clarke, 1998). Research philosophy is shaped by the assumptions constructed by the researcher in accordance with the aims of the study (Hughes, 1994). Sauder et al. (2009) identify two core concepts within research philosophy, namely ontology, which concerns the nature of reality, and epistemology, which addresses how reality can be understood and interpreted (Furlong & Marsh, 2010).

Ontology concerns the nature of reality and being. More specifically, it asks: What is the form and nature of reality, and what can be known about that reality? Ontological positions are commonly classified into positivism, interpretivism, and realism (Sauder et al., 2009).

The interpretivist or constructivist, also referred to as subjectivist, philosophy is often described as anti positivist. Interpretivism is generally associated with an inductive or theory building approach. Interpretivists maintain that multiple realities may exist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), and that knowledge is inherently linked to the individual who acquires it and is shaped by their context. Consequently, interpretivist researchers seek to work collaboratively to understand and derive meaning from different perspectives, drawing conclusions grounded in participants' lived experiences (Schwandt, 1994; Hansen, 2004; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). The interpretivist paradigm is often regarded as an alternative to the received positivist view.

Through the interpretivist philosophy, this research can be clearly justified, as its aim is to explore how political patronage is linked to anti poverty programs in the state of Sabah. The researcher assumes that the realities of patron networks and anti poverty programs in Sabah are intertwined. Therefore, this study adopts neopatrimonialism theory to make sense of that reality. Examining political patronage involves explaining patterns of political elite participation in anti poverty programs and analysing policy making processes, particularly how power is exercised by political elites. It also involves understanding how decisions are made and how resources are allocated.

In essence, this study seeks to uncover the meanings constructed by political elites through their practices in policy making and implementation. Such meanings can only be understood through direct interaction and dialogue with key informants. Accordingly, a qualitative approach enables the researcher to investigate these realities

in greater depth (Furlong & Marsh, 2003; Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2012; Neuman, 2011).

3.3 Application of Research Philosophy

Furlong and Marsh (2003) clearly state that qualitative research is closely linked to ontological and epistemological positions (Furlong & Marsh, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). Ontology concerns the nature of reality and reflects the researcher's beliefs and assumptions about what exists. In this study, the ontological position is grounded in the researcher's belief that political patronage is closely linked to anti poverty programs in the state of Sabah. This assumes that patron networks and poverty eradication initiatives are not separate phenomena but are interconnected within the state's governance structure.

Epistemology, on the other hand, relates to how knowledge is constructed and understood. In this research, the epistemological stance is based on the argument that institutions shape the behaviour of political elites, particularly in the formulation and implementation of anti poverty programs. Knowledge about political patronage and poverty programs is therefore derived from understanding how political actors interpret, negotiate, and exercise power within institutional contexts.

Accordingly, the data collection method employed in this study is in depth semi structured interviews, consistent with the interpretivist approach (Furlong & Marsh, 2003; Ponterotto, 2005; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009; Easterby Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008). This method allows the researcher to explore participants' perspectives and interpretations, enabling a deeper understanding of the relationship between political patronage and anti poverty programs in Sabah.

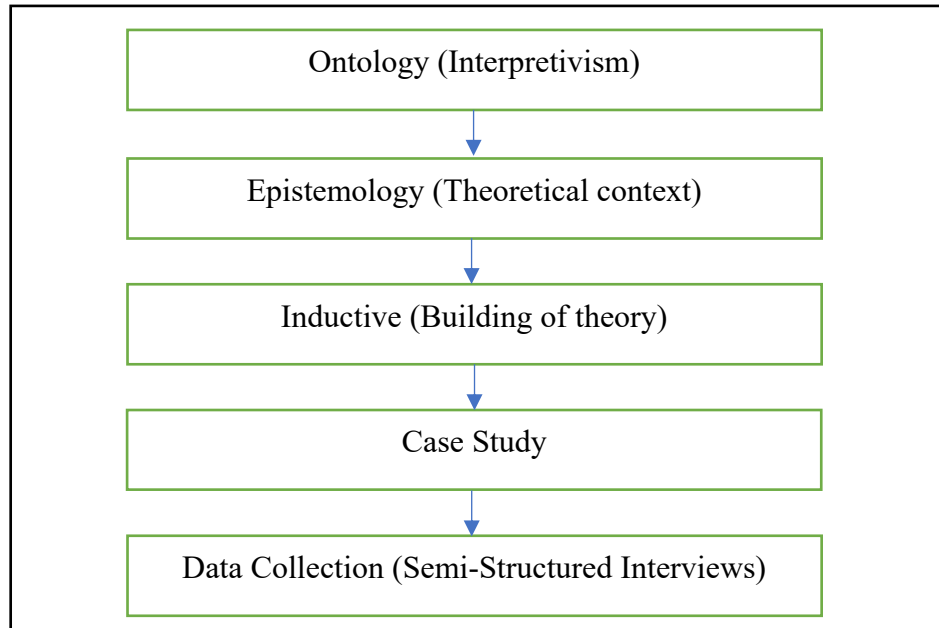


Figure 2.3 The Process of Applying Research Philosophy

3.4 Research Approach

Saunders et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of determining whether a study adopts an inductive or deductive research approach. Creswell (2003) and Trochim (2006) similarly classify reasoning into two broad categories, namely inductive and deductive approaches. Induction refers to reasoning that moves from the specific to the general, whereas deduction begins with general principles and applies them to specific cases. Arguments grounded in experience or observation are typically expressed inductively, while those based on established laws, rules, or widely accepted principles are expressed deductively. In simple terms, an inductive researcher works from the bottom up, using participants' perspectives to build broader themes and generate a theory that connects these themes (Creswell & Plano, 2007). For this study, the inductive approach is the most appropriate, as it enables the researcher to draw upon participants' views and experiences to develop broader thematic patterns and construct a theoretical understanding of how political patronage is linked to anti poverty programs in Sabah.

3.5 Research Strategy

This study adopts poverty eradication programs in the state of Sabah as a case study. Selecting Sabah as the case provides a nuanced approach to understanding

complex socio political phenomena. Sabah possesses unique socio economic and political characteristics, making it particularly suitable for case study analysis. It remains one of the poorest states in Malaysia, with poverty rates consistently higher than the national average, thus making it an important site for examining the effectiveness and challenges of poverty eradication programs (Lim & Lee, 2020). The role of political patronage in Sabah is especially significant, as it has historically influenced the distribution of resources, political appointments, and development initiatives. These dynamics are shaped by Sabah's distinct federal state relations, ethnic diversity, and governance challenges in managing a geographically dispersed and predominantly rural population (Chin, 2018).

By focusing on Sabah, this research applies institutional theories, including the concept of extractive institutions, to analyse how political elites may prioritize personal or political interests over equitable resource distribution, thereby affecting the outcomes of poverty alleviation programs (North et al., 2009). Programs such as Program Pembasmian Kemiskinan in Sabah have produced mixed results, with inefficiencies frequently linked to political interference (Rahman, 2022). Examining such programs through a case study approach provides insight into the mechanisms of political patronage that shape policy design and implementation. This localized focus also enables broader comparative reflection, allowing patterns and lessons to be identified for other regions facing similar governance and development challenges. Furthermore, the case study design supports in depth qualitative exploration through interviews, document analysis, and thematic analysis, thereby revealing the interaction between political structures and development outcomes. Sabah's poverty eradication efforts therefore offer a contextually rich framework for analysing the impact of political patronage and contribute to both academic scholarship and policy discussions.

The case study design is appropriate for several reasons. First, the central research inquiry is framed around what and how questions (Yin, 1994; Flick, 1998; Creswell, 2003). The primary question asks how political patronage is linked to state anti poverty programs. This exploratory question requires an exploratory research design, for which the case study is particularly well suited. Additional questions, such as how patron networks shape the interests of the poor and how rent seekers influence state poverty outcomes, are also exploratory and align with the case study as a preferred research strategy. These questions require a strategy that allows the researcher to trace

developments over time rather than capture isolated events or incidental observations (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000). The case study design meets this requirement. Second, the research inquiry emphasizes understanding political patronage and anti poverty programs within their broader political and historical context. The case study approach provides insight into the causal processes underlying these phenomena (Stoecker, 1991; Yin, 2003). As discussed earlier, Malay political elites exercised significant influence in policy development and decision making, particularly following the Bumiputera Congress of 1966. This historical context shaped the political climate in Malaysia and influenced the formulation of anti poverty programs.

Third, the study seeks to explore patron networks at the state level in depth. Debates surrounding government legitimacy involve pluralistic conceptualizations of power (Hudson & Lowe, 2004). In this respect, the case study allows for a detailed examination of political patronage within the framework of neopatrimonialism. It enables the researcher to situate patronage within its political, institutional, and historical context.

These considerations highlight the evolving nature of patron client relations and policy making processes. It is difficult to analyse the configuration of political patronage independently of its context. The case study design allows the researcher to account for these contextual conditions and to identify how political patronage operates within them. An additional contextual dimension is the historical development of patron networks in Sabah. Understanding how political elites act, how their relationships have evolved, and how policies and programs have changed over time is essential. The case study design therefore enables an extensive and context sensitive exploration of these complexities.

3.6 Data Collection

Data collection in this study is based primarily on primary sources in the form of qualitative data, which require expert opinions and informed perspectives (Neuman, 2011). This research seeks to build a comprehensive understanding of political patronage and anti poverty programs within their complex institutional and political settings. To achieve this objective, semi structured in depth interviews are proposed as the main method of data collection, as they are suitable for addressing all research

objectives. In depth semi structured interviews enable informants to provide detailed feedback, share experiences, express feelings and opinions, and elaborate on specific issues (Salkind, 2012; Boyce & Neale, 2006). As qualitative research aims to uncover social phenomena and human behaviour, interviews are considered the most appropriate method for examining the relationship between political patronage and anti poverty programs.

In depth semi structured interviews involve the interviewer guiding the session using prepared questions while allowing flexibility for further probing, observing participants, taking notes, and recording responses (Monette, 1985; Moen & Karlsdottir, 2011). This method provides opportunities for the researcher to observe the environment and adapt questions according to the flow of discussion (Postholm, 2010; Neuman, 2011; Neuman, 2012).

Given that this study examines the relationship between political patronage and anti poverty programs, a potentially sensitive topic, in depth semi structured interviews offer flexibility and depth. They provide informants with space to elaborate on complex, sensitive, or difficult issues (Postholm, 2010). Therefore, this study adopts in depth semi structured interviews to collect data from key informants.

The qualitative semi structured interview approach in this research employs purposive sampling, whereby the researcher strategically selects a limited number of key informants to obtain in depth insights into the phenomenon under study. In qualitative research, the concept of data saturation is central. Achieving data saturation ensures a comprehensive understanding of the research topic by capturing diverse perspectives related to the research questions (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Aiming for saturation also reflects practical considerations, as interviews require time, effort, and financial resources. The pursuit of saturation enhances the validity and reliability of the study by ensuring that findings are robust and not dependent on isolated responses. A sufficient number of interviewees strengthens the credibility of the research and aligns with the principles of trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Saturation enables the identification of recurring themes and patterns, supporting detailed and nuanced analysis. Practical constraints, including time and personnel limitations, are considered in determining the sample size, ensuring that the research remains feasible and methodologically sound. Ethical considerations are also addressed, as saturation prevents unnecessary repetition and respects

participants' time and privacy (Morse, 1995). As noted by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), data saturation is reached when no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews, indicating that a relatively small number of interviews may be sufficient to capture the complexity of the research topic. Accordingly, selecting 17 key informants is consistent with the qualitative approach, which prioritizes information richness and depth over statistical representativeness. This sample size allows for an in depth exploration of diverse perspectives while remaining manageable within the study's practical constraints.

The key informants selected for this study include:

1. Government officials responsible for anti poverty programs from relevant government agencies and ministries.
2. Parliamentarians and members of the State Legislative Assembly with extensive experience in anti poverty programs.
3. Senior bureaucrats involved in the coordination and implementation of poverty eradication programs.

These categories of informants ensure that the study captures perspectives from policy formulation, political decision making, and administrative implementation levels.

Table 1.4

The List of Interviewees

No.	Categorization of Informant	Number of Informant
1	Top Bureaucrats	9
2	Political Elite	5
3	Politically Linked Individually	2
4	State Statutory Body	1
		17

3.7 Sampling Technique

Given the researcher's intention to examine the linkage between patron networks and anti poverty programs, and considering that the key informants are drawn primarily from top bureaucrats, government officials, political elites, and policy makers, this

study adopts purposive or selective sampling. In purposive sampling, interviewees are selected based on their specific positions, knowledge, and experience relevant to the research topic (Flick, 1998; Neuman, 2011).

This approach ensures that the participants possess direct involvement in, or substantial understanding of, the formulation, coordination, and implementation of anti poverty programs, as well as the dynamics of political patronage within the state. By deliberately selecting individuals with strategic insight and institutional experience, the study is able to generate rich, in depth data that directly addresses the research objectives.

3.8 Data Analysis

As this study adopts a case study design with objectives centered on exploration and explanation, it employs thematic data analysis. Data analysis involves organizing and categorizing data into meaningful units according to emerging themes (James, 2013). In this research, the data are analysed thematically by integrating themes guided by the research framework and extracted from the case study findings.

Thematic analysis is a widely used and highly relevant method for analysing qualitative data derived from semi structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019). One of its primary strengths lies in its flexibility, which allows researchers to explore emerging patterns, themes, and categories without imposing rigid structures on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This flexibility enables a deeper engagement with the data, allowing the researcher to examine the meanings, nuances, and complexities embedded in participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The inductive orientation of thematic analysis aligns with the qualitative research paradigm, as themes can emerge organically from the data rather than being strictly imposed by predetermined theories or frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019). At the same time, in this study, the thematic analysis is informed by the research framework, ensuring coherence between theory and empirical findings. The method supports systematic organization of large datasets into coherent themes, assisting the researcher in presenting key findings in a structured and analytically rigorous manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Furthermore, thematic analysis enhances transparency in the research process by providing a clear and systematic approach to identifying, analysing, and reporting themes, thereby strengthening the rigor and credibility of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In the context of qualitative semi structured interviews, thematic analysis is particularly valuable for identifying patterns across participants, highlighting similarities and differences in responses, and generating nuanced insights that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between political patronage and anti poverty programs in Sabah (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.8.1 Thematic Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis serves as a cornerstone in qualitative research due to its comprehensive and systematic contribution to data interpretation. Its structured approach enables the organization and summarization of extensive qualitative datasets, allowing researchers to distil key insights from large volumes of interview material. By identifying recurring patterns and trends, thematic analysis moves beyond surface level description and provides a nuanced understanding of the underlying structures embedded within the data. The emphasis on interpreting core themes aligns with the broader objective of qualitative inquiry, which seeks to extract meaningful insights from participants' experiences, perspectives, and practices.

The structured nature of thematic analysis ensures a rigorous and transparent analytical process, thereby enhancing the credibility and consistency of qualitative research findings. Its flexibility allows it to be applied across various research designs and theoretical frameworks, making it particularly suitable for case study research. Furthermore, thematic analysis promotes reflexivity by encouraging researchers to remain aware of their own assumptions, positionality, and interpretative role throughout the analytical process. Overall, the use of thematic analysis is justified by its capacity to systematize qualitative data, enhance interpretative depth, and adapt to diverse research contexts.

Following data collection, the next critical stage in the research process is data analysis. In this study, thematic data analysis, also referred to as manual coding, was applied to analyse the data (Saldaña, 2013). All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim in their original language to preserve meaning and contextual nuance. Each

recording and transcript was assigned a code number to replace the interviewee's name, thereby ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The transcriptions were then reviewed and compared to identify similarities and differences across participants' accounts. Once transcription was completed, initial codes were developed based on the themes of inquiry and the analytical framework outlined in Chapter 2. Interview transcripts were labelled, sorted, compiled, and synthesised according to thematic categories guided by theoretical propositions and insights derived from the existing literature. This process enabled the generation of coherent themes and concepts relevant to the research objectives.

The evidence was categorised into a manageable coding system. As new themes emerged during the analysis, they were noted and incorporated as additional categories where necessary. This iterative procedure underpinned the analytical process, which involved identifying, coding, classifying, and labelling dominant patterns within the interview data. Such a systematic approach enabled the researcher to determine the substantive significance of these patterns and to link them meaningfully to the broader theoretical framework (Boyatzis, 1998; Ritchie, Lewis, Ormston, & Morrell, 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

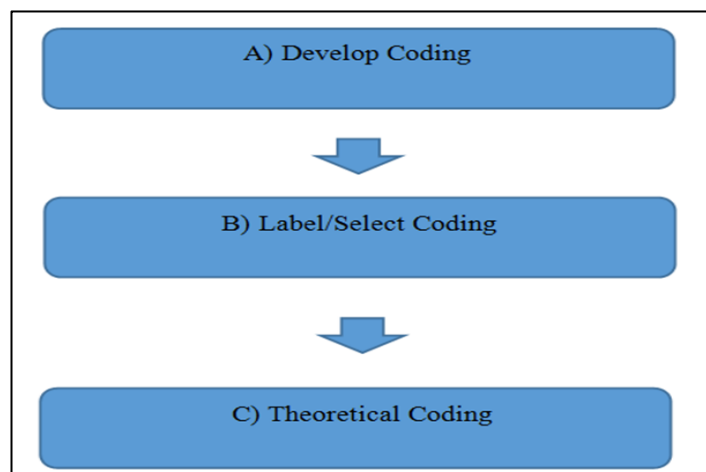


Figure 2.4 Thematic Data Analysis Process

Themes are best understood as outcomes of the coding, categorization, and analytical reflection process rather than as elements that are directly coded from the outset. In other words, there is no such method as “theme coding” in a strict sense. Instead, themes emerge through a systematic engagement with the data, which is why

qualitative methodology literature refers to thematic analysis and the process of “theming the data,” rather than coding themes at the initial stage.

A datum is first subjected to primary coding in order to identify and label its content, meaning, or function in relation to the research objectives. Where necessary, secondary coding is applied to refine interpretation, establish connections, or deepen analytical insight. Through this iterative process of coding, comparing, grouping, and reflecting, patterns begin to cohere into broader categories. It is from these categories and interpretative linkages that themes are ultimately developed.

Thus, themes represent higher level analytical constructs that capture patterned meanings across the dataset. They are not simply labels attached to individual excerpts, but conceptual outcomes that synthesize multiple coded segments into coherent and theoretically informed interpretations aligned with the needs of the inquiry.

3.8.2 Manual Coding Process/ Guideline

The process of data analysis commenced after all interviews with the 17 key informants were completed. Several systematic steps were undertaken to interpret the data in a rigorous and structured manner.

Develop Coding

A. Coding Patterns

Each unit of data was assigned a unique code, particularly because the interview excerpts were relatively short. In larger datasets, the same codes may appear repeatedly throughout the transcripts. This repetition is both natural and deliberate. It is natural because patterns of action and consistency commonly occur in human affairs. It is deliberate because one of the primary objectives of coding is to identify these recurring patterns and consistencies as documented in the data (Saldaña, 2003; Agar, 1996).

Following the initial coding process, analytic memos were written. These memos allowed the researcher to reflect on emerging meanings and to critically examine how she personally related to the participants and the phenomenon under study. At this stage, the researcher established a connection between herself and the social world being examined. Reflexivity was central to this process. The researcher sought to empathize with participants’ actions, perspectives, and worldviews in order

to understand their experiences within their socio political context. Attention was given to emotions, relationships, values, attitudes, and beliefs expressed in relation to political patronage and anti poverty programs.

B. Coding Filter

Coding requires the researcher to adopt an analytical lens. However, interpretation depends on the conceptual filter through which the data are viewed. This filter is shaped by the theoretical framework and research objectives. For example:

“...there’s just no place in this country for illegal immigrants. Round them up and send those criminals back to where they came from...” (P1)

Code: No Place → Immigration Issues → Xenophobia

In this example, the coding process moves from descriptive labelling to more interpretative categorization. The filter applied reflects both the contextual meaning of the statement and its broader socio political implications.

C. Coding As A Heuristic

Many qualitative researchers code data both during and after collection because coding itself is an analytical tactic (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While some scholars argue that coding and analysis are not synonymous, coding remains a crucial component of analysis (Bisit, 2003). Coding is heuristic in nature, meaning it is an exploratory problem solving technique without rigid formulas. It represents the first step toward deeper interpretation and theoretical development.

Coding is not merely labelling. It involves linking ideas. As Richards and Morse (2007) explain, coding leads the researcher from data to idea, and from idea back to all data associated with that idea. Thus, coding establishes conceptual connections across the dataset.

Label and Select Coding

A. Codifying And Categorizing

To codify is to arrange data systematically and classify it into meaningful

groupings. When codes are repeatedly applied and refined, the researcher engages in a process that allows data to be segregated, regrouped, and reconnected in order to consolidate meaning and explanation (Grbich, 2007).

Analysis involves searching for patterns in the data and identifying ideas that explain why such patterns exist. Coding enables the organization of similar data segments into categories or families that share common characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

B. From Codes To Categories

Codes are subsumed under broader subcategories within a hierarchical coding scheme (Lewins & Silver, 2007). At this stage, the researcher determines which codes are most analytically significant and clusters related codes together to form categories. This involves reviewing all previously generated codes, arranging and combining related ones, and identifying conceptual linkages among them.

The researcher then selects overarching themes that capture the essence of these grouped categories. Themes are therefore not directly coded but emerge from the systematic consolidation of related codes.

Theoretical Coding

A. From Codes And Categories To Theory

Some categories may contain clusters of coded data that require further refinement into subcategories. As major categories are compared, contrasted, and consolidated, the analysis begins to move beyond descriptive reality toward thematic, conceptual, and theoretical interpretation.

This stage often overlaps with the process of theme development. The researcher uses conceptual mapping techniques, such as mind maps, to examine relationships among codes, categories, and themes. These are then connected to the adapted theoretical framework, particularly neopatrimonialism and institutional perspectives.

Through this iterative process, the analysis progresses from raw data to conceptual abstraction, enabling the researcher to explain how patron networks shape the distribution and implementation of anti poverty programs at the Sabah state level.

3.9 Validity and Reliability of the Research

Validity and reliability in qualitative research are commonly discussed in terms of trustworthiness, which comprises four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These criteria provide a framework to ensure rigor and integrity in qualitative inquiry.

Credibility is comparable to internal validity in quantitative research. It concerns the confidence in the truth and accuracy of the findings. Strategies to enhance credibility include prolonged engagement and sustained interaction with participants. Prolonged engagement involves spending sufficient time in the field to understand the context, build trust, test for misinformation, and gain a deep familiarity with the data. Through extended interviews and continuous engagement, the researcher is able to obtain rich and detailed data that accurately reflect participants' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applicable to other contexts. Unlike quantitative generalization, transferability relies on the provision of thick description. The researcher must describe participants, settings, and research processes in sufficient detail to allow readers to determine whether the findings are transferable to their own contexts. This includes describing not only behaviours and experiences but also the socio political and institutional environment in which they occur, so that the findings become meaningful to external audiences (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010; Koch, 1994; Saldaña, 2011; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Dependability concerns the consistency and stability of the research process over time. It requires that the findings, interpretations, and recommendations are clearly supported by the data collected from participants. An audit trail documenting research decisions, coding processes, and analytical steps enhances dependability by allowing others to examine how conclusions were reached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability relates to objectivity. It ensures that the findings are grounded in the participants' accounts rather than shaped by the researcher's personal biases, motivations, or assumptions. Confirmability is strengthened through reflexivity, transparent documentation of analytical procedures, and the use of representative quotations from interview transcripts. Presenting verbatim excerpts demonstrates a clear link between the data and the interpretations, thereby reinforcing that the

conclusions reflect participants' voices and lived realities (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Polit & Beck, 2012).

Together, these four criteria establish the rigor of qualitative research and ensure that the study's findings are credible, transparent, and grounded in empirical evidence.

3.10 Validity of Research Through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) as a Triangulation Method

Ensuring research validity is a critical component of any scholarly endeavour, particularly when examining complex phenomena such as political patronage and poverty eradication programs. In this study, Focus Group Discussions, referred to as FGDs, were employed as a triangulation strategy to enhance data validity and reduce potential bias. FGDs enable the collection of diverse perspectives from participants with varied experiences and insights, thereby ensuring that the data are comprehensive and reflective of multiple viewpoints (Morgan, 1997).

The inclusion of FGDs strengthens the depth and accuracy of the findings by complementing individual interviews and document analysis. Given that this research investigates the interaction between formal policies, informal networks, and political behavior, relying solely on one method could result in partial interpretations or selective narratives (Creswell, 2014). FGDs provide an interactive setting in which participants are able to share, affirm, question, or challenge each other's perspectives. This interaction generates richer data and helps uncover inconsistencies or contested interpretations, thereby reinforcing the credibility of the findings.

For instance, in examining patron networks within Sabah's poverty eradication programs, FGDs create space for participants to collectively discuss how resources are allocated, how patron client relationships influence program outcomes, and whether these dynamics differ across districts or communities. Such discussions reveal not only individual experiences but also shared patterns, informal norms, and power hierarchies that shape governance practices.

FGDs are particularly valuable in capturing relational and collective dimensions of governance. Political patronage is inherently network based and relational in nature. Individual interviews may highlight personal accounts but may not fully illuminate how collective expectations, group norms, or informal hierarchies influence decision making

processes. Through interactive dialogue, FGDs allow participants to co construct meanings and reflect on shared realities, thereby enhancing contextual validity (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Furthermore, triangulation through FGDs allows for cross verification of themes identified through interviews, documentary analysis, and other sources. Where patterns converge across methods, the credibility of the findings is strengthened. Where discrepancies arise, they prompt further analytical reflection and verification, thereby enhancing rigor and minimizing researcher bias (Patton, 2015). This iterative process ensures that interpretations are grounded in a critically examined and multi dimensional dataset.

In summary, the use of FGDs as a triangulation method is a deliberate and methodologically sound strategy to enhance validity. By facilitating interactive engagement, capturing collective experiences, and cross validating findings, FGDs strengthen the credibility, depth, and contextual robustness of the research. This approach supports the production of reliable and meaningful insights into the dynamics of political patronage and poverty eradication in Sabah.

3.11 Reliability of Research Through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Ensuring reliability is essential in qualitative research, as it reflects the consistency and dependability of both the data collection process and the analytical procedures employed. In this study, Focus Group Discussions, referred to as FGDs, are utilised to strengthen the reliability of the findings by ensuring that patterns identified in the data are consistent across different participant groups and contexts. Reliability in qualitative research is enhanced through systematic procedures, transparent documentation, and rigorous analytical frameworks (Creswell, 2014). Through careful design and implementation of FGDs, this study ensures that the findings are dependable and reflective of the broader dynamics of political patronage and poverty eradication programs in Sabah.

FGDs contribute to reliability by providing a structured yet interactive environment in which participants discuss shared experiences and perspectives. To ensure consistency, the same guiding questions were used across all focus group sessions. This uniform structure enables comparability of responses across groups and

ensures that discussions remain aligned with the research objectives (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Participant selection was also conducted strategically to include individuals with relevant experience while maintaining diversity of perspectives. This approach ensures that the data are both information rich and consistently grounded in comparable contexts.

Reliability is further strengthened through detailed documentation of the FGD process. All discussions were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and systematically archived. An audit trail was maintained to document methodological decisions, coding procedures, and analytical steps. This level of transparency enables the research process to be reviewed and, where necessary, replicated or reassessed by other scholars (Patton, 2015). Where multiple facilitators were involved, consistent moderation guidelines were applied to minimize facilitator bias and ensure uniformity in the conduct of discussions.

The reliability of the findings was also reinforced through the iterative coding process. A consistent coding framework was applied across all transcripts. Where applicable, inter coder discussions were conducted to review coding decisions and resolve discrepancies through consensus. This process ensured that themes and patterns were grounded in the data rather than shaped by individual interpretation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

In addition, triangulation enhanced reliability by cross referencing FGD findings with individual interviews, policy documents, and relevant field observations. Convergence of findings across multiple sources strengthened confidence in the consistency of identified patterns. Where divergences emerged, these were examined analytically to ensure that contextual variations were properly understood rather than overlooked.

In summary, the reliability of this research is ensured through standardized procedures, consistent questioning, rigorous coding practices, transparent documentation, and triangulation. These measures collectively enhance the consistency, dependability, and robustness of the findings, providing a strong empirical foundation for analysing political patronage and poverty eradication programs in Sabah.

3.12 Research Ethical Procedures in Data Collection

In academic research employing semi structured interviews, adherence to ethical

principles is essential to ensure the integrity of the study and to safeguard the rights, dignity, and well being of participants. The following ethical considerations were observed in this research.

1. Approval From The Ethics Committee

Obtaining approval from a recognised ethics committee is a fundamental step in ensuring ethical compliance in research involving human participants. The ethics committee, composed of experts in research governance and ethical standards, evaluates the proposed study to ensure adherence to established guidelines and regulatory frameworks.

In this study, a detailed research proposal was submitted outlining the research objectives, methodology, participant recruitment strategies, interview procedures, and data management plans. The committee assessed potential risks and benefits, ensuring that participants' rights, confidentiality, and welfare were adequately protected.

Approval from the ethics committee signifies that the study met the required ethical standards. Following approval, the researcher was obligated to conduct the research in accordance with the approved protocol and to report any deviations or unforeseen ethical issues. This process not only protects participants but also strengthens the legitimacy and credibility of the research.

2. Informed Consent

Informed consent is a foundational ethical requirement in qualitative research. Prior to participation, all informants were provided with clear and comprehensive information about the study. This included the purpose of the research, the nature of the semi structured interviews, the expected duration, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were informed of any potential risks or discomforts and were assured that their information would be treated confidentially. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Contact details of the researcher were provided for further clarification or concerns.

Written consent was obtained from all participants before interviews commenced. Informed consent was treated as an ongoing process rather than a single event, ensuring that participants remained fully aware of their rights throughout the research process.

3. Confidentiality

Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the study. Participants' identities were protected by assigning pseudonyms or coded identifiers in place of real names. Audio recordings, transcripts, and related documents were securely stored in password protected electronic files and restricted access folders. Only the researcher and authorised members of the research team had access to the data.

During analysis and reporting, care was taken to present findings in aggregated or anonymised form to prevent identification of individual participants. Any potentially identifying details were removed or modified. These measures ensured that sensitive information shared during interviews remained protected.

4. Anonymity

Anonymity was upheld by ensuring that no identifying personal information appeared in transcripts, field notes, or published findings. Codes were assigned to each participant to dissociate their identity from their responses. This approach encouraged openness and candid discussion, particularly given the sensitive nature of topics such as political patronage and poverty programs.

During the consent process, participants were explicitly informed about the procedures adopted to protect their anonymity. In disseminating findings, only aggregated data and representative quotations were presented, ensuring that individual identities could not be traced.

By prioritising ethical approval, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, this study upheld established ethical standards in qualitative research. These measures fostered trust between the researcher and participants and ensured the responsible conduct of semi structured interviews within a sensitive political context.

Table 1.5

The Codes for Key Informants

No.	Categories of Informant	The Informant	Code
1	Top Bureaucrats 1	Development Officer	P1
2	Top Bureaucrats 2	Chief Executive Officer	P2
3	Political Elite 1	Member of Parliament	P3

4	Top Bureaucrats 4	Member of Parliament	P4
5	Top Bureaucrats 5	Member of Parliament	P5
6	Top Bureaucrats 6	Member of Parliament	P6
7	Top Bureaucrats 7	Assistant Director	P7
8	Top Bureaucrats 8	Assistant Director	P8
9	Top Bureaucrats 9	Ministry Officer	P9
10	State Ministry	CEO of State Agency under CMI	P10
11	State Statutory Body	Director	P11
12	Politically Linked Connected	With the title of ADK	P12
13	Political Elite	Member of Parliament	P13
14	Chief Minister Officer	State Secretariat	P14
16	Policy Maker	State Politician	P16
17	Top Bureaucrat	Assistant Director	P17

5. Transparency

Transparency is a fundamental ethical principle in qualitative research, particularly in the conduct of semi structured interviews. It refers to the commitment to openness, clarity, and accountability throughout the entire research process. Transparency ensures that participants, reviewers, and the wider academic community are able to understand how the study was designed, conducted, and interpreted.

Transparency begins at the informed consent stage, where participants are clearly informed about the objectives of the study, the nature of their involvement, the duration of the interview, and the intended use of the data. Participants were also informed about how their information would be recorded, stored, analysed, and reported. Any potential risks, sensitivities, or implications associated with participation were communicated in advance.

Throughout the research process, transparency was maintained by documenting methodological decisions, interview procedures, sampling strategies, and analytical steps. An audit trail was preserved to demonstrate how themes were developed and how interpretations were derived from the data. This ensures that findings are traceable to

the original sources and that analytical conclusions are grounded in empirical evidence.

In the reporting stage, transparency requires accurate and honest representation of the data. This includes acknowledging limitations, methodological constraints, and potential challenges encountered during the research. By clearly outlining these aspects, the study allows readers to critically evaluate the robustness, validity, and reliability of the findings.

Prioritising transparency strengthens trust between researcher and participants, enhances scholarly credibility, and upholds the integrity of the research process. In a politically sensitive study examining patron networks and poverty eradication programs, such openness is particularly important to ensure ethical accountability and academic rigor.

3.13 Process of The Data Collection

Conducting interviews presents several methodological and practical challenges for the researcher. As noted by Neuman (2012), the interviewer must simultaneously manage multiple responsibilities during the interview process. These include guiding the direction of the conversation, ensuring that discussion remains aligned with the research objectives, and maintaining a balance between flexibility and structure.

At the same time, the interviewer must establish cooperation and rapport with participants while preserving professional objectivity and neutrality. This balance is particularly important in studies involving sensitive topics such as political patronage and poverty programs, where responses may be influenced by political sensitivities or institutional affiliations. The interviewer must therefore remain attentive, respectful, and non judgmental, creating an atmosphere that encourages open and honest dialogue. Another key challenge involves minimising discomfort, fear, or suspicion among respondents. Participants, especially those holding official positions such as government officers, bureaucrats, or political elites, may initially approach interviews with caution. To address this, the researcher adopted a professional and transparent approach, clearly explaining the purpose of the study, the confidentiality measures in place, and the voluntary nature of participation. Establishing trust was essential to obtaining candid and reflective responses.

The interviews in this study were conducted at the interviewees' offices or workplaces, based on their preference and convenience. Prior to the interviews, formal

communication was sent via email or official correspondence outlining the objectives of the research and providing relevant information about the study. This preliminary engagement helped to build credibility, reduce uncertainty, and prepare participants for the discussion.

Overall, effective interviewing requires not only methodological rigor but also interpersonal competence. The ability to manage dialogue, build trust, remain neutral, and create a comfortable environment was central to ensuring the quality and authenticity of the data collected in this research.

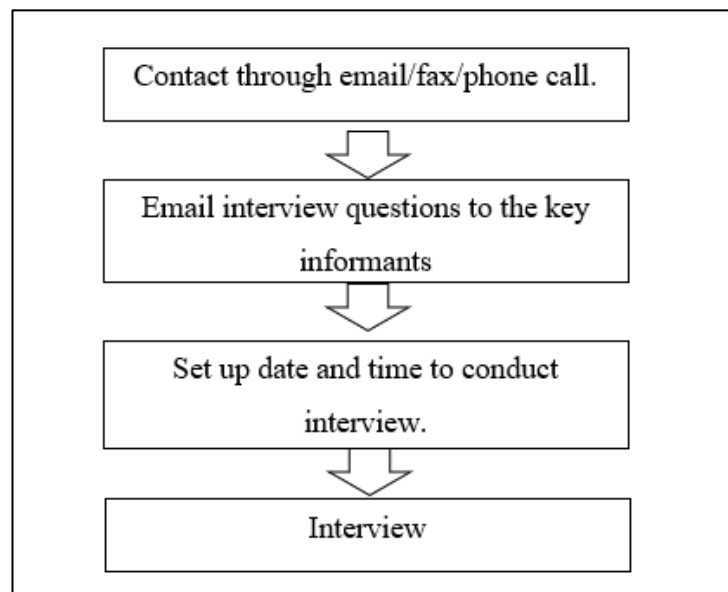


Figure 2.5 The Stages of Conduct Interview

3.14 Summary

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted in this study. The primary objective of the research is to explore how patron networks and poverty eradication programs are intertwined, particularly at the state level in Sabah. To comprehend this complex socio political reality, a case study strategy was employed, as it provides a strategic and context sensitive approach to examining institutional and relational dynamics within a specific setting.

A qualitative research design was deemed most appropriate for this inquiry. Given that the study seeks to understand the ontology of patron networks and the lived realities of political actors within anti poverty programs, qualitative methods allow for an in depth and nuanced exploration of meanings, perceptions, and power relations.

This approach enables the researcher to capture the complexity of patronage practices that may not be observable through quantitative measures alone.

The study utilised semi structured interviews as the primary data collection method. This method allowed the researcher to gain detailed insights into patronage dynamics through the experiences, participation, and perspectives of key informants, including political elites, bureaucrats, and policy actors. Through direct engagement and dialogue, the research was able to explore how informal networks operate within formal policy frameworks and how these interactions shape the implementation and outcomes of anti poverty programs.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the data and outlines the key findings that emerged from the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Through the application of thematic analysis, the study examines patterns, meanings, and relationships within the qualitative data, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the dynamics of political patronage and poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level.

The analysis moves beyond descriptive accounts to interpret how patron networks influence the design, allocation, and implementation of anti poverty initiatives. By systematically identifying recurring themes and linking them to the theoretical framework of neopatrimonialism and institutionalism, this chapter provides an empirically grounded explanation of how informal power structures intersect with formal policy mechanisms.

This chapter is organised into several sections. Section 4.2 presents the demographic profile of the informants, providing contextual background to the participants involved in the study. Section 4.3 outlines the presentation of the data findings. Sections 4.4 to 4.7 elaborate on the major themes that emerged from the data, offering detailed interpretation and analysis of each theme in relation to the research objectives and theoretical framework. Finally, Section 4.8 concludes the chapter with a summary of the key findings and their implications for understanding patronage and poverty eradication programs in Sabah.

4.2 Demographics

This study involved 17 key informants comprising top bureaucrats, political elites, policy makers, and politically linked individuals who have direct or indirect involvement in the formulation, coordination, and implementation of poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level. The selection of these informants was guided by purposive sampling to ensure that participants possessed relevant experience,

institutional knowledge, and decision making authority related to the research objectives.

The demographic profile of the informants provides contextual background necessary for understanding the perspectives shared during the interviews. The diversity in roles, institutional affiliations, and years of experience enriches the analysis by capturing multiple vantage points within the governance structure.

The table below presents the demographic characteristics of the informants, including their position, institutional background, and years of involvement in anti poverty programs.

Table 1.7

The Categorization of Informant

No.	Categorization of Informant	Number of Informant
1	Top Bureaucrats	10
2	Political Elite	5
3	Politically Linked Individually	1
4	State Statutory Body	1
		17

4.3 Findings

This section presents the findings of the study on how patronage practices influence the experience, implementation, and persistence of poverty at the Sabah state level. The data were gathered through in depth semi structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and document analysis involving key informants such as political elites, top bureaucrats, policy makers, and politically linked individuals.

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data systematically. Through iterative coding, categorisation, and analytical reflection, patterns of meaning emerged that illuminate how political patronage and poverty eradication programs are intertwined within formal governance structures and informal networks. The analysis reveals how patron networks shape decision making processes, resource allocation, beneficiary selection, and program implementation at various levels of governance.

Rather than viewing poverty eradication programs solely as technical policy instruments, the findings indicate that these programs are embedded within broader political and institutional dynamics. Informal relationships, loyalty structures, and personalised authority often intersect with formal administrative procedures, influencing who benefits, how resources are distributed, and how accountability mechanisms function.

The themes that follow capture the core dimensions of this relationship, demonstrating how neopatrimonial practices operate within the state machinery and how they contribute to patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and uneven development. These findings provide empirical grounding for the theoretical framework discussed in earlier chapters and offer insight into the institutional and relational drivers behind the persistence of poverty despite ongoing state interventions.

Table 1.8

The Influence of Political Patronage

Anonymity	Raw Data
P1	‘Kami melaksanakan banyak projek di kawasan luar bandar, tetapi cabaran yang kami hadapi semasa melaksanakan projek dan program pembangunan ini, terutamanya di kawasan luar bandar Sabah, selalunya disebabkan oleh kepadatan penduduk yang rendah dan isu logistik, yang menyukarkan kami untuk mempercepatkan kemajuan’ (P1)
P1	Masalah utama di sini adalah peruntukan kewangan negeri yang sangat terhad dan kita berharap daripada federal juga (P1)
P1	Bila bajet negara dibentangkan setiap tahun diumumkan peruntukan berbilion dan Sabah juga disebut, tetapi peruntukan tersebut dikumpulkan di kementerian di sana (persekutuan).
P1	Contohnya diumumkan RM400 juta untuk program pengukuhan keterjaminan makanan yang juga meliputi peruntukan di Sabah dan kami diminta membuat permohonan untuk dana itu. RM250 juta daripada RM400 juta itu diperuntukkan untuk keterjaminan

	<p>makanan, Sabah minta RM70 juta tapi hanya dapat RM2.2 juta – 0.08%, tidak sampai 1%. Selepas itu baru peruntukan bertambah ke RM25 juta.</p>
P1	<p>Pegawai tertinggi di Semenanjung hanya melihat masalah Semenanjung [komen peribadi dan off the record]. Contohnya self-sufficiency level (SSL) padi Sabah semakin menurun dari tahun ke tahun. Pada tahun 1981, Lembaga Padi Sabah telah dimansuhkan kerana Lembaga Padi Negara masuk ke Sabah. Hanya ada satu kawasan jelapang padi di Sabah iaitu di IADA Kota Belud. Produksi padi IADA Kota Belud hanya sekitar 34% setahun per hektar berbanding di Semenanjung Malaysia yang boleh mencapai 70%. Ada pesawah yang tanam padi tapi menunggu baja yang belum sampai kerana baja datang dari utara Semenanjung melalui NAFAS. Keutamaan diberi kepada padi jelapang – di Semenanjung semua jelapang, jadi orang Semenanjung mendapat keutamaan tetapi di Sabah hanya di Kota Belud dan petani perseorangan seperti di Papar dan Keningau sukar untuk mendapatkannya. Kenapa ada polisi yang berbeza-beza? Seharusnya ada polisi yang sama rata</p>
P1	<p>berkaitan dengan peruntukan, terdapat juga kekangan misalnya apabila kerajaan mengumumkan peruntukan. Contohnya Perdana Menteri umumkan peruntukan RM10 juta untuk Sabah pada sekitar bulan Mac atau April yang telah masuk mesyuarat kabinet dan diluluskan, tetapi sampai sekarang peruntukan belum turun</p>
P1	<p>Peruntukan tersebut adalah peruntukan one-off dan perlu dibelanjakan pada tahun ini, tetapi sekarang telah masuk bulan Ogos. Tahun lepas juga diberi peruntukan RM400 ribu untuk membeli mesin – macam ini juga, sudah hujung tahun. Perolehan sudah dibuat, tinggal lagi kontraktor belum tender tapi sudah close account dan peruntukan ditarik balik. Jadi yang rugi Sabah juga – sepatunya RM400 ribu itu sudah ada di sini tetapi disebabkan kekangan masa itu ia ditarik balik.</p>

P1	Macam-macam dokumentasi yang diminta dan perlu dapatkan kelulusan daripada pejabat Ketua Menteri walaupun untuk membina projek di daerah-daerah dan kampung-kampung
P1	Memang betul pendidikan merupakan enabler yang utama, tetapi JPN bergantung kepada agensi-agensi lain juga. Contohnya infrastruktur – kalau jalan tidak bagus, maka kos pengangkutan akan menjadi mahal dan bila kos pengangkutan mahal ia akan menjadi halangan untuk pelajar miskin untuk ke sekolah.
P2	"Terdapat isu sistemik di sini di mana, di Semenanjung Malaysia, 30% daripada penduduk tinggal di kawasan luar bandar manakala selebihnya di kawasan bandar. Namun, di Sabah, keadaannya terbalik, dengan 60% daripada penduduk tinggal di kawasan luar bandar. Oleh itu, strategi pembasmian kemiskinan di Sabah tidak boleh mengikut pendekatan yang sama seperti di Semenanjung Malaysia." (P2)
P3	Kita di peringkat persekutuan masih bergelut dengan politik ideologi bha, yang tidak ada berkaitan pun bha dengan penyelesaian isu rakyat. (P3)
P3	kalau itu pucuk pimpinan tidak tukar now what we see in Malaya arh, their fighting their ideology terus teranglah fighting with BN la bukan fighting for people (P3)
P3	Mereka tidak pandang kita bha. so what I say kan, you will feel it lah, next time lah whatever you submitted to them right, kalau mereka masih main politik kita politik cek lah tapi, you see ah, what Tan Sri Haji Hajiji kan Kita ma tengok permohonan bah Bukan permohonan bah Jangan tengok GRS KD yang tolak-tolak PKR UMNO approve approve approve. Tengok permohonan, bukan permohonan Haa betul ka? Kalau kau tengok bah Asal UMNO PKR approve lah Untuk makluman kau tau Kita MP Last year 3 million Peruntukan 2 million project 1.5 million diisi oleh Ketua bagi UMNO, 7-8 million. PKR juga, kita kosong ICU. PKR ketua cawangan, berapa? (P3)

P4	<p>“... Terdapat projek-projek seperti projek tebatan banjir atau projek atasi kesesakan jalan raya, tetapi sebaliknya mereka laksanakan projek di kawasan yang tiada masalah pun. Semua ini dilakukan semata-mata kerana tekanan daripada PKR dan UMNO ...” (P3)</p>
P6	<p>“...‘Tapi bila sudah diberi... mungkin... saya minta maaf kalau saya cakap begini... kita selalu... kita selalu minta peruntukan lebih untuk Sabah. Namun, bila sudah ada dana, kau gunakanlah dengan bijak. Maksud saya, contohnya, jangan kau buat menara telekomunikasi di tengah hutan yang tiada siapa pun mau pakai. Ya, kau buatlah di kawasan hijau dan pedalaman yang betul-betul di pisuk-pisuk paling hujung’... (P6)”</p>
P6	<p>“Orang selalu bercakap tentang politik wang, kononnya YB beri duit kepada penduduk kampung. Tapi hakikatnya, bila saya turun pigi kampung dan dengar sendiri masalah orang kampung ini pasal kesusahan mereka, apa lagi yang saya boleh buat? Satu-satunya perkara yang saya boleh lakukan dengan cepat adalah dengan bagi dorang duit untuk tulung, sebab itu jalan yang paling cepat. Ndakan saya mau tunggu lagi dari Parlimen kan? Hmm.” (P6)</p>
P3	<p>Ini berbalik kepada persekutuan. Semua persekutuan boleh tolak mereka apa? Di Tawau, saya fight-fight fight boleh masuk ke-120. Tapi, how about the thousand or the 10,000 outside? Tidak (P3)</p>
P6	<p>“...Ini off the record la arh... ada juga penduduk kampung, kamu tahulah macam mana orang kampung, kan? Orang kampung ni memang susah, tapi ada yang cukup berani dan bagi kepercayaan sama orang untuk mintak tulung orang untuk kasi kluarkan duit durng dari tu ATM” (P6)</p>
P3	<p>...tetapi sekarang nih itu sudah satu tahun lebih people expect result bukan lagi cakap itu cakap ini retorik, pengumuman sana, pengumuman sini sampai di... tu lah, kerajaan kita ini digelar</p>

	kerajaan pengumuman. Tiada result, they will change this government (P3)
P13	So, yang paling affected siapa? Rakyat lah di kawasan yang saya pikir tidak adil lah. Kita ini wakil rakyat. Kita dipilih menang. Ya bukan kita suka-suka melantik diri ini. (P13)
P4	Tapi siapa mau tolong saya di kawasan saya, ini kawasan dia punya lah akan datang. Saya tetap masih boleh menang disana (P3)
P2	Program kemiskinan ni kadang-kadang digunakan sebagai alat untuk mengukuhkan pakatan politik, bukannya sebagai mekanisme sebenar untuk membasmi kemiskinan.” (P2)
P4	Tapi saya cakap dengan dia, kalau kau mau lantik kau punya kontraktor, kau lantiklah. Bukan kita mau ini projek ini, bukan semua kaya daripada ini projek (P4)
P4	I'm telling you, Mr. Minister, ini pejabat daerah diambil, semua ini list-list daripada DO-DO Apa ada orang buat? They will give their priorities based on the... most profitable project sebab ini semua perlantikan semua kontrak tersebut melalui pejabat daerah jadi apa yang kita ada? (P3)
P13	Projek-projek ini disalurkan kepada kontraktor-kontraktor yang dah established (P13)
P13	Akhirnya, jalan yang sudah pun berada dalam keadaan baik menerima RM500,000 untuk dinaik taraf lagi, manakala jalan-jalan yang sukar diakses dibiarkan tanpa perhatian. Inilah sebenarnya yang saya rasa berlaku di kawasan saya—saya tidak tahu tentang kawasan lain (P4)
P14	Di Sabah, isu utama ialah infrastruktur, dan kebanyakan peruntukan yang diberikan adalah untuk infrastruktur. Namun begitu, keadaan infrastruktur semakin merosot kerana apabila berurusan dengan ahli politik, mereka beranggapan bahawa selagi ada kerosakan, maka akan wujud projek dan peluang untuk mendapatkan keuntungan kewangan (P14)

P14	“... Saya beritahu kamu, ahli politik tidak buat kerja sebenar, tetapi kadang-kadang mereka awarded kontrak-kontrak ini kepada ahli keluarga mereka. Jadi akhirnya, keluarga merekalah yang mendapat manfaat. Perkara yang sama berlaku dengan DO (Pegawai Daerah) juga.” (P15)
P6	‘... Kadang-kadang, saya bukan mau cakap ini salah kerajaan (seperti yang dicadangkan oleh DO), tetapi kontraktor-kontraktor ini siapa pun mereka (seperti yang disebut oleh DO dan ahli politik) yang menguruskan projek-projek ini. Saya rasa kita perlu ada semangat patriotisme. Apa-apa sahaja dana yang kita terima, gunakanlah dengan sebaiknya.’ (P6)
P3	‘Peruntukan untuk program sama projek kemiskinan ini disalahguna oleh individu yang mempunyai kaitan politik atas nama projek pembangunan. (P3)
P7	Berhubung dengan kelewatan projek, JPN mendapati memang ada kelewatan dari segi pembangunan sekolah-sekolah daif. Ada sekolah yang dari tahun 2010 yang masih belum siap. Perkara ini telah ditangani melalui mesyuarat bersama Tindakan Negeri dan juga JKR untuk mencari cara untuk mempercepatkan projek-projek tersebut. JPN berharap pelaksanaan projek-projek infrastruktur dapat dipercepatkan
P4	Peruntukan dipohon tempat lain, tapi tiba-tiba dibuat pula di tempat lain? Macam mana itu?..
P7	Berkenaan dengan peruntukan, dari segi permohonan tidak seimbang, perlu digariskan (highlight) berkenaan peruntukan-peruntukan yang diterima JPN. Contohnya per capita grant (PCG) untuk anak-anak di sekolah – setiap anak di sekolah ada duit, misalnya di sekolah menengah untuk Bahasa Melayu PCG untuk seorang murid adalah RM100. Jika sekolah tersebut ada seribu murid, maka jumlah PCG adalah RMRM100 ribu yang sekolah akan gunakan untuk program-program seperti mencetak buku dan sebagainya. JPN telah maklumkan kepada Kementerian

	<p>Pendidikan Malaysia (KPM) supaya agihan peruntukan dilihat semula mengikut wilayah. Contohnya di Sabah kita ada pelabelan sekolah mengikut kesukaran iaitu P1, P2 dan P3, tetapi agihan peruntukan PCG masih sama – katakan agihan sekolah menengah di KK RM100, di Telupit pun RM100, di pulau pun RM100 sedangkan kos untuk tempat-tempat tersebut berbeza. Pengagihan peruntukan perlu local-based. 1 kilometer di Sabah dan 1 kilometer di Semenanjung tidak sama – 1 kilometer di Semenanjung mungkin ambil masa 5 minit, 1 kilometer di Sabah mungkin setengah jam atau 1 jam.</p>
P15	<p>Baru-baru ini di sidang DUN Sabah telah diutarakan keadaan kemiskinan terkini Sabah. Negeri Sabah mempunyai Sekretariat Sabah Maju Jaya (SMJ) yang telah menganjurkan kutipan data untuk isu kemiskinan di Sabah. Apa yang dirisaukan adalah banyak pihak membuat kajian dengan agenda mereka yang tersendiri tetapi apa yang dihasilkan adalah laporan tanpa tindakan</p>
P17	<p>Berhubung cadangan bahawa sistem e-Kasih perlu disemak semula kerana ia tidak merangkumi semua rakyat di Malaysia (birokrasi), mungkin ada ahli mesyuarat dalam perbincangan pada hari ini masih belum faham apa itu sistem e-Kasih. E-Kasih adalah bank data rasmi yang digunakan oleh kerajaan untuk merancang dan membuat dasar berkenaan perancangan pembangunan. Data e-Kasih ada flow-nya atau peraturan untuk pendaftaran. Data e-Kasih menggunakan pendapatan garis kemiskinan (PGK) yang terkini untuk menentukan status miskin yang didaftarkan dalam sistem – miskin tegar, miskin dan terkeluar</p>
P16	<p>Walaupun APPGM-SDG telah mengakui dan menyatakan bahawa isu kemiskinan di Sabah dan Sarawak adalah berbeza berbanding di Semenanjung, adakah definisi kemiskinan yang digunakan masih merupakan definisi one size fits all? Kemiskinan adalah subjektif yang dapat dilihat bila program-program dianjurkan di peringkat masyarakat. Perkara ini perlu diberi</p>

	perhatian kerana gerak kerja APPGM-SDG adalah berprofil tinggi (high profile) dan melibatkan ahli-ahli parlimen.
P8	..Samalah macam itu buat jalan, kamu pigi buat dekat kawasan hutan monyet seja yang ada'..
P12	Status miskin dibahagikan kepada strata iaitu bandar dan luar bandar dan setiap nilai per kapita adalah berbeza. Untuk miskin tegar, untuk bandar nilainya adalah RM221 per kapita dan luar bandar RM288. Untuk miskin tegar, konsepnya adalah kita menggunakan PGK merujuk kepada pemakanan – keupayaan isi rumah untuk memenuhi keperluan makanan yang lengkap dengan nutrisi. Di Sabah, kebanyakan penduduk di kampung lebih kepada bergantung kepada pertanian sara diri. Penentuan untuk nilai PGK makanan adalah dengan mengambil 13 sumber pendapatan. Selain daripada pendapatan tunai (cash), kita juga menilai semula pengeluaran pertanian yang dikeluarkan sendiri oleh orang kampung – contohnya kalau orang kampung itu telah bekerja sebagai penoreh getah. Selain daripada pendapatan daripada getah yang diperolehi, kita juga mengambil kira tanaman sara diri contohnya sayur-sayuran atau tanaman hiliran yang dikeluarkan oleh isi rumah tersebut. Dari situ mereka akan ditentukan sama ada miskin tegar atau miskin.
P4	Bayangkan tahun lalu, daripada kementerian ekonomi turun 5 juta lebih di Banggi. Pigi buat benda yang saya sendiri pun tidak tahu. Semua orang cakap, ini MP budu, dia tidak tahu. Pigi bikin... Itu kios jual makanan di tengah hutan.
P6	Program sebegini sering kali gagal mencerminkan keperluan sebenar rakyat disebabkan oleh pengaruh-pengaruh sebegini (amalan rent-seeking)' (P6)
	'Inisiatif keusahawanan seperti PROTUNe direka untuk kelihatan inklusif tetapi sebenarnya, hakikatnya memberi manfaat kepada

	mereka yang mempunyai hubungan dengan tokoh politik berpengaruh." (P10)
P4	Semua orang pergi online. Apply. Ini projek-projek kecil ini. Apa yang berlaku, mana kawasan yang ada internet, mana kawasan yang ada good creativity, mereka boleh apply. Ada satu kampung boleh dapat sampai 5-6 projek. Kampung yang remote kampung. tidak ada konektiviti, tidak pandai apply melalui online. Zero! Ini masalahnya.
P4	Ini masalahnya. Bila kita semua wakil rakyat ini bagi list development project, very small, 200,000, the most is 500,000. This is enable for this people to have accessible road and everything Sampai di sana saya jumpa dengan YB Rafizi. Dia kata, oh ini dia bilang, you have to do through online. Online saya kata dengan dia, ini kalau kita buat online, kita tidak boleh tentukan mana satu projek yang jadi priority. Sebab everything based on your system. Saya kata, betul tidak?
	Berdasarkan pengalaman ICU JPM Sabah mengumpul data e-Kasih, untuk negeri Sabah kita memang susah untuk jumpa orang yang tidak boleh makan dalam sehari. Masalah tempat tinggal juga diambil kira, tetapi ia termasuk di bawah kategori miskin. Untuk konsep miskin, selain daripada dia masih boleh makan, tetapi dia tidak dapat memenuhi keperluan asas seperti pendidikan dan tempat tinggal.
P4	Saya bagitahu mereka, saya kata Yang Berhormat, ini masaah sistem. Macam mana kita mau apply online kalau kita punya sendiri pun ada masalah coverage' (P4)
P4	Bayangkan tahun lalu, daripada kementerian ekonomi turun 5 juta lebih di Banggi. Pigi buat benda yang saya sendiri pun tidak tahu. Semua orang cakap, ini MP budu, dia tidak tahu. Pigi bikin... Itu kios jual makanan di tengah hutan.

P4	<p>“Sudah hampir setahun saya menyertai mesyuarat ini, dan saya perasan tiada satu pun cadangan kita yang telah dilaksanakan setakat ini. Saya juga telah dihubungi oleh beberapa menteri, termasuk Perdana Menteri sendiri. Dia minta saya sediakan satu senarai, jadi saya berusaha keras menyediakan satu—projek bernilai sekitar 7 hingga 8 juta. Kemudian, dokumen itu hilang, dan mereka minta saya buat semula. Saya buat sekali lagi, dan kemudian YB Rafizi call, kononnya nak tolong... hmm.” (P4)</p>
P15	<p>ICU akan menerima aduan daripada pemohon sendiri. Sebelum ini ICU mengamalkan pendaftaran secara terbuka, tetapi setelah proses ditambah baik dari semasa ke semasa, kita menggalakkan penglibatan daripada JKKK, ketua kampung, UPPM dan pihak berkepentingan di kawasan tertentu. Pendaftaran yang sampai ke pejabat ICU adalah pendaftaran yang sepatutnya telah di-filter di pejabat daerah – disahkan melalui mesyuarat focus group daerah. Sebelum itu pendaftaran juga telah di-filter di peringkat JKKK dan UPPM.</p>
P4	<p>“Mereka kata kita tak boleh kawal ini — semuanya berkaitan sistem. Jadi, Yang Berhormat, memang tepat masanya untuk kamu datang sini dan dengar semua ini. Bila kita bercakap tentang cara membangunkan kampung-kampung ini, kami, wakil rakyat, tahu setiap kampung dalam kawasan kami. Dalam kes saya, ada lebih 400 kampung. Saya bukan minta semua projek ini. Terus lantik kontraktor kau la, hantar menteri turun, dan biar mereka buat kerja. Tapi tolong ikut apa yang kami cadangkan. Saya bukan di sini untuk mencari mencari makan sama ni kontrak-kontrak.” (P4)</p>
P11	<p>ICU akan menerima aduan daripada pemohon sendiri. Sebelum ini ICU mengamalkan pendaftaran secara terbuka, tetapi setelah proses ditambah baik dari semasa ke semasa, kita menggalakkan penglibatan daripada JKKK, ketua kampung, UPPM dan pihak berkepentingan di kawasan tertentu. Pendaftaran yang sampai ke</p>

	pejabat ICU adalah pendaftaran yang sepatutnya telah di-filter di pejabat daerah – disahkan melalui mesyuarat focus group daerah. Sebelum itu pendaftaran juga telah di-filter di peringkat JKKK dan UPPM.
P4	kalau kau mau lantik kau punya kontraktor, kau lantiklah. Bukan kita mau ini projek ini,
P4	Ikut apa yang kami cadangkan
P4	...After 60 years...That is unacceptable actually. You would say it's unacceptable... Because it's been passing down through the government to government to government'. (P4)
P4	Itu meeting, kami buat tiap bulan... tapi, satu pun cadangan yang kami kasi tidak pernah dilaksanakan. (P4)
P3	"Saya sudah banyak kali cakap ini isu Sabah dan Sarawak di Parlimen. Keadaan kami sama itu juga belanjawan dimuktamadkan pada bulan Februari atau Mac, dan pelaksanaan bermula pada April. Jadi, secara idealnya, prosedur tender sepatutnya bermula dalam bulan Jun. Tetapi di Sabah dan Sarawak, dengan cabaran geografi yang ada, semuanya perlu masa. Contohnya, mereka mungkin hadir untuk satu mesyuarat, kemudian perlu tunggu dua hingga tiga bulan lagi untuk mesyuarat seterusnya. Bila semuanya selesai, mungkin sudah masuk bulan Oktober, barulah mesyuarat dimuktamadkan dan tender ditutup. Akhirnya, semua peruntukan yang dikasi itu dikembalikan semula kepada mereka (federal)." (P3)
P3	sama lah ada di hutan yang orang cakap mungkin pun tidak ada dibuat jalan highway di jalan banyak tidak ada kenapa kawasan itu kawasan UMNO, PKR kawasan yang kita GRS tidak diberi peduli eh sorry,
	Budget suda kena announced tapi inda jalan'

P8	<p>So as a MP, kami terpaksa memohon dan kita punya peruntukan tidak banyak terhad. Dan kita lah ya, I think MP lah yang paling faham, paling maklum berkaitan masalah di kawasan kami. So kalau kami pun tidak dapat akses, kepada peruntukan yang besar, yang ada tetap paksa mohon kepada kementerian kementerian itu, kementerian ini yang saya ingat MP-MP Sabah ada sedikit kekurangan lah yang memandangkan kita berbicara macam saya pun jarang-jarang pilih paling-paling di kawasan itu ya, jadi apapun pembangunan kita seringkali terkebelakang lah Ini pun satu kekurangan kepada MP-MP, terutama Sabah. Banyak peruntukan itu ada di kementerian. Kita kena mohon. Dan, mohonan itu pula dibatasi lagi pula oleh politik. Lain parti politik, lain lagi daripada Sabah. Benar gimana? Ada yang kurang, ada yang lebih. Ada yang tidak dapat langsung</p>
P3	<p>Macam tahun lalu, saya kasih satu example. Sabah. Persekutuan Jalan Persekutuan Tiang Lampu semua mati. Since 3 years ago. Dulu di bawah jaga majlis. Sabah Sarawak sama juga saya dengar</p>
P3	<p>Jadi saya jumpa Datuk Sri Alexander. Tahun lalu di MOF dia JANJI dalam kertas dia akan turunkan 30 juta untuk selesai masing masing, tapi sampai sekarang belum ada.</p>
P7	<p>"Apabila kita bercakap tentang kemiskinan, sudah tentu berkait rapat dengan jalan raya serta cabaran yang dihadapi oleh peniaga kecil dan komuniti dalam memasarkan produk mereka. Merujuk kepada data bagi negeri Sabah: jalan berturap meliputi 5,378.669 km, jalan batu kerikil meliputi 3,492.468 km, dan jalan tanah sejauh 158.701 km. Apabila berlaku masalah jalan raya di kawasan luar bandar, ia menyukarkan para petani atau usahawan di sana untuk memasarkan barangan mereka ke luar kawasan. Oleh itu, jalan raya di Sabah perlu diperbaiki dan diperuntukkan lebih banyak dana pembangunan supaya kami dapat menikmati kemudahan yang sama seperti di Semenanjung Malaysia. Berkenaan isu utiliti (air), terdapat dua kebimbangan utama: 1) Air</p>

	terawat yang diuruskan oleh Jabatan Air, dan 2) Air graviti – rakyat Sabah masih cenderung menggunakan sumber ini, terutamanya di kawasan luar bandar. Kemudahan memang tersedia; namun, penerimaan dalam kalangan rakyat adalah berbeza-beza." (P7)
P13	this tender RM150,000 project can become RM500,000. So I managed to get it done by gotong-royong. So channel the money, RM50,000, RM50,000, RM50,000, 2 rumah hebat untuk this particular project. Tiba-tiba, this project in lulus tahun lepas. Tiba-tiba tahun ni the ADUN luluskan 500k lebih daripada 500k lah, setiap kampung untuk projek yang sama untuk kampung, dilema sudah, YB macam mana, kami nak teruskan atau tidak? saya teruskan, apa lagi? Projek saya tak dapat, Projek ADUN itu kamu tak dapat jadi teruskan, jadi kamu tengok, you see, in terms of penyaluran projek tu kenapa MP tak diperlukan ruang untuk channel terus projek YB?
P13	successfully completed the project using the initial budget and even redirected the leftover funds to support more households. However, after the project was approved, a state assemblyman (ADUN) unexpectedly allocated a significantly larger amount to the same project, highlighting further inconsistencies.
P5	Macam sekarang kita mau masuk sekolah kan, sebulan sebelum kita mau memohon. Ini adalah penyusunan kita bah. Kita yang cari peruntukan. Jadi, jangan cakap jalan. Elektrik, air. Sekolah pun ada masalah. Kerana autonomi.
P6	Ini semua politik, buang masa seja bha kalau kita tidak ubah
P16	Untuk menyelesaikan masalah infrastruktur untuk ekonomi kita adalah peruntukan pembangunan. Keperluan untuk membangunkan negeri Sabah dengan menyelesaikan masalah seperti banjir dan sebagainya memerlukan peruntukan berbilion-bilion, apatah lagi untuk meningkatkan ekonomi. Namun, setiap

	tahun bajet hanya naik sedikit sedangkan keperluan Sabah memang banyak. Ada 2 masalah yang kita boleh selesaikan:
P16	1. Peruntukan pembangunan daripada persekutuan-ahli-ahli parlimen kita perlu membantu untuk menuntu pembangunan yang adil (fight for a fair development allocation) yang sepatutnya 50% disemenanjung dan 25%-25% untuk Sabah dan Sarawak. Sekarang 70%-80% adalah untuk semenanjung
P16	Duit hasil 40% masih tidak dipulangkan kepada Sabah-angkanya adalah sehingga RM 20 billion
	itu sepatutnya 40% mesti kasi balik sama Sabah
P4	Kalau boleh, kita juga ada bincang di parlimen supaya 40% itu. Please lah. 40% itu... bagi dengan sabah cepat mungkin supaya kerajaan sabah sendiri boleh implement mana-mana yang emergency untuk rakyat kita.
P4	semua pembangunan yang ada di kawasan harus dibincang dengan setiap ahli-ahli parliment untuk memastikan supaya sasaran kita melibatkan keperluan itu untuk rakyat di kawasan.
P4	Ini semua tentang sistem. Jadi... Yang terhormat, it's timely for you to come here and hear all these things. Kalau kita bercerita tentang macam mana mahu develop di kampung, kami ini, wakil rakyat, you sebut mana satu kampung yang saya tidak tahu di kawasan saya.
P13	Semua peruntukan ini disalurkan melalui UPEN, tetapi kami sendiri tidak tahu tentang projek-projek ini. Kami tidak tahu sama ada dana tersebut telah disalurkan atau belum. Kami langsung tidak terlibat atau diberikan notification duit suda masuk atau tidak sama sekali." (P13)
P4	Satu kampung boleh dapat 3, 4, 5 projek. Kenapa? Dia ada kampung,... Infra itu betul- betul perlu, langsung tidak dapat

P3	Asal UMNO PKR approve lah Untuk makluman kau tau Kita MP Last year 3 million Perentukan 2 million project 1.5 million isigil Ketua bagi UMNO, 7-8M. PKR juga, kita kosong ICU. PKR ketua cawangan, berapa?
P3	Kosong, GRS, GPS semua kosong Itu Kumpulan GPS semua Kosong, KDM semua kosong
P3	Ketua Cawangan PKR ada Ketua Bahagian UMNO ada Kita MP kosong saja kita macam mana kosong Dia sama,
P8	Program dilaksanakan dekat peringkat negeri tapi banyak campur tangan daripada kerajaan pusat, semuanya mau tunggu approval daripada persekutuan
P7	Berhubung dengan kelewatan projek, JPN mendapati memang ada kelewatan dari segi pembangunan sekolah-sekolah daif. Ada sekolah yang dari tahun 2010 yang masih belum siap. Perkara ini telah ditangani melalui mesyuarat bersama Tindakan Negeri dan juga JKR untuk mencari cara untuk mempercepatkan projek-projek tersebut. JPN berharap pelaksanaan projek-projek infrastruktur dapat dipercepatkan.
P3	Pengumuman sana, pengumuman sini sampai di... tulu lah, kerajaan kita ini digelar kerajaan pengumuman Ingat saya, kita terasa salah ya kita part of government we can deliver but ?
P3, P4, P7 & P8	Di Malaysia, sebagai contoh, Perlembagaan Persekutuan memusatkan kuasa terhadap bidang-bidang penting seperti pertahanan, kewangan dan pendidikan, serta memberikan fleksibiliti yang terhad kepada negeri-negeri untuk menggubal dasar secara bebas.
P8	Ketidakseimbangan ini sering meletakkan negeri-negeri dalam kedudukan yang terdedah, terutamanya apabila mereka bergantung kepada peruntukan persekutuan untuk melaksanakan projek pembangunan, infrastruktur, atau perkhidmatan asas seperti yang disokong oleh P8.

P12	"Sedih, kan? Sabah, negeri seja kaya, tapi semua hasil negeri sendiri pun mau kasi dikongsi... hmm... terlalu ramai yang mau masuk campur, terutamanya inilah yang ini PDA 1974 (P12)
P3	macam sekarang kita mau masuk sekolah kan, sebulan sebelum kita mau memohon. Ini adalah penyusunan kita bah. Kita yang cari peruntukan. Jadi, jangan cakap jalan. Elektrik, air. Sekolah pun ada masalah. Kerana autonomi.
ALL INFORMANT	Peruntukan sumber antara kerajaan persekutuan dan negeri, terutamanya negeri-negeri bukan jelapang seperti Sabah, menyerlahkan bagaimana kepentingan rangkaian dan dinamik kuasa boleh mempengaruhi hasil. Apabila sumber diagihkan berdasarkan kepentingan rangkaian seperti kesetiaan politik, kesetiaan wilayah, atau perkongsian strategik, ia boleh membawa kepada pengagihan yang tidak seimbang dan mengukuhkan hierarki kuasa sedia ada. (Semua informan)
P3, P4 & P18	To maintain order and fairness, bureaucracies use standardized processes, but these can sometimes lead to delays and inefficiencies, especially when projects require coordination between multiple agencies. For instance, a single project may need approvals from several departments, each with its own criteria, creating potential bottlenecks and slowing down overall implementation (P3, P4, P18).
P11	Memang betul pendidikan merupakan enabler yang utama, tetapi JPN bergantung kepada agensi-agensi lain juga. Contohnya infrastruktur – kalau jalan tidak bagus, maka kos pengangkutan akan menjadi mahal dan bila kos pengangkutan mahal ia akan menjadi halangan untuk pelajar miskin untuk ke sekolah.
P10	Sabah menghadapi cabaran yang unik disebabkan oleh keluasan geografinya yang besar, kepadatan penduduk yang rendah, serta kepelbagaian demografinya, yang membezakan negeri ini daripada wilayah lain di Malaysia (P10).

P1	isu pembangunan yang tidak seimbang, seperti yang ditekankan oleh pemberi maklumat, menggambarkan ketidakseimbangan yang wujud akibat dinamika kuasa antara pihak berkuasa pusat dan kawasan luar bandar. Cabaran struktur di Sabah, seperti kekurangan infrastruktur asas, menunjukkan bagaimana hubungan kuasa boleh menghalang pembangunan yang saksama. Walaupun inisiatif seperti peningkatan jaringan jalan raya di kawasan seperti Tongod menunjukkan hasil yang positif, ia juga menonjolkan kebergantungan tadbir urus tempatan terhadap keputusan dan agihan sumber yang dibuat secara berpusat.
P10	Penilaian impak P10 terhadap projek pembangunan menunjukkan betapa pentingnya menangani isu-isu struktur terlebih dahulu bagi membuka peluang ekonomi, seperti membolehkan penduduk Tongod memulakan perniagaan dan mengakses pusat bandar dengan lebih cekap (P1 dan P10).
P10, P9 & P1	Agensi seperti P10, SEDCO dan P9 beroperasi dalam batasan ini, sekali gus menyerlahkan kesukaran dalam mengimbangi proses membuat keputusan secara berpusat dengan keperluan pelbagai komuniti tempatan di Sabah. Ketidakseimbangan ini menekankan keperluan untuk menangani dinamika kuasa agar inisiatif pembangunan dapat memenuhi keperluan khusus wilayah ini dengan lebih berkesan.
P9	Contoh P9 yang memohon RM70 juta bagi tujuan keselamatan makanan tetapi hanya menerima RM2.2 juta mencerminkan keterbatasan pengaruh aktor tempatan dalam proses membuat keputusan di peringkat persekutuan. Pemusatan kuasa ini menyebabkan sektor-sektor penting seperti pertanian dan pembangunan luar bandar kekal kurang dibiayai dan gagal mencapai kemajuan yang bermakna.
P10 & P1	Peranan P10 dan P1 dalam menangani isu-isu struktur seperti pembangunan infrastruktur terhad oleh cabaran logistik dan kos yang unik di Sabah. Projek-projek seperti pembinaan menara

	telekomunikasi untuk komuniti kecil di kawasan pedalaman atau kedai di kawasan yang kurang penduduk tetap diteruskan walaupun tidak efisien dari segi kos kerana tanggungjawab sosial yang perlu dipenuhi.
P9	P9 menekankan perbezaan ketara dalam tahap sara diri (SSL) bagi beras antara Sabah dan Semenanjung, yang diburukkan lagi oleh keputusan dasar seperti keutamaan pengagihan baja kepada kawasan jelapang. Situasi ini menunjukkan bagaimana dasar persekutuan yang dibentuk berdasarkan keutamaan pihak berkuasa pusat sering gagal menangani keperluan unik Sabah, sekali gus meneruskan ketidaksamarataan dalam produktiviti pertanian dan keselamatan makanan (P9).
ALL INFORMANT	Pembiayaan persekutuan bagi projek-projek di Sabah sering berdepan dengan halangan prosedur, termasuk kelewatan yang ketara dalam penyaluran dana atau penarikan semula peruntukan disebabkan tarikh akhir yang tidak dipenuhi (Semua pemberi maklumat).
P9	Menurut pemberi maklumat P9, dana yang diluluskan pada bulan Mac mungkin hanya boleh diakses pada penghujung tahun, menyebabkan projek terbengkalai atau dana ditarik balik sepenuhnya. Cabaran birokrasi seperti ini terus melemahkan keupayaan struktur tadbir urus tempatan untuk melaksanakan penyelesaian yang berkesan dan tepat pada masanya, sekali gus menjejaskan hasil pembangunan.
P11	Sekretariat Sabah Maju Jaya (SMJ) telah mengambil langkah untuk mengumpul data berkaitan kemiskinan, dengan menekankan kepentingan penggubalan dasar berasaskan bukti. Namun begitu, kebimbangan timbul apabila terdapat terlalu banyak kajian dijalankan dengan agenda yang berbeza-beza, yang akhirnya menghasilkan laporan tanpa tindakan susulan atau impak yang ketara. Situasi ini menimbulkan persoalan mengenai

	keselarasan kuasa, keutamaan, dan akauntabiliti dalam tadbir urus tempatan (P11).
P6	“Sabah ni sebuah negeri yang kaya dengan sumber di Malaysia, terutamanya minyak, gas dan kayu balak, tetapi masih belum berjaya lagi menterjemahkan kekayaan tersebut kepada kemakmuran ekonomi yang berterusan atau pembangunan yang menyeluruh.” (P6)
P9	“...Walaupun memiliki kekayaan sumber, hasil pertanian seperti pengeluaran beras tetap berada pada tahap yang sangat rendah, dengan Sabah masih bergantung kuat kepada import.” (P9)
P6	“Ketidakselarasan antara peruntukan sumber oleh kerajaan persekutuan dan keperluan negeri, dengan dana sering kali lewat disalurkan atau disalahgunakan.” (P6)
P2	“Hubungan antara kerajaan persekutuan dan negeri mewujudkan dinamik kebergantungan, di mana Sabah perlu berunding untuk mendapatkan sumber yang sepatutnya diperuntukkan secara semula jadi bagi pembangunan negerinya.” (P2)
P1	“Projek seperti menara telekomunikasi dan pembinaan jalan raya sering kali diberi keutamaan berdasarkan pertimbangan politik berbanding keperluan ekonomi yang sebenar, sekali gus memburukkan jurang perbezaan antara kawasan luar bandar dan bandar.” (P1)
P14	“Perancangan di peringkat negeri sering diketepikan oleh dasar persekutuan, menyebabkan ruang yang terhad untuk penyelesaian setempat dalam menangani kemiskinan dan pengurusan sumber.” (P14)
P3	kita masih berjuang dengan politik ideologi juga bukan soal masalah rakyat (P3)
P3	Siapa yang akan memutuskan mana yang projek priority? Macam kamu mana paham masalah kita (P3)

P3	<p>Dato (kurang jelas) Sudah banyak kali saya panggil di parlimen kan masalah Sabah Sarawak sama sama macam kita budget kita diputuskan bulan 2, 3 dan bulan 4 mulai dilaksanakan Jadi itu tender procedure should be sometimes initiated by June macam Sabah Sarawak, the master geographer Macam mereka datang satu meeting mungkin dua tiga bulan meeting untuk balik Jadi bulan 10 mungkin baru siap meeting more tender itu akan close, all the budget announced will be taking back to them, tapi sebenarnya semua saya bangkit dalam kamar khas Kamar khas, MOF menjawabkan, mana ada duit? to them, tapi sebenarnya semua saya bangkit dalam kamar khas Kamar khas, MOF menjawabkan, mana ada duit? kita Sabah Sarawak mintak tubuhkan tabung amanah supaya projek kamu yang annouced bajet will be allocated to Sabah Sarawak state tabung amanah Amana, tabung amanah, trust fund Jadi kalau kita tidak sempat, next year kita buat ke mana?</p>
P15	<p>The most important Datuk is to make use of this MP because we are the people who are the closes point to the government to the ground that as simple as that ya..that is our request</p>
P15	<p>Kalau kau tengok bah Asal UMNO PKR approve lah Untuk makluman kau tau Kita MP Last year 3 million Perentukan 2 million project 1.5 million isigil Ketua bagi UMNO, 7-8M. PKR juga, kita kosong ICU. PKR ketua cawangan, berapa?</p>
P4	<p>Saya tahun lalu, ICU kosong. Kosong kita ICU. GRS, GPS semua kosong. Jadi ini politik bah, for me. Ini itu terus terangla. Kalau kita buang masa bah kita buat begini. Kalau mereka tidak ubah sana. Saya berpikir tentang politik dan semua politik</p>
P3	<p>Sebenarnya, waktunya pembaikan itu sangat bagus. Sebenarnya, kita semua membaiki itu. Itu sangat bagus. Masalah utama adalah duit. Jadi, dari mana dana? (Wakil Ranau)</p>

P12	Ranau dapat tak? (Prof Dr Denison) Kampung-kampung Ranau dapat? Kosong, GRS, GPS semua kosong Itu Kumpulan GPS semua Kosong, KDM semua kosong (MP Tawau)
P4	Ketua Cawangan PKR ada Ketua Bahagian UMNO ada Kita MP kosong saja kita macam mana kosong Dia sama,
P3	bagaimana? Saya beritahu awak, itu salah Sejujurnya, kita tidak berpikir Bagi PKR Kita berpikir, kita berpikir untuk orang lalu
P14	Saya tahun lalu, ICU kosong. Kosong kita ICU. GRS, GPS semua kosong. Jadi ini politik bah, for me. Ini itu terus terangla. Kalau kita buang masa bah kita buat begini. Kalau mereka tidak ubah sana. Saya berpikir tentang politik dan semua politik
P3	This is not kidding but this is real Jadi sekarang ini... Apabila kita cerita tentang pembangunan di kawasan masing-masing ini... Prograsi pertama adalah... Untuk membangun jalan yang terkawal... Tapi kalau suara kita ini sebagai wakil rakyat tidak didengar oleh pengimpin-penyimpin di atas, malah dibuka, oh online, semua macam orang gila, orang sabit, pejabat daerah.
P4	Saya boleh masuk dalam Mesyuarat Tindakan Daerah sejak Julai last year. Sebelum itu saya tidak boleh masuk, sebab saya bebas dalam cakap saya ini di federal saya dalam kerajaan tapi di peringkat negeri sebagai pembangkang dan ketua menteri buat satu surat pekeliling bahawa saya ini memang baki rakyat kerajaan lah di peringkat negeri juga. So saya boleh masuk. Bila saya masuk, saya nampak everything in order in terms of organizing the meeting. Kemudian semua suggestion ini dari mesyuarat ini diberikan kepada kawasan yang berkaitan dengan authority
P3	Sama juga dengan YB YB dan mereka yang lain berkata kita harus menyerang hingga 40%. Jadi, itu saya berkata, kalau tiada itu duit, kita jangan beri jalan sampai yang kita rancang. Jadi, itu saja. Dan mereka berkata, we must be fair in implementation

4.4 Patronage-based Governance Dynamics

Patronage based governance dynamics refer to the processes and interactions through which political leaders allocate resources, positions, or opportunities in exchange for loyalty and political support. In public administration, these dynamics illustrate how decision making, resource distribution, and bureaucratic appointments may be shaped by personal relationships or political affiliations rather than strictly meritocratic or needs based criteria. At the state level, such patterns reveal strategies of political survival, the structuring of client networks, and the interweaving of formal institutions with informal patronage relationships. Understanding these dynamics is essential to explaining how patronage not only consolidates political power but also affects the implementation of poverty eradication programs.

In the Sabah State Government, the implementation of poverty eradication initiatives often unfolds within a complex network of political patronage. One informant observed:

“Sometimes, projects get approved not because they are urgent or needed, but because the person proposing them is close to someone in the leadership.” (P4)

This statement highlights how informal institutions, such as personal networks and loyalty based relationships, influence the allocation of resources. Instead of being guided solely by objective indicators of poverty or community needs, development projects may be prioritised based on political proximity. As a result, vulnerable communities without political linkage risk being marginalised.

Thematic analysis reveals recurring patterns showing that patronage shapes not only the allocation of resources but also program priorities and administrative structures. The findings suggest a shift from need based distribution toward selective benefits mediated by political connections. The mechanism of patronage becomes visible when access to state resources depends on relational proximity to decision makers. This observation is reinforced by other informants. For example, P12 noted:

“Promotions often depend on who you know, not just on your performance. If you are aligned with the right political group, your chances increase.” (P12)

Such accounts indicate that bureaucratic advancement may be influenced by political alignment. This has implications for poverty eradication programs, as administrative actors responsible for implementation may be selected or promoted based on loyalty rather than technical competence. Over time, this can weaken institutional capacity and compromise program effectiveness.

Similarly, P13 remarked:

“Decisions on funding or staffing sometimes come from above, and we are expected to follow, even if it does not match the actual needs of the community.” (P13)

This reflects a top down dynamic where political directives override local assessments. When funding decisions are politically driven rather than community based, poverty eradication efforts may prioritise visible or politically strategic areas over structurally disadvantaged communities.

At the point where poverty eradication programs are transferred from the federal to the state level, the interplay between political actors and beneficiaries becomes more pronounced. Patron client relationships may emerge, in which patrons provide access to development benefits in exchange for political support. This reciprocal relationship shapes how resources are allocated and mobilised. While such networks may facilitate rapid distribution in some cases, they may also entrench dependency, reinforce political loyalty structures, and limit equitable access

Overall, the findings demonstrate that patronage based governance dynamics significantly influence the operationalisation of poverty eradication programs in Sabah. Rather than functioning purely as technical policy instruments, these programs are embedded within broader political strategies, where resource allocation, staffing decisions, and program priorities are intertwined with informal networks of loyalty and power.

4.5 Political Patronage and Its Influence

This study identifies political patronage as a central dynamic shaping the operation of state poverty eradication programs. Based on the coding process, references to

political patronage appeared approximately 55 times and were directly quoted up to 65 times across interviews and focus group discussions. The frequency of this theme underscores its significance in explaining how poverty programs are structured and implemented.

The findings indicate that political patronage operates asymmetrically between the federal and state levels. The way patronage is adapted and practiced differs significantly, particularly in relation to the federal transfer of poverty programs and their subsequent implementation at the state level.

At the federal level, patronage, especially in the form of policies favouring the Malay population, has been associated with measurable reductions in national poverty. Federal programs linked to redistributive strategies have contributed to improvements in socio economic conditions, suggesting what may be described as inclusive patronage, where patronage mechanisms are aligned with broader developmental objectives. However, this pattern does not appear to be replicated at the Sabah state level.

The asymmetry suggests that state level patronage operates under different political, social, and historical conditions. In Sabah, structural and geographic realities significantly influence implementation outcomes. As one informant explained:

“We carry out many projects in rural areas, but the challenges we face when implementing these projects and development programs, especially in the rural areas of Sabah, are often due to low population density and logistical issues, which make it difficult for us to accelerate progress.” (P1)

This reflects the demographic and geographic differences between Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah. Sabah covers approximately 73,904 square kilometres and has a majority rural population, many of whom reside in remote and isolated areas with limited access to infrastructure, education, healthcare, and development opportunities.

This structural distinction was further elaborated by another informant:

“There are systemic issues here where, in Peninsular Malaysia, 30 percent of the population resides in rural areas while the rest are in urban areas. However, in Sabah, the situation is reversed, with 60 percent of the population living in rural areas. Therefore, poverty eradication strategies in Sabah cannot follow the same approach as

those in Peninsular Malaysia.” (P2)

These differences highlight that a uniform federal strategy may not adequately address Sabah’s rural poverty context. However, beyond structural constraints, ideological and political considerations also shape resource allocation. One informant reflected on federal level political dynamics:

“We at the federal level are still struggling with ideological politics, which are not about addressing the people's issues.” (P3)

This statement suggests that federal patronage networks may be influenced by partisan considerations. According to the informant, poverty eradication programs may be transferred or prioritised based on political alignment rather than objective need. As he further stated:

“If the leadership doesn't change, what we see now in Malaya is them fighting over their ideologies. To be frank, they're fighting with BN, not fighting for the people.” (P3)
This implies that constituencies aligned with the ruling federal coalition may receive preferential treatment, while others may be deprioritised. Such dynamics illustrate how patronage can shift from inclusive redistribution to partisan allocation.

Several informants, including P4, P5, and P6, agreed that practices in Peninsular Malaysia should not be directly replicated in Sabah. One informant explained:

“They do not pay attention to us. So, what I am saying is, you will feel it next time, whatever you submit to them. If they keep playing politics, let us play politics too. But you see, what Datuk Seri Haji Hajiji does, we focus on the applications, not the applicants. Do not look at whether it is GRS or KDM and reject them, then approve PKR or UMNO. Just approve based on the application.” (P3)

This statement reflects an attempt to shift from applicant based evaluation to application based evaluation. In other words, poverty projects should be assessed according to need and proposal quality rather than political affiliation.

However, other accounts suggest that political considerations still influence project selection. For example:

“There are projects, like flood mitigation projects or road congestion projects, but instead, they implement projects where there are no issues. These are done simply due to pressure from PKR and UMNO.” (P3)

Similarly, P6 shared:

“We always ask for more allocations for Sabah. However, when you have the funds, use them wisely. For instance, do not build a cell tower in the middle of the forest where no one is going to use it.” (P6)

This highlights concerns about misaligned development priorities. Infrastructure projects, such as telecommunications towers, may be constructed in areas without sufficient population or actual need, reflecting either symbolic development or politically motivated allocation.

The findings demonstrate that political patronage influences not only who receives funding but also where and how projects are implemented. The asymmetrical functioning of patronage between federal and state levels reveals how structural, ideological, and relational dynamics shape poverty eradication outcomes. While federal patronage may have contributed to national poverty reduction, its translation at the state level in Sabah appears more complex, often constrained by geography, demographic realities, and partisan considerations.

Ultimately, this section underscores that poverty eradication programs cannot be understood purely as administrative interventions. They are embedded within political structures where patronage, ideology, and regional context collectively determine their effectiveness and inclusivity.

4.5.1 Creation of Patron-Client Relationship

Particularly in the poorest state like Sabah, reflects the dynamics where political leaders (patrons) establish dependent relationships with the low-income class (clients)

through targeted distribution of resources, aid, or development opportunities. In relation to the poverty eradication programs, this relationship often arises when patrons, such as politicians provide material benefits, such as financial assistance, the clients who are struggling with poverty. As the informant said,

'People always talk about money politics, saying that YBs give money to villagers. But the truth is, when I go to the villages and the villagers complain about their hardships, what else can I do? The only thing I can do quickly is give them money to help because that's the fastest solution. Waiting for something from Parliament? Hmm.(P6)

This statement illustrates that political elites are compelled to provide financial assistance to underprivileged group due to the prolonged waiting time for aid from the federal government. The same situation faced by other informant where he demonstrated that he had a close relationship with the poorest members of his community,

.. 'This comes back to the federal government. The federal can reject anything, right? In Tawau, I fight and fight, and I managed to get up to 120 students into schools. (P3)

Indirectly, this situation encourages to the establishment of close relationship between patrons and clients. To the extent that, when people know of a runner closely associated with the YB they trust them to help them with various tasks, including purchasing goods and even withdrawing cash from ATM as told by the P6,

...This is off the record, yeah... there are even villagers, you know how it is with villagers, right? They're struggling, but they are bold enough and trust runners to withdraw cash from ATMs for them'. (P6)

In return, the clients may feel obligated to show loyalty, typically in the form of political support, votes, or continued allegiance to these leaders or their affiliated parties. As the informant states,

... ' But now, it's been over a year, and people expect results, not just talk and rhetoric.

If there are no results, next time they'll change this government'... (P3)

At the state level in Sabah, which faces distinct socio-economic challenges, this patron-client relationship can become a significant factor in poverty alleviation efforts. As the informant shares,

... ' So, who is the most affected? The people, of course, especially in areas that I think are being treated unfairly. We are their representatives. We were elected by the people. It's not like we appointed ourselves' (P13).

This statement supported by,

'Who is going to help me in my area? I focus on my area because I can still win there' (P4)

This phenomenon can perpetuate a cycle of dependency, where clients continuously rely on the patron's support to access essential resources and assistance. This dependency is often rooted in the belief that the patron will provide help, particularly during times of hardship, thus reinforcing the client's loyalty and ongoing reliance on the patron for their basic needs. In other words, rent seeking fosters clientelist relationships, where resources are distributed in exchange for political loyalty. As the informant highlighted,

'Certain anti-poverty programs are used as tools to strengthen political alliances, rather than as mechanisms for genuine poverty alleviation'. (P2)

For instance, employment opportunities within state-driven programs are often reserved for individuals within the patronage network, reinforcing dependency and loyalty. This dynamic aligns with the theoretical framework of neopatrimonialism, where patron-client relationships dominate governance, leading to an unequal distribution of state resources. Such practices weaken institutional accountability and perpetuate cycles of dependency.

4.5.2 Rent Seeking in Policy Implementation

The theme of rent seeking in policy implementation reveals how individuals and networks leverage state resources for personal or political gain, often at the expense of the intended beneficiaries of poverty eradication programs. This practice aligns closely with the characteristics of neopatrimonial governance, where informal power structures and patron client relationships frequently overshadow meritocratic procedures and institutional transparency.

The data highlight recurring patterns in which rent seeking distorts the original objectives of poverty eradication initiatives. When such programs are implemented, resources may be channelled toward politically connected individuals, contractors, or constituencies rather than to communities experiencing the most severe deprivation. One informant described this dynamic as follows:

“... ‘ But I told them, if you want to appoint your contractor, then go ahead and appoint them. It's not about us wanting these projects; not everyone is profiting from these projects’ (P4)”

This quotation reflects frustration with politically influenced contractor appointments, suggesting that project allocation is not always driven by community needs.

Similarly, another informant explained:

“‘They will prioritize the most profitable projects because all these appointments and contracts go through the district office. So, what do we have? (P3)”

This statement illustrates how decision making channels, particularly at the district level, may create opportunities for selective prioritisation of profitable projects. The implication is that project selection may be influenced more by financial incentives than by poverty indicators.

The pattern is further reinforced by another informant:

“‘These contracts are awarded to contractors who are already established and have

links with politicians' (P13)''

Such accounts demonstrate how rent seeking behavior redirects development funds toward politically affiliated actors. Instead of targeting underserved or remote areas, investments may concentrate in locations that offer economic or political returns.

One informant highlighted the consequences of this distortion:

“‘In the end, the already good roads get RM500,000 to be improved further, while the inaccessible roads are left unattended. This is exactly what I feel happens in my area—I don't know about other areas’ (P4).”

This reflects misalignment between infrastructure allocation and actual need. Projects that enhance already developed areas may be prioritised, while isolated or marginalised communities continue to lack basic access. Another informant emphasised the infrastructure dimension of rent seeking:

“‘In Sabah, the main issue is infrastructure, and most of the allocated funds are for infrastructure. However, the condition of infrastructure keeps worsening because, when dealing with politicians, they think that as long as there's damage, there will be projects and opportunities for financial gain’ (P14)”

This suggests a cyclical dynamic where infrastructure deterioration may inadvertently sustain project based financial opportunities, reinforcing rent oriented incentives rather than long term development planning.

Further, one informant directly addressed the issue of familial and political favoritism:

“... ‘I tell you, politicians don't do the actual work, but sometimes they award these contracts to their family members. So, in the end, it's their families who benefit. It's the same with these DOs (District Officers) as well’ (P15)”

This highlights how rent seeking may extend beyond political actors to administrative intermediaries, reinforcing patronage networks across governance levels. Another informant expressed concern about accountability:

“... ‘ Sometimes, I’m not saying it’s the government (as suggested by the DO), but the contractors—whoever they are (suggested by DOs and politicians)—who might be handling these projects. We need to have a sense of patriotism, I feel. Whatever funds we receive, let’s use them properly’ (P6)”

This statement reflects awareness of systemic weaknesses and the need for ethical commitment in public resource management.

Rent seeking also manifests in the diversion of poverty allocations:

“‘Allocations for poverty alleviation programs were appropriated by politically connected individuals under the guise of development projects’ (P3)”

Other informants, including P7, P8, and P1, similarly indicated that funds intended for rural infrastructure were sometimes directed toward politically favourable constituencies, sidelining communities in genuine need.

Delays in disbursement further illustrate institutional inefficiencies linked to rent seeking. As P9 described, delays in federal allocations for agricultural programs were attributed to bureaucratic bottlenecks influenced by informal networks. These disruptions hinder timely implementation and increase the risk of funds being redirected to less impactful initiatives.

This concern is echoed in the following observation:

“‘Program outcomes often fail to reflect the actual needs of the population due to the influence of rent-seeking behavior’. (P6)”

Overall, the findings suggest that rent seeking behavior significantly undermines the effectiveness of poverty eradication programs. Resources are often captured by elites or diverted toward symbolic projects that offer limited long term value. This dynamic reflects the broader influence of informal patronage networks within Sabah’s governance structure. The persistence of rent seeking practices weakens institutional accountability, reduces program efficiency, and perpetuates inequalities, thereby limiting the transformative potential of poverty eradication initiatives.

4.5.3 Manipulations of Development Projects

Development projects in Sabah are frequently perceived to be manipulated in ways that align with rent seeking interests. Instead of functioning purely as instruments of socio economic upliftment, certain initiatives are structured or implemented in a manner that favours individuals connected to political networks. This dynamic reinforces patron client relationships and limits the transformative impact of poverty eradication efforts. As noted by one informant:

“‘Entrepreneurial initiatives like PROTUNe are often designed to appear inclusive but primarily benefit those with ties to influential political figures’. (P10)”

This statement reflects how development programs may be framed as inclusive and community oriented while, in practice, their benefits are concentrated within politically connected circles. Although such initiatives are publicly justified as mechanisms to empower entrepreneurs and stimulate economic growth, access to opportunities may depend on proximity to influential actors.

Consequently, the manipulation of development projects not only distorts program objectives but also perpetuates socio economic disparities. Rather than dismantling poverty structures, these practices risk entrenching inequalities by channeling public resources toward those already embedded within patronage systems. This finding strengthens the argument that informal political networks significantly shape the operational realities of poverty eradication programs in Sabah.

4.5.4 Unequal Distribution of Resources and Benefits

The unequal distribution of resources and benefits emerges as a persistent theme affecting economic development, social equity, and program effectiveness. In the context of poverty eradication programs in Sabah, disparities in access to resources are particularly evident between rural and more connected areas. These inequalities often disadvantage marginalized communities that already face structural limitations.

As reflected in the findings:

“‘These small projects—what happens is that areas with internet access and good connectivity can apply. Some villages can get up to 5-6 projects. Meanwhile, remote villages without connectivity and the ability to apply online get nothing. This is the problem’ (P4)”

This statement highlights a critical digital divide influencing access to development opportunities. Communities with reliable internet access and higher levels of digital literacy are better positioned to submit applications and secure multiple projects. In contrast, remote villages lacking connectivity are systematically excluded from participation. The inequality, therefore, is not only financial but also technological and procedural. The informant further explained:

“‘When we, as representatives, submit a list of development projects, they're very small 200,000, and at most, 500,000. This is meant to provide people with accessible roads and other necessities. Then they say, 'You have to do it online.' I told them, if we do it online, we can't determine which project should be prioritized because everything is based on their system’ (P4)”

This quotation reveals two interconnected challenges. First, rural development allocations are already modest in scale. Second, reliance on centralized digital systems limits the ability of local representatives to prioritize projects according to contextual needs. While digital platforms are intended to increase efficiency and transparency, they may inadvertently marginalize communities with limited technological access. The concern is reinforced in another statement:

“‘I told them, Yang Berhormat, this system is problematic. How are we supposed to apply online when we ourselves have issues with coverage?’ (P4)”

Here, the structural constraints of connectivity become a barrier to equitable participation. The system presumes universal access and digital capacity, conditions that do not uniformly exist across Sabah's rural landscape. As a result, communities most in need of development support may be systematically disadvantaged by procedural requirements.

Political considerations further complicate the allocation process. One informant expressed frustration regarding stalled proposals and selective approvals:

“‘It's been almost a year since I joined this meeting, and I see that none of the proposals we've made have been implemented so far. I was even called by several ministers, including the Prime Minister himself. He asked me for a list, so I prepared one like crazy about 7 to 8 million worth of projects. Then the document went missing, and they asked me to do it again. I did it again, and then YB Rafizi called, supposedly to help... hmm’ (P4)”

This account suggests administrative inefficiencies and potential political interference that disrupt consistent resource allocation. The uncertainty surrounding project approval processes may further entrench inequality, particularly when proposals fail to translate into implementation. Moreover, allocation decisions may not always align with urgent local needs:

“‘And then a few million gets allocated to my area, and sometimes to a single place, but it's not something the villagers urgently need. For instance, they build toilets in that village community toilets with up to six stalls’ (P4)”

This illustrates a mismatch between funded projects and community priorities. Even when funds are allocated, they may not address the most pressing infrastructural or socio economic concerns. Such misalignment reduces the effectiveness of poverty eradication initiatives and may generate perceptions of symbolic rather than substantive development.

Addressing these inequalities requires more context sensitive mechanisms that account for rural realities, technological constraints, and genuine community needs. Without structural adjustments, development benefits may continue to concentrate among better connected or politically advantaged groups, undermining broader goals of inclusive growth and equitable poverty reduction in Sabah.

4.5.5 Institutional Weakness and Rentier Opportunity

The concept of institutional weakness and rentier opportunity highlights the relationship between fragile governance structures and the opportunities such weaknesses create for rent seeking behavior. Institutional weakness refers to the limited capacity of state institutions, including government agencies, enforcement bodies, and regulatory frameworks, to effectively implement policies, manage resources, and ensure accountability. When institutional mechanisms are weak, inconsistent, or overly centralized, they create structural gaps that can be exploited by politically connected actors.

As reflected in the findings, one informant expressed the following:

“‘They say we can’t control this—it’s all about the system. So, Yang Berhormat, it’s timely for you to come here and hear all of this. When we talk about how to develop these villages, we, the representatives, know every single village in our area. In my case, there are over 400 villages. I’m not asking for all these projects. Go ahead and appoint your contractors, send the ministers down, and let them do the work. But please, follow what we suggest. I’m not here to make a living as a politician’ (P4).”

This statement reflects frustration with centralized decision making structures that limit local agency. Although elected representatives possess intimate knowledge of community needs, project selection and contractor appointments appear to be governed by an impersonal system that does not adequately incorporate local input. The reference to “the system” suggests a bureaucratic structure that operates independently of ground realities, potentially weakening accountability and responsiveness.

The informant further stated:

“‘Go ahead and appoint your own contractors’ (P4)”

This remark points to a pattern in which contractor selection may occur without meaningful consultation with local leaders. Such arrangements may create opportunities for politically connected contractors to secure projects, reinforcing rent oriented incentives. When appointments are controlled from the top down, local

oversight becomes limited, reducing accountability to affected communities.

Institutional weakness in this context does not necessarily imply absence of formal rules. Rather, it reflects insufficient coordination, unclear lines of accountability, and limited integration of local knowledge into policy implementation. The system's rigidity may unintentionally enable rent seeking behavior by centralizing discretionary authority in a way that reduces transparency and participatory governance.

Another informant reinforced this concern:

“‘Inefficiencies in program implementation often arise from overlapping responsibilities and a lack of clear accountability in resource management’ (P3)”

Overlapping institutional mandates and unclear accountability structures can create administrative fragmentation. In such environments, monitoring mechanisms become diluted, and enforcement capacity weakens. This fragmentation creates spaces where patronage networks may operate with limited scrutiny.

From a broader governance perspective, these findings resonate with arguments in the resource curse literature, which emphasize how institutional weakness can transform resource abundance into inefficiency and inequality. Without strong governance mechanisms, public resources may be captured by elites, leading to corruption, misallocation, and stagnation rather than inclusive development.

In the Sabah context, institutional weakness appears to facilitate rentier opportunities by concentrating decision making authority while limiting participatory oversight. The disconnect between centralized allocation systems and local priorities reinforces inequalities and reduces the effectiveness of poverty eradication programs.

The plea to “follow what we suggest” underscores the need for institutional reform that integrates local knowledge into formal governance structures. Strengthening accountability, clarifying responsibilities, and enhancing transparency could reduce rent seeking incentives and improve the alignment of development projects with genuine community needs. Without such reforms, institutional weaknesses may continue to create opportunities for rent oriented practices, undermining equitable and sustainable poverty reduction efforts.

4.6 Politics for Staying Poor

The phenomenon of politics for staying poor in Sabah emerges from the interplay between wealth distribution, political power, and systematic dependency. Despite its vast natural wealth including oil and gas reserves, fertile land, and biodiversity, Sabah remains one of the poorest states in Malaysia. This paradox reflects political dynamics that sustain poverty rather than resolve it.

The findings suggest that poverty is not merely a governance failure but may function as a mechanism through which political influence is maintained. By controlling the allocation of resources and benefits, political actors retain leverage over disadvantaged populations. One informant stressed that even after decades, Sabah continues to face recurring infrastructure and enabling issues that were reported as early as the 1960s:

“...After 60 years...That is unacceptable actually. You would say it's unacceptable... Because it's been passing down through the government to government to government’. (P4)”

The repetition of “government to government” reflects the perception of prolonged inaction and continuity without substantive resolution. This concern is reinforced by another statement:

“... ‘In those meetings, we hold them every month... yet not a single proposal we've made so far has been implemented’ (P4)”

These accounts suggest a cycle in which poverty related issues are discussed but remain unresolved. Such patterns contribute to the perception that structural dependency persists. Budgetary processes were also identified as contributing to inefficiencies. One informant explained:

“The budget is tabled between October and November and comes into effect immediately in January at the start of the year. However, it takes until around October for the funds to be transferred into the state account through UPEN. Then, in October,

there's still negotiation at the federal level on whether the projects are approved or not. By November, they're still talking about what projects to implement between November and December. Then the accounts close in November, and the money is returned to the federal government. It doesn't make any sense. (P8)''

This statement highlights delays and procedural constraints that result in allocated funds being returned rather than implemented. A similar concern was expressed by another informant:

“I've brought up the issues of Sabah and Sarawak in Parliament many times. It's the same for us—our budget is finalized in February or March and implementation starts in April. So, the tender procedures should ideally begin by June. But in Sabah and Sarawak, with the geographical challenges, it takes time. For example, they might come for one meeting, and then it takes two to three months for the next meeting. By the time they're done, maybe in October, the meetings are finalized, and the tenders close. In the end, all the budget that was announced gets taken back to them'. (P3)''

These procedural constraints reinforce perceptions that development funds are not fully utilised within the state.

Another manifestation of politics for staying poor appears through selective allocation aligned with political affiliation. One informant noted:

“... 'It's the same situation—there are highways being built in forests where people say no one even lives. Why? Because those areas belong to UMNO and PKR, while areas under GRS are completely ignored'. (P3)''

This reflects the perception that development projects may be influenced by political alignment rather than objective need.

Additionally, implementation gaps were highlighted:

“... 'budget was announced but has not been implemented yet' (P3)''

Collectively, these findings suggest that structural delays, selective allocation, and political considerations contribute to persistent underdevelopment. In this context, poverty appears embedded within broader political and administrative dynamics, reinforcing dependency rather than enabling sustained empowerment.

4.6.1 Politics of Coordination

The politics of coordination refers to the challenges involved in aligning policies, resources, and decision making across different levels of government. In a federal structure, coordination between federal, state, and local authorities is essential to ensure that development initiatives are implemented effectively. However, political interests, administrative procedures, and control over funding often complicate this process, resulting in delays and unequal allocation.

One informant described the constraints faced by Members of Parliament:

“As MPs, we are forced to make requests, and our allocations are very limited. I think MPs are the ones who truly understand and are most aware of the issues in our areas. So, if even we cannot access significant funding and are still forced to apply through the ministries, our development often lags behind. This is a disadvantage for MPs, especially in Sabah. Much of the funding is controlled by the ministries, and we have to apply for it. Those applications are further restricted by politics—different political parties, different treatment for Sabah. It’s true. So, what happens? Some get less, some get more, and some get nothing at all’ (P3)”

This statement reflects how centralized control over funding, combined with political considerations, affects access to development resources. Although MPs possess local knowledge of community needs, they remain dependent on ministries for allocations. The process is described as both administratively demanding and politically sensitive, leading to uneven outcomes.

Infrastructure delays further illustrate coordination gaps. One informant noted:

“... All the streetlights along the Federal Road have been out for three years. I’ve heard it’s the same under the management of the council’ (P3)”

The same informant added:

“I met with Datuk Seri Alexander. Last year, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) promised in writing to allocate RM30 million to resolve these issues, but (sigh) until now, nothing has materialized’ (P3)”

These quotations highlight the disconnect between formal commitments and actual disbursement. Although allocations may be approved at the federal level, delays in implementation undermine service delivery at the state level. Such gaps reflect coordination challenges between ministries, state agencies, and local authorities.

The impact of these coordination issues extends to broader poverty concerns. Another informant explained:

“‘When we talk about poverty, it is certainly linked to roads and the challenges faced by small traders and communities in marketing their products. Referring to data for the state of Sabah: paved roads cover 5,378.669 km, gravel roads cover 3,492.468 km, and dirt roads cover 158.701 km. When road problems occur in rural areas, it becomes difficult for farmers or entrepreneurs there to market their goods beyond their area. Therefore, the roads in Sabah need to be improved and allocated more funding for development so that we can enjoy the same benefits as in Peninsular Malaysia. Regarding utility issues (water), there are two main concerns: 1) Treated water managed by the Water Department, and 2) Gravity-fed water – the people of Sabah still prefer to use this, especially in rural areas. The facilities are available; however, the acceptance among the people varies’ (P7)”

This statement connects infrastructure conditions directly to economic participation. Limited road access and utility challenges restrict market access for rural communities, reinforcing developmental disparities.

Overall, the findings indicate that coordination challenges between federal and state levels influence the speed, distribution, and effectiveness of development initiatives. Delays in allocation, political considerations in funding approval, and administrative fragmentation contribute to uneven outcomes, particularly in regions such as Sabah

4.6.2 Politics of Implementation

The politics of implementation refers to the dynamics that occur when policies or development projects move from approval to execution. During this phase, authority over budgets, project design, and implementation may involve multiple actors, including federal agencies, state representatives, and local leaders. Differences in priorities, coordination, and discretion can influence how resources are ultimately used.

From the findings, it appears that budget allocations and implementation authority are not always aligned. Discrepancies in approved amounts and duplication of projects raise concerns about efficiency and coordination. One informant described the situation as follows:

“This tender was RM150,000, and the project could be completed for RM500,000, but I managed to get it done through community effort (gotong royong). So, I redirected the money, splitting it—50, 50, 50—to several houses for this particular project. Suddenly, the same project was approved again last year. Then, an assemblyman (ADUN) approved more than RM500,000 for each village for the same project. This is already a dilemma... so, in terms of fund allocation, projects, and funding, this is a problem’.. (P13)”

This statement highlights inconsistencies in project valuation and approval. The informant explained that through community cooperation, the project was completed efficiently, allowing funds to be redistributed to additional beneficiaries. However, the subsequent approval of the same project at a higher allocation by another authority created redundancy and raised questions about coordination.

Such cases illustrate how overlapping responsibilities between Members of Parliament and state assembly members can result in fragmented implementation. When identical or similar projects receive separate approvals with different budget scales, inefficiencies may occur. These inconsistencies affect not only financial management but also the credibility of development initiatives.

The findings suggest that the politics of implementation involve negotiation of authority, discretion in funding, and varying levels of oversight. Where coordination is limited, duplication or uneven allocation may arise. This reinforces the need for clearer alignment between approving bodies and implementing agencies to ensure that poverty

eradication projects are delivered effectively and based on priority rather than competing authority structures.

4.7 Politics of Federalism

The “Politics of Federalism” underscores the complex interplay between the central government and state governments, particularly in the context of state autonomy, resource allocation, and policy implementation. This theme examines the federal structure of governance which, although constitutionally designed to balance power, often reveals inherent tensions between the central authority and state governments, especially concerning political influence and unequal distribution.

“Like now, if we want to enroll in school, we have to apply a month in advance. This is part of our planning. We are the ones who look for funding. So, don’t just talk about roads. Electricity, water even schools have issues. All of this is because of autonomy’ (P3)”

This statement reflects the challenges and limitations faced by the state due to the imbalance of power between the federal government and the state of Sabah, where autonomy issues directly affect essential services and infrastructure development. Here, the informant uses the issue of education to illustrate how state-level authorities are often required to secure funding and resources well in advance, even for something as fundamental as establishing a school. The quotation also broadens the concern beyond roads, emphasizing electricity, water, and schools as part of the structural limitations tied to autonomy.

This is supported by another informant who stated:

“I think all of this is just politics. We’re just wasting our time doing this if they don’t make changes (there)’ (P6)”

The statement expresses frustration over political challenges within the federal system, highlighting a sense of futility in local efforts if there is no policy change at the federal level. The informant suggests that much of the work carried out at the state or

local level may lack impact if federal decisions remain unchanged. This sentiment reflects a recurring critique within the politics of federalism in Malaysia, where alignment between federal and state governments becomes crucial for effective development outcomes.

In this context, the informants' views reveal perceived limitations within the current federal structure, where state or district-level actions are constrained by policies and funding decisions made at the federal level. It reflects the frustration of local leaders who believe their efforts are restricted by centralized authority. This perspective connects to broader debates on federalism, particularly regarding the extent to which states like Sabah are able to exercise meaningful autonomy in addressing their specific development needs.

From the perspective of the politics of federalism, responsibilities such as building access roads, ensuring electricity supply, and providing clean water, which are often associated with federal support, are described as falling heavily on the state. These responsibilities illustrate how limited autonomy and constrained fiscal space may hinder efficient service provision and infrastructure development at the state level. The informants suggest that due to structural constraints within federal arrangements, state governments are required to manage critical functions with limited resources, reinforcing demands for greater autonomy and more equitable allocation.

This study indicates that the federalist framework functions not only as an administrative mechanism but also as a platform where political patronage, regional disparities, and power negotiations are manifested. The politics of federalism directly influences state development policies and poverty alleviation programs, as federal priorities shape allocation decisions and implementation timelines. This theme demonstrates how the distribution of power between the federal government and Sabah affects socio economic outcomes, governance structures, and policy effectiveness.

Informant P16 highlighted the issue of development allocation as follows:

“To address the infrastructure challenges for our economy, development allocations are critical. The need to develop the state of Sabah and solve issues such as flooding and other related problems requires billions in allocation, let alone boosting the

economy. However, every year, the budget only increases slightly, while Sabah's needs are significant. There are two issues that we can work to resolve:

- 1. Development allocation from the federal government – Our Members of Parliament must help demand a fair development allocation, which should ideally be 50% for Peninsular Malaysia and 25%-25% for Sabah and Sarawak. Currently, 70-80% is allocated to Peninsular Malaysia.*
- 2. The 40% revenue share still has not been returned to Sabah – The amount is estimated to reach up to RM20 billion.*

When infrastructure development improves, with sufficient roads and so forth, investors will come to Sabah.” (P16)

This statement illustrates the perception that Sabah’s economic infrastructure challenges require substantial and sustained development allocations. However, the incremental increase in annual budgets is viewed as insufficient compared to the scale of need. The informant also highlights concerns regarding the distribution of federal development funds, where Peninsular Malaysia is perceived to receive a disproportionately larger share.

Furthermore, the unresolved issue of Sabah’s 40 percent revenue entitlement, estimated at RM20 billion, reflects continuing tensions within the federal arrangement. These fiscal imbalances are seen as limiting Sabah’s capacity to address infrastructure deficits and attract investment. Without structural adjustments in resource distribution and greater fiscal recognition, Sabah’s development trajectory remains shaped by the broader political economy of federalism.

4.7.1 Sweeping Power over Resources Control

Centralization in decision making contributes significantly to control over state resources. This control reflects elements of patrimonialism, where political actors treat state resources as if they were personal assets. The extractive nature of institutions in Malaysia is evident in the way control over key resources, decision making, and revenues remains concentrated in the hands of the federal government, with limited

authority devolved to state level leaders in Sabah. Such centralization restricts the ability of local leaders to make decisions that directly benefit their communities, perpetuating a system where resources are extracted from the region without proportional returns.

The informant's remarks on the need for greater control over resource revenues illustrate this dynamic:

"That 40%... should be given to Sabah as quickly as possible so that the Sabah government can implement any emergency measures needed for our people." (P4)

This statement reflects frustration with centralized control over resource wealth, particularly revenues derived from Sabah's oil and gas. The demand for the 40 percent revenue entitlement highlights the call for greater fiscal autonomy, enabling the state government to implement development or emergency measures without prolonged dependence on federal approval. The extractive character of current arrangements is further reflected in comments regarding development decision making:

"All developments in the area must be discussed with every member of parliament to ensure that our targets address the needs of the people in the area." (P3)

While this statement suggests the importance of consultation, the findings indicate that such discussions do not always occur meaningfully in practice. Decisions are often perceived as being made through a top down process, where centralized authorities retain control over allocation and implementation. This approach limits the state's ability to respond effectively to localized needs and contributes to uneven development outcomes.

Other findings in this study indicate that federal authorities retain substantial control over development policies in Sabah, frequently without adequate consultation with local leaders. One informant described the disconnect as follows:

"This is all about the system. So... Yang Berhormat, it's timely for you to come here and hear all these things... We, as representatives, know every single village in our area—you name one, and I'll know it' (P4)"

This statement suggests that local representatives possess detailed knowledge of community conditions, yet the centralized system constrains their influence. It reflects a structural imbalance where decision making authority is removed from those most familiar with local realities.

In an inclusive institutional framework, decision making would involve greater participation from local representatives, ensuring that resource allocation aligns with regional priorities. However, the current structure concentrates authority at higher levels, limiting transparency and participation. As another informant stated:

“‘All these allocations are channelled through UPEN, but we don’t even know about these projects. We don’t know whether the funds have been disbursed or not. We are not involved or included at all’ (P13)”

This statement highlights concerns regarding transparency and inclusion. The centralization of allocations through agencies such as UPEN, without clear communication or local involvement, reinforces perceptions of limited accountability.

Overall, this theme underscores how sweeping centralized control over resources shapes development trajectories in Sabah. The concentration of fiscal and decision making power at the federal level constrains state autonomy, limits participatory governance, and reflects characteristics of extractive institutional arrangements. Without greater transparency and devolved authority, resource management remains detached from local needs, reinforcing disparities in development outcomes

4.7.2 Uneven Development

Uneven development in Sabah is significantly influenced by the entrenched system of political patronage, which distorts the allocation of resources and development outcomes. Political patronage creates a system in which access to federal funds, contracts, and other resources is often shaped by political alignment rather than by the genuine needs of communities. This dynamic favors Members of Parliament and local leaders who align themselves with the ruling coalition, positioning them to access resources more readily and prioritize development in areas supportive of the central government. As reflected by informants (P3, P4, and P7), this hierarchy based on

political favoritism sidelines other constituencies and contributes to disparities between regions.

The implications of this patronage-based system are significant. Development resources are distributed within a framework that benefits the politically connected while marginalizing others. MPs in Sabah, particularly those outside the dominant political alignment, frequently express frustration at the constraints imposed by this system. Political connection becomes a prerequisite for channeling development projects to constituencies, limiting the ability of local leaders to respond effectively to community needs. This weakens equitable governance and reduces the autonomy of local representatives, as developmental outcomes are influenced by political allegiance rather than needs-based planning (P3).

The result is a persistent cycle of uneven development across Sabah. Some areas experience better infrastructure, education, and healthcare services, while others continue to struggle with underdevelopment and limited access to essential services. This outcome contradicts the principles of transparent governance and equitable development, contributing to economic inequality, regional imbalance, and declining public trust.

The issue is further illustrated in the allocation of education funding:

“Regarding allocations, the application process is uneven and needs to highlight the allocations received by the State Education Department (JPN). For example, the Per Capita Grant (PCG) for students in schools allocates a certain amount for each student. In secondary schools, for instance, the PCG for Malay Language is RM100 per student. If a school has 1,000 students, the total PCG would be RM100,000, which the school would use for programs like printing books and so on. JPN has informed the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM) that allocation distribution should be reviewed based on regions. For example, in Sabah, schools are categorized based on difficulty levels as P1, P2, and P3, but the PCG distribution remains the same. A secondary school in Kota Kinabalu receives RM100 per student, the same as a school in Telupid or on an island, despite the differing costs in these areas. The allocation distribution must be local-based. One kilometer in Sabah and one kilometer in Peninsular Malaysia are not the same. One kilometer in Peninsular Malaysia might take 5 minutes, while in Sabah, it

could take 30 minutes or even an hour' (P7)''

This statement demonstrates how uniform allocation formulas fail to account for geographical and logistical realities. Although Sabah schools are categorized based on difficulty levels, funding remains standardized. The comparison of travel time between Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia highlights structural differences that are not reflected in funding mechanisms. Such standardized distribution reinforces uneven development, as cost structures and accessibility challenges vary significantly across regions.

4.7.3 Dependency and Power Imbalance in Development Project

Dependency and power imbalance emerge when access to development resources becomes closely tied to political alliances. Rent seeking behavior within poverty eradication programs creates conditions where beneficiaries may feel compelled to maintain loyalty to political figures who facilitate their access to resources. Instead of fostering sustainable economic independence, this arrangement reinforces cycles of dependency and political control.

The inequitable distribution of poverty alleviation programs is highlighted by the following statement:

“‘One village can get 3, 4, or even 5 projects... but the infrastructure that is truly needed doesn't get anything at all!’ (P3)''

This reflects a system in which development allocation does not consistently align with objective need. Some villages receive multiple projects, while others lacking essential infrastructure receive none. The pattern suggests that allocation may be influenced by political networks rather than systematic needs assessment. Further concerns were raised regarding distribution among political actors:

“‘UMNO and PKR get approvals. For your information, as MPs, last year we had a RM3 million allocation: RM2 million for projects, and RM1.5 million was taken by the UMNO chief, 7-8 MPs. PKR too; we got nothing, see? PKR branch chiefs, how much?’ (P3)''

And:

“‘The others got nothing—GRS, GPS, all got nothing. That entire GPS group got nothing, and KDM got nothing as well’ (P3)”

When asked who received allocations, the informant stated:

“‘The PKR branch chiefs have allocations, the UMNO division chiefs have allocations, but us? As MPs, we get nothing. How come we’re left with nothing’ (P3)”

These statements illustrate perceived disparities in fund distribution based on political affiliation. The allocation of projects appears to follow party alignment, reinforcing hierarchical power structures. Communities associated with favored political factions may receive greater development benefits, while others remain excluded.

This distribution pattern not only deepens dependency but also reinforces power imbalances. Access to infrastructure and development becomes conditional upon political connection. As political elites control allocations, communities may remain dependent on those networks for continued access to resources.

The issue of federal interference further reinforces this imbalance:

“‘The program is implemented at the state level, but there’s a lot of interference from the federal government... everything has to wait for approval from the federal level’. (P8)”

Similarly, delays in infrastructure development were highlighted:

“‘Regarding project delays, the State Education Department (JPN) has found significant delays in the development of dilapidated schools. Some schools have remained incomplete since 2010. This issue has been addressed through meetings with the State Action Committee and the Public Works Department (JKR) to find ways to expedite these projects. As of now, JPN continues to hope that the implementation of these infrastructure projects can be accelerated’. (P7)”

These accounts reflect how centralized approval processes and political

alignment influence implementation timelines. Delays and uneven approvals reinforce dependency on higher authorities and limit state capacity to act independently.

Overall, this theme demonstrates how dependency and power imbalance in development projects are closely tied to patronage networks and centralized control. The distribution of resources is shaped not only by policy objectives but also by political alignment, reinforcing uneven development and limiting sustainable empowerment across Sabah.

4.8 Power Dynamics in Federal-State Relations

In analysing the power dynamics in federal–state relations, it is essential to consider the historical legacy that has shaped the distribution of power over time. Many countries, including Malaysia, have federal–state relations deeply influenced by colonial legacies and historical agreements. In Malaysia, the Federation of Malaysia Agreement and the formation of Malaysia in 1963 (MA63) established foundational frameworks that significantly affect states such as Sabah and Sarawak.

This historical foundation sets the stage for contemporary power asymmetries, often curbing state autonomy and influencing local governance and policy priorities. Closely linked to this is the legal and institutional framework, which explicitly defines through constitutional provisions and statutory laws the powers granted to the federal and state governments. In Malaysia, the Federal Constitution centralizes authority over critical areas such as defence, finance, and education, leaving limited flexibility for states to enact independent policies (P7, P4, P3, and P8). These frameworks may also contain ambiguities that allow the federal government to extend its reach into state-level decision-making, thereby shaping federal–state mediation processes (P4).

Economic factors further shape federal–state power dynamics, particularly through federal control over financial resources (P3), as he states:

“‘This government keeps making announcements here and there, almost like a 'government of announcements,' but the funds never get disbursed’ (P3)”

This quote directly reflects the theme of power dynamics in federal–state relations, particularly regarding the distribution and control of financial resources. The informant’s frustration highlights a recurring issue faced by state governments within a

federal system, especially those reliant on federal grants or allocations. The statement implies a gap between public announcements made at the federal level and the actual disbursement of promised funds to the states. This illustrates a power imbalance in which the federal government, holding fiscal authority, can delay or regulate the flow of resources to state governments.

The phrase “government of announcements” suggests a perception that federal rhetoric is not consistently matched by financial implementation. Such delays constrain the ability of state governments to execute development projects and address local needs effectively. Control over fiscal transfers may also function as a mechanism of political leverage, reinforcing compliance or alignment with federal priorities.

This dynamic creates dependency, particularly for states that rely heavily on federal allocations to fund development and public services. Resource-rich states such as Sabah often confront challenges related to revenue-sharing arrangements with the federal government, particularly under the Petroleum Development Act 1974 (PDA1974), which affects the distribution of wealth derived from local resources. As the informant states:

“It's sad, isn't it? Sabah, a rich state, but even managing its own revenue has to involve sharing... hmm... so many people want to interfere, especially with it being scrutinized under the PDA1974. Hmm, so sad’ (P12)”

This remark reflects concerns over limited fiscal autonomy despite substantial natural resource wealth. Economic dependency on federal funding, particularly in less affluent regions, consolidates federal influence and constrains state sovereignty in fiscal and policy matters. Political patronage may further reinforce this dominance, as selective funding and appointments can strengthen loyalty among state actors aligned with central government objectives. Consequently, disparities in development may arise, with states aligned with the federal leadership receiving more favourable treatment compared to those outside dominant coalitions.

Despite these imbalances, movements advocating greater state autonomy and decentralization have gained momentum, particularly in regions with strong regional identities such as Sabah. These efforts are driven by cultural, economic, and political motivations. Negotiated arrangements and special administrative concessions illustrate

attempts by states to assert greater control over local governance, with the aim of strengthening accountability and responsiveness.

The practical implications of these dynamics are evident in public policy and service delivery. As expressed by P3:

“‘We want to renovate the school, but we can't access it all because of authority issues’ (P3)”

When federal and state governments operate under conflicting agendas or insufficient coordination, disparities in policy implementation and service provision may emerge. Essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure development may be delayed or unevenly distributed. States with limited federal backing may experience slower development trajectories and reduced service quality.

Overall, the interplay of historical agreements, constitutional structures, fiscal control, and political considerations creates a complex federal–state relationship. These power dynamics have significant implications for governance effectiveness, regional equity, and the socio-economic welfare of citizens, particularly in states such as Sabah.

4.8.1 Resources Allocation and Network Interest

The theme of Resources Allocation and Network Interest addresses the dynamics and implications of how resources are distributed within governance structures and the role that influential networks play in shaping this process. In a federal system, resource allocation is a central mechanism that reflects both national priorities and underlying power structures. Resources, often in the form of financial transfers, grants, or development funds, are essential for state and local governments to implement policies and respond to the needs of their constituencies.

However, the allocation process is rarely neutral or purely administrative; it is embedded within networks of political relationships, alliances, and patronage systems that influence the direction and flow of resources, as reflected by informants P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P10. In Malaysia, resource allocation between the federal government and the states, particularly non-granary states such as Sabah, illustrates

how network interests and power dynamics shape distribution outcomes.

When allocations are influenced by political allegiance, regional loyalty, or strategic alignment, distribution patterns may reinforce existing hierarchies (All informants). Federal funds may favor regions aligned with central government interests, creating incentives for state leaders to align politically in order to secure access to financial support. Conversely, regions perceived as less aligned may experience reduced access or delays in funding.

This theme highlights the importance of transparency, accountability, and equity in resource distribution to prevent regional marginalization. At the same time, it emphasizes how network interests, including political patronage and influence, can limit state autonomy and constrain the ability of state governments to pursue development agendas independently. Addressing the intersection between resource allocation and network interests is therefore critical to strengthening balanced federal–state relations and promoting inclusive and sustainable development across regions.

4.8.2 Bureaucratic Control

Bureaucratic control refers to the authority exercised by administrative bodies and government officials over the management, implementation, and oversight of policies, programs, and resources. This control operates through structured procedures, regulations, and formal mechanisms intended to ensure consistency, accountability, and alignment with government objectives. In a federal system such as Malaysia's, decision making authority is often centralized within federal ministries and departments. As a result, state and local agencies frequently depend on approvals, guidelines, and financial allocations from higher authorities, which limits their flexibility and autonomy (P3, P4, P18).

Although bureaucratic systems are designed to maintain order and fairness through standardized processes, these procedures may also generate delays and inefficiencies. Projects that require coordination across multiple agencies often encounter bottlenecks, as each department applies its own criteria and approval processes. A single development initiative may therefore pass through several layers of administrative scrutiny before implementation, slowing overall progress. Bureaucratic control also fosters inter-agency dependence, particularly in cross-sectoral domains

such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. When the effectiveness of one sector depends on another, coordination becomes essential but often cumbersome. Delays within one agency can disrupt outcomes in others. This interdependence reinforces the importance of synchronized administrative action, yet it also exposes structural limitations within centralized systems.

The control over resource allocation further reflects this dynamic. Centralized agencies determine funding priorities based on national strategies and policy considerations, creating a dependency where state agencies must wait for federal disbursement or approval before proceeding with projects. Such dependency can slow local development initiatives and constrain responsiveness to regional needs.

As highlighted by the informant:

“It is true that education is a key enabler, but JPN also relies on other agencies, such as those responsible for infrastructure. If roads are not in good condition, transportation costs will increase, and when transportation costs are high, it becomes a barrier for poor students to attend school. Therefore, we hope that other agencies can also expedite their projects’ (P7)”

This statement emphasizes the interconnected nature of bureaucratic control. While education is recognized as a central enabler of development, its success depends on infrastructure managed by other agencies. Poor road conditions and high transportation costs become indirect barriers to educational access, particularly for disadvantaged students. The informant’s appeal for expedited implementation reflects concern over delays that arise from inter-agency coordination challenges.

In Malaysia’s federal framework, where fiscal and administrative authority is largely centralized, such delays may reflect bureaucratic bottlenecks or limited prioritization at higher levels (P6). Consequently, bureaucratic control not only shapes the distribution of resources but also influences the pace and effectiveness of development initiatives at the state level.

Overall, this theme illustrates that bureaucratic control, while structured to ensure accountability and policy coherence, can also create constraints when coordination mechanisms are inefficient. Without effective collaboration across agencies, centralized control may inadvertently impede development outcomes,

particularly for vulnerable populations whose access to services depends on integrated and timely administrative action.

4.8.3 Power Dynamics and Local Governance

This theme highlights how power dynamics and structural priorities influence local governance, particularly through the role of P10 (Sabah Economic Development and Investment Authority) in driving economic and infrastructural development in Sabah. Sabah faces distinct challenges due to its vast geographical size, low population density, and diverse demographics, setting it apart from other regions in Malaysia.

These structural realities demonstrate how power dynamics shape developmental priorities. Decisions such as constructing telecommunications towers in remote areas with only a few houses are not based solely on cost-effectiveness but also on social obligations tied to national development. This reflects the interaction between centralized power structures and local governance needs, where top-down decisions frequently determine resource allocation. As P1 noted, uneven development illustrates the imbalances created by centralized authority over rural areas. Sabah's structural constraints, including limited basic infrastructure, reveal how power relations can hinder equitable development. While improved road connectivity in areas such as Tongod demonstrates progress, it also highlights the dependence of local governance on centralized decision-making and funding.

The findings further indicate that structural and infrastructural concerns are prioritized over broader developmental programs. This reflects the dominance of structural power in shaping governance agendas, as accessibility and infrastructure must be addressed before other initiatives can function effectively. Impact assessments conducted by P10 show that resolving infrastructure gaps unlocks economic opportunities, enabling residents in areas such as Tongod to start businesses and access urban markets more efficiently (P1 and P10).

At the same time, the evaluation and implementation of development projects remain influenced by centralized authority. Although projects may generate employment and contribute to GDP growth, their execution depends heavily on federal funding and policy direction. This reliance underscores how local governance operates within externally defined constraints, limiting autonomy in addressing region-specific

needs. Additional findings emphasize the broader structural challenges of uneven development in Sabah. Agencies such as P10, SEDCO, and P9 function within logistical and financial limitations that stem from centralized decision-making structures. The imbalance between centralized authority and local requirements reinforces the need to critically examine power relations to ensure that development initiatives align with Sabah's specific context.

Centralized control over resource allocation remains evident in financial decisions. Despite announcements of substantial federal budgets, allocations to Sabah frequently fall short of actual needs. P9's example of requesting RM70 million for food security but receiving only RM2.2 million illustrates the limited influence of local actors in federal fiscal processes. Such disparities constrain key sectors, including agriculture and rural development, from achieving sustained progress.

Similarly, infrastructural projects in remote areas are shaped by both logistical constraints and centralized policy priorities. Telecommunications towers and small commercial facilities are developed in sparsely populated communities despite limited cost-efficiency, reflecting social obligations rather than comprehensive structural reform. Meanwhile, rural entrepreneurs continue to face barriers such as poor road connectivity, which increases transportation costs and limits economic expansion, even when entrepreneurial programs such as PROTUNE are introduced.

Agricultural policy further reflects uneven power relations. As highlighted by P9, disparities in rice self-sufficiency levels between Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia are compounded by fertilizer distribution policies that prioritize granary regions in the Peninsula. Such decisions demonstrate how centralized policy priorities may overlook Sabah's agricultural realities, reinforcing structural inequities in productivity and food security.

Bureaucratic inefficiencies compound these challenges. Federal funding often encounters procedural delays, with approved allocations disbursed late in the fiscal year or withdrawn due to unmet timelines (All informants). As experienced by P9, funds approved in March may only become accessible toward the end of the year, causing projects to stall. These administrative constraints weaken the capacity of local governance institutions to implement timely and effective interventions.

The findings also reflect concerns regarding poverty governance. The Sekretariat Sabah Maju Jaya (SMJ) has undertaken data collection initiatives to support

evidence-based policymaking. However, informants raise concerns about the proliferation of studies conducted without clear follow-through or coordinated implementation (P11). Research outputs may lack tangible impact when fragmented agendas prevent alignment with actionable policy strategies.

These dynamics reveal the complexity of power relations within governance structures. When research and policy agendas are misaligned, data collection does not translate into effective interventions. This gap may arise from bureaucratic inertia, limited coordination, or competing institutional priorities. Strengthening institutional frameworks and improving coordination mechanisms are therefore essential to ensure that research informs concrete policy outcomes.

Overall, the theme of Power Dynamics and Local Governance demonstrates how centralized authority, fiscal dependency, bureaucratic delays, and structural inequalities shape developmental outcomes in Sabah. The region's uneven development is closely tied to limited autonomy and resource control. Addressing these challenges requires more balanced fiscal arrangements, streamlined administrative processes, and enhanced local participation in decision-making.

In conclusion, the findings reinforce the central role of power dynamics in shaping local governance in Sabah. Developmental outcomes are influenced by the interaction between centralized authority and local priorities. Achieving inclusive and sustainable development requires recalibrating these power relations to ensure that policy implementation reflects Sabah's specific needs while maintaining national coherence.

4.8.4 Resources Curse

The theme of the resource curse emerges prominently in the context of Sabah's struggles with poverty eradication and governance. The resource curse refers to the paradox where resource-rich regions experience slower economic growth and weaker development outcomes due to mismanagement and institutional weaknesses. The findings from Sabah reflect a localized manifestation of this phenomenon. Despite its natural wealth and resource potential, Sabah remains one of Malaysia's poorest states. This paradox is linked to the interaction of neopatrimonial governance, extractive institutions, and entrenched patronage networks.

One informant stated:

“‘Sabah, a resource-rich state in Malaysia, particularly oil, gas, and timber has not translated into sustained economic prosperity or broad-based development’. (P6)”

This statement captures the central concern of the resource curse in Sabah. Although the state possesses abundant natural resources, the economic benefits have not been equitably distributed to support inclusive development or significantly reduce poverty, especially in rural and marginalized communities. A substantial portion of oil and gas revenue is managed at the federal level under the Petroleum Development Act 1974, leaving Sabah with only 5% of the resource revenue. This arrangement constrains fiscal autonomy and limits the state’s development capacity. Sabah’s agricultural and forestry resources are also considerable, yet their economic returns have not generated widespread socio-economic transformation. As noted by P9:

“... ‘Despite resource abundance, agricultural outputs like rice production remain critically low, with Sabah relying heavily on imports’. (P9)”

This illustrates a disconnect between resource potential and productive outcomes. Resource-intensive sectors often benefit elites and politically connected actors, while broader segments of society remain excluded from meaningful wealth redistribution. This pattern aligns with the theoretical understanding of the resource curse, where wealth concentration among elites reinforces inequality and restricts inclusive growth.

Governance dynamics further intensify this condition. P6 highlighted the:

“‘Misalignment between federal resource allocations and state needs, with funds often delayed or misused’ (P6)”

Such misalignment reflects administrative and political inefficiencies that hinder effective resource utilization. Rent-seeking practices may divert development funds into politically motivated or private interests, reinforcing inefficiencies and limiting long-term developmental impact. These characteristics are consistent with rentier dynamics often associated with resource-dependent economies.

Sabah's reliance on federal allocations compounds the resource curse effect. Although the state contributes significantly to national resource revenues, federal budget returns remain comparatively limited. As emphasized by P2:

“Federal-state relations perpetuate a dependency dynamic, where Sabah must negotiate for resources that should inherently be allocated for its development’ (P2)”

This dependency reflects structural imbalances within federal–state relations, where centralized control over resources constrains regional empowerment. Such arrangements resemble extractive institutional structures in which resource control is concentrated at higher levels of authority, limiting equitable distribution.

Centralization also restricts economic diversification. Heavy reliance on resource extraction exposes Sabah to global market volatility and reduces incentives to strengthen other sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, or value-added agriculture. Political patronage and rent-seeking behavior may further distort allocation priorities, directing revenues toward consolidating political influence rather than investing in sustainable development strategies.

Uneven development patterns further reflect the resource curse dynamic. While urban centers such as Kota Kinabalu have experienced moderate growth, rural regions remain significantly underdeveloped. As noted by P1:

“Projects such as telecommunication towers and roads are often prioritized based on political calculations rather than genuine economic need, exacerbating rural-urban disparities’ (P1)”

This uneven distribution of projects demonstrates how resource wealth can intensify regional disparities when planning and governance mechanisms are not aligned with needs-based assessments. The politics of federalism also contributes to Sabah's resource constraints. Federal dominance in resource management and allocation limits the state's ability to determine its own development trajectory. As P14 observed:

“State-level plans are frequently overridden by federal policies, leaving little room for localized solutions to poverty and resource management’ (P14)”

This reflects a broader structural issue in which centralized control over resource wealth reinforces dependency and reduces local agency. The interaction between centralized authority, fiscal dependency, and limited autonomy mirrors global cases of the resource curse.

Overall, the resource curse in Sabah is closely linked to neopatrimonial governance, extractive institutional arrangements, and rentier practices. Resource wealth, instead of functioning as a catalyst for development, becomes constrained by governance structures that limit equitable distribution and diversification. The findings underscore the need for stronger institutional transparency, more balanced federal–state fiscal arrangements, and governance reforms to ensure that resource wealth contributes to sustained and inclusive development rather than perpetuating inequality.

4.9 Summary

This chapter presented a thematic analysis of poverty eradication programs in Sabah, demonstrating how their implementation is shaped by the complex interaction between political patronage, institutional weaknesses, and persistent socio-economic disparities. Drawing on insights from key informants and guided by the theoretical lens of neopatrimonialism, the findings reveal that the limited effectiveness of poverty eradication initiatives is not merely a technical or administrative issue, but a systemic governance problem embedded within the state’s political and institutional structures.

The analysis was organized around several interrelated themes, including the influence of political patronage on program implementation, the politics of sustaining poverty, the dynamics of federalism, and asymmetrical power relations between the federal and state governments. Collectively, these themes illustrate how patron–client relationships and informal political networks shape decision-making processes, frequently overriding needs-based considerations in the allocation and delivery of poverty-related interventions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that neopatrimonial practices and extractive institutional arrangements significantly undermine the effectiveness of poverty eradication programs in Sabah. Political patronage perpetuates inequality and administrative inefficiency, while rent-seeking behavior distorts program priorities and weakens accountability mechanisms. At the same time, uneven federal–state power

relations and federal dominance constrain Sabah's policy autonomy, reinforcing structural dependency and limiting the state's capacity to address its development challenges.

The persistence of the resource curse further reflects the consequences of weak governance and resource mismanagement, where abundant natural wealth fails to translate into broad-based socio-economic advancement. Taken together, these dynamics underscore the urgent need for institutional reform, strengthened transparency, and merit-based resource allocation as prerequisites for fostering inclusive and sustainable development in Sabah.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the grassroots dynamics of political patronage embedded in the implementation of poverty eradication programs in the state of Sabah. While these programs are formally framed as development-oriented interventions aimed at eradicating poverty, their execution is deeply shaped by informal political arrangements and patronage network relationships operating within the state's governance structure. The chapter situates these dynamics within the broader context of federal–state relations, acknowledging the role of intergovernmental cooperation in poverty eradication programs while critically interrogating how state-level actors mediate, reinterpret, and at times distort these interventions during implementation.

Central to this analysis is the argument that the processes through which poverty eradication resources are transferred and distributed at the state level are not politically neutral. Instead, they are frequently influenced by entrenched patterns of control exercised by rent-seeking actors who dominate access to state resources. Such behavior reinforces extractive institutional practices, whereby development programs are mobilized to consolidate political loyalty, preserve elite interests, and sustain patronage networks rather than to address structural poverty effectively. As a result, poverty eradication initiatives may become instruments of political exchange, prioritizing strategic constituencies over genuine socio-economic need.

Guided by the research objectives, this chapter explores how political patronage shapes the allocation, design, and implementation of poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level (RO1). It further analyzes how patronage networks influence the prioritization of political and socio-economic interests within these programs, often blurring the boundaries between development objectives and political survival strategies (RO2). Finally, the chapter assesses how rent-seeking behaviors embedded within patronage practices affect the effectiveness, efficiency, and outcomes of poverty eradication programs in Sabah, thereby limiting their transformative potential and entrenching dependency relationships (RO3). Through this analysis, the chapter

provides a grounded understanding of the institutional and political realities underpinning the governance of poverty eradication programs in Sabah.

5.2 Understanding State Political Patronage And State Poverty Eradication Programs

State political patronage plays a crucial role in shaping the implementation and outcomes of poverty eradication programs. The aftermath of the 13 May 1969 racial riots marked a critical juncture in Malaysia's political and socio-economic trajectory. The tensions, rooted in deep-seated economic disparities and ethnocentric grievances, prompted the ruling coalition, led by UMNO under the Barisan Nasional (BN) banner, to adopt a more interventionist approach through political patronage and affirmative action policies. The New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced in 1971, was designed as a response to economic imbalances that primarily affected the Malays and Bumiputera communities. By focusing on poverty eradication and restructuring wealth distribution, the NEP sought to elevate the socio-economic standing of the Malays, positioning them as principal beneficiaries of state-led development initiatives.

This framework of affirmative action was embedded within the mechanism of political patronage. The state, under UMNO-BN leadership, exercised its authority to allocate economic resources, employment opportunities, and political appointments to consolidate support among the Malay electorate. Agencies such as MARA (Majlis Amanah Rakyat), FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority), and other rural development programs functioned as instruments of patronage, ensuring loyalty to the ruling coalition while addressing poverty in rural Malay heartlands. State-controlled enterprises and government-linked companies (GLCs) further contributed to redistributing wealth and creating opportunities for Bumiputera entrepreneurs.

However, this patronage system attracted criticism. While segments of the Malay population experienced socio-economic mobility, the system also fostered dependency and inefficiency, at times sidelining meritocratic considerations. Chinese and Indian communities who perceived the NEP as exclusionary increasingly supported opposition parties, contributing to political polarization and factionalism.

The intertwining of political patronage and poverty eradication programs raises questions about sustainability and inclusivity. Although addressing immediate economic needs, reliance on patronage networks often resulted in selective development, where benefits were disproportionately channeled to constituencies aligned with the ruling party. This practice strengthened political loyalties but also reinforced socio-economic disparities beyond the scope of these programs.

Political patronage refers to the distribution of resources, benefits, or opportunities by political leaders to secure loyalty and maintain power. Within state-driven poverty alleviation initiatives, patronage dynamics influence funding allocation, beneficiary selection, and project prioritization, generating both facilitative and constraining effects.

Patronage can facilitate poverty eradication by directing resources toward underserved regions that might otherwise be overlooked by bureaucratic mechanisms. Political actors may serve as intermediaries, channeling state resources to marginalized communities. However, the developmental impact depends significantly on political motivations. Where patronage is genuinely oriented toward upliftment, it may yield positive outcomes. Conversely, when driven by political consolidation, it introduces inefficiencies and inequities, disproportionately benefiting politically aligned constituencies while marginalizing others. Such practices undermine poverty reduction objectives and can entrench dependency rather than promote sustainable self-reliance.

In Sabah, political transitions have profoundly shaped poverty eradication strategies. The state has experienced multiple changes in ruling parties, including Sabah Alliance, SCA, USNO, BERJAYA, PBS, BN, WARISAN, and GRS. Each administration utilized patronage mechanisms to secure loyalty and consolidate authority, embedding development initiatives within broader political strategies. These transitions introduced variability in resource allocation, reflecting shifting priorities and beneficiary networks over time.

During the USNO era under Tun Mustapha Harun, poverty eradication initiatives targeted rural Muslim Bumiputera communities, aligning with the party's political base. Land distribution and agricultural subsidies were directed toward these areas, while critics argued that non-Muslim indigenous and Chinese communities received limited benefits. Patronage during this period was centralized, reinforcing loyalty through resource allocation rather than objective poverty indicators.

Under BERJAYA, led by Harris Salleh, economic diversification and rural poverty reduction were emphasized through initiatives such as the Sabah Padi Board. While some infrastructure investments contributed to development, allegations of cronyism persisted, and resource distribution remained uneven.

The PBS administration, under Tan Sri Joseph Pairin Kitingan, emphasized indigenous empowerment and rural development in non-Muslim indigenous areas. However, fiscal constraints and political instability limited implementation capacity, and ethnocentric patterns of allocation reinforced interethnic disparities.

During the BN era, federal integration expanded large-scale poverty programs, including FELDA and FELCRA initiatives. Although these programs increased development spending, patronage networks continued to shape distribution patterns, prioritizing electorally significant constituencies. Despite scale and funding, poverty levels in Sabah remained comparatively high, partly due to inefficiencies and politically influenced implementation.

Recent administrations under WARISAN and GRS have continued to embed poverty initiatives within political realignments. While new programs were introduced to address rural development and education, critics contend that patronage considerations remain influential in shaping allocation decisions.

The study's findings indicate that political patronage significantly influences poverty program allocation in Sabah, with observable preferences for regions aligned with ruling parties. This pattern aligns with research such as Anastacio (2023), which suggests that political connections influence development outcomes, particularly in opposition-aligned areas.

These findings support the theory of extractive institutions, whereby ruling elites prioritize resource distribution to consolidate authority rather than promote inclusive growth. Political considerations may therefore undermine the intended impact of poverty eradication initiatives.

Given Sabah's repeated political transitions and persistent disparities, reforms are necessary to insulate program allocation from partisan bias and strengthen anti-corruption safeguards. Although this study focuses regionally, future research may extend comparative analysis across other states or countries to examine how political patronage shapes poverty alleviation more broadly.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for governance reforms in Sabah to ensure more equitable, transparent, and sustainable development across all regions

5.3 Discussion Of Key Findings And Implication

The findings of this study, analysed through the theoretical lenses of neopatrimonialism and extractive institutions, expose entrenched systemic weaknesses within the governance of poverty eradication programs in Sabah. These frameworks are essential for understanding the interaction between formal governance structures and informal power networks that prioritize political and personal interests over genuine developmental objectives.

At the centre of the findings is the pervasive role of political patronage, a hallmark of neopatrimonial systems, where public resources and programs intended to alleviate poverty are transformed into instruments for consolidating political loyalty and control. The patron–client dynamics revealed in the study demonstrate how political elites, acting as patrons, selectively distribute resources to constituencies or individuals aligned with their political interests. This practice undermines equity and perpetuates a dependency culture in which impoverished communities remain reliant on political actors for material benefits. These dynamics reflect the extractive character of Sabah’s political and institutional framework, where governance mechanisms are captured by elites, sidelining vulnerable populations most in need of assistance.

The findings raise critical concerns regarding the institutional integrity of poverty eradication efforts, suggesting that programs function less as mechanisms for structural poverty reduction and more as tools for reinforcing existing power hierarchies. A particularly troubling dimension is the prevalence of rent-seeking behavior embedded within state-level implementation processes.

Rent-seeking actors, often positioned within political and economic networks, manipulate program priorities and resource allocation to secure undue benefits, including inflated contracts and privileged access to development funds. Through the lens of extractive institutions, this demonstrates how systems designed to promote public welfare can instead concentrate wealth and influence within a narrow elite. Evidence from the study indicates that contracts for poverty-related projects are frequently awarded to politically connected entities, often bypassing competitive or

merit-based procedures. Such practices inflate costs, reduce quality, and in some cases result in the misallocation of resources. For example, infrastructure projects, including roads and telecommunications towers, were implemented in areas with minimal population presence, primarily benefiting contractors linked to political networks. This inefficiency not only wastes public funds but also deprives marginalized communities of essential services, thereby intensifying existing poverty conditions.

The findings further highlight inequities in resource distribution shaped by federal–state power dynamics, reinforcing extractive institutional characteristics. Sabah’s reliance on federal allocations creates structural imbalances that allow federal authorities to exert significant influence over state-level poverty programs. Evidence suggests that federal transfers are often accompanied by political considerations, with resources disproportionately directed toward constituencies aligned with the ruling federal coalition.

Such practices marginalize opposition-led areas and undermine equitable distribution of development resources. Informants expressed frustration that federal funds are frequently allocated to politically strategic projects while pressing needs in rural and underserved communities remain unresolved. This systemic bias contributes to socio-economic disparities and weakens public trust, as communities perceive poverty eradication initiatives as instruments of political control rather than mechanisms of empowerment. These patterns indicate that the existing governance structure prioritizes political alignment over developmental necessity, limiting its capacity to address structural poverty.

The study also underscores the consequences of dependency reinforced through patron–client relationships. In Sabah, these relationships extend beyond resource distribution to become mechanisms of social control. Political elites provide short-term assistance, such as financial aid, food supplies, or infrastructure projects, in exchange for continued loyalty. While such support may offer temporary relief, it fails to address underlying structural barriers and instead entrenches long-term dependency. Communities excluded from patronage networks often lack access to essential resources, deepening inequality and limiting social mobility. This reinforces the extractive logic of neopatrimonial governance, where maintaining authority takes precedence over sustainable development.

Institutional weaknesses and administrative inefficiencies further intensify these challenges. Limited transparency and accountability enable informal networks to influence decision-making processes with minimal oversight. Informants reported delays in fund disbursement and project implementation, often linked to bureaucratic bottlenecks or interference by rent-seeking actors. These delays reduce program effectiveness and create opportunities for resource diversion. Such fragility reflects extractive institutional arrangements, where formal structures are weakened in ways that sustain elite dominance.

The implications for policy and governance are substantial. The persistence of neopatrimonial practices and extractive institutions in Sabah necessitates systemic reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability, and equity in poverty program design and implementation. Decentralizing decision-making authority to empower local institutions and communities represents a critical step toward reducing the influence of patronage networks. Context-sensitive approaches that prioritize needs-based allocation over political alignment are essential.

Strengthening procurement systems, introducing transparent auditing mechanisms, and enforcing merit-based allocation processes can reduce rent-seeking behavior. Furthermore, expanding public participation in decision-making processes can promote accountability and restore trust in governance systems.

In conclusion, the findings provide a critical assessment of the governance structures underpinning poverty eradication programs in Sabah. The influence of neopatrimonialism and extractive institutions has distorted program objectives and entrenched cycles of inequality, dependency, and resource mismanagement. Addressing these systemic challenges requires a fundamental recalibration of governance practices, prioritizing transparency, accountability, and equitable development over political expediency. By reducing the dominance of patronage networks and rent-seeking behavior, Sabah can move toward a more inclusive and effective poverty eradication framework that genuinely serves its most vulnerable populations.

5.4 Research Objective 1: To Explore How Political Patronage Shapes The Allocation, Design, And Implementation Of Poverty Eradication Programs At Sabah Sabah State Level.

The findings of this study, aligned with the objective of exploring political patronage in poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level, provide an in-depth understanding of how patronage systems shape, influence, and often hinder the effectiveness of these programs. The study reveals that political patronage in Sabah operates as a deeply embedded governance mechanism, where poverty eradication initiatives are frequently manipulated to serve political interests rather than address the structural causes of poverty. Informants highlighted how political elites utilize these programs as instruments to maintain and consolidate power through patron–client relationships.

These relationships are characterized by selective resource allocation, where benefits are distributed not on the basis of need but according to political loyalty. This dynamic results in marginalized communities, particularly those in rural and underserved areas, being excluded from programs, thereby exacerbating inequality and undermining efforts to uplift the most impoverished groups in the state.

At the core of this patronage system is a reciprocal exchange in which political leaders, as patrons, provide material benefits such as financial assistance, development projects, or employment opportunities in return for loyalty, votes, or continued political support. The findings demonstrate that this patron–client relationship is particularly pronounced in Sabah, where the state’s geographical and socio-political characteristics intensify its impact. Sabah’s dispersed rural population, combined with limited infrastructure and access to services, increases community reliance on patronage networks for basic needs. Informants reported that political leaders often prioritized projects in areas aligned with their political parties, while other constituencies were neglected. This practice perpetuates dependency and undermines the objectives of poverty eradication programs, transforming them into mechanisms of political consolidation rather than instruments of social development.

The findings further highlight how federal–state dynamics reinforce political patronage at the state level. Informants described how federal transfers and program approvals are frequently influenced by political considerations, with constituencies

aligned to the ruling federal coalition receiving preferential allocations. This creates asymmetrical implementation outcomes within the state. Although federal programs may demonstrate measurable impact in other regions, their effectiveness in Sabah is weakened by uneven distribution and limited sensitivity to local realities. Informants noted that federal authorities often prioritize politically strategic areas, while neglecting Sabah's distinctive challenges, including infrastructural deficits, geographical dispersion, and logistical constraints. This misalignment illustrates how political patronage shapes not only allocation but also program design and implementation, subordinating developmental needs to political calculations.

The manipulation of development projects represents another critical dimension of patronage identified in this study. Informants reported instances of rent-seeking behavior in which contracts and development funds intended for poverty alleviation were redirected to politically connected actors. These practices reflect neopatrimonial characteristics, where informal power networks override formal governance procedures. Rural infrastructure projects, for example, were reportedly awarded based on political affiliation rather than community need, resulting in inefficiencies and misallocation of resources. Informants recounted cases in which projects were implemented in locations with minimal direct benefit to local residents, indicating prioritization of political networks over genuine socio-economic impact. Such patterns reinforce the extractive institutional features of Sabah's governance system, where public resources are captured to sustain elite interests.

In addition, the study reveals how patronage dynamics deepen community dependency. Informants observed that communities reliant on assistance from political leaders often feel compelled to demonstrate political support to secure continued access to benefits. This dynamic constrains long-term empowerment and inhibits sustainable development. Rather than strengthening community resilience or economic independence, patronage-based distribution reinforces reliance on political intermediaries. Reports of short-term financial assistance or project announcements during election periods further illustrate how poverty programs are mobilized strategically, sidelining comprehensive and long-term poverty reduction strategies.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that political patronage significantly shapes the allocation, design, and implementation of poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level. These programs are frequently embedded within political

networks and utilized to consolidate authority rather than address systemic poverty. The instrumentalization of poverty initiatives for political purposes undermines their transformative capacity and perpetuates inequality, dependency, and uneven development. Addressing these challenges requires structural reforms that enhance transparency, accountability, and needs-based allocation. Strengthening local decision-making autonomy and insulating program distribution from political interference are essential steps toward ensuring that poverty eradication programs fulfill their intended developmental objectives in Sabah

5.5 Research Objective 2: To Explore How The Patronage Networks Influences The Prioritization Of Political And Socio-Economic Within Poverty Eradication Programs In Sabah State Level.

The findings of this study, aligned with the objective of exploring the role of patronage networks in shaping the interests of poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level, provide a nuanced understanding of how these networks influence the design, implementation, and outcomes of such programs. Patronage networks, as revealed through the thematic analysis, play a central role in shaping priorities and resource allocation within poverty eradication efforts, often directing these initiatives toward political and personal interests rather than structural needs of impoverished communities. These networks, comprising political elites, influential contractors, and bureaucrats, function as informal systems of power in which decision-making and resource distribution are shaped by loyalty, relationships, and political alignment rather than merit or evidence-based planning.

At the core of patronage networks is the strategic use of poverty eradication programs to reinforce political allegiance and maintain influence over communities. The findings highlight how these networks influence beneficiary selection and the geographical focus of development projects, ensuring that resources are channelled to constituencies aligned with the patron's political objectives. Informants reported that infrastructure improvements and agricultural subsidies were frequently prioritized in areas where political support could be secured or strengthened. This practice transforms poverty eradication programs into mechanisms of patronage, where aid distribution serves political consolidation rather than substantive poverty reduction. Such patterns

reflect the neopatrimonial character of governance in Sabah, where formal policies are often overshadowed by informal political arrangements.

A significant dimension of patronage networks lies in their control over development contracts and resource allocation. The findings indicate that contracts for poverty eradication initiatives are frequently awarded to individuals or companies closely linked to political elites or embedded within patronage networks. Informants described instances in which development funds intended for essential infrastructure in underserved areas were redirected to projects that benefited politically connected actors. Infrastructure projects, including roads and telecommunications towers, were sometimes prioritized based on rent-seeking opportunities rather than demonstrable community need. These practices reflect extractive institutional tendencies, where public resources are captured for private or political gain, undermining the capacity of poverty eradication programs to address structural deprivation.

Patronage networks also contribute to systemic inefficiencies and misalignment between policy objectives and implementation outcomes. Informants noted that program approval processes frequently prioritize projects that enhance the visibility or influence of political patrons rather than initiatives that respond to pressing needs such as education access, healthcare provision, or rural employment opportunities. This misalignment results in symbolic or politically strategic projects overshadowing substantive interventions. Consequently, marginalized communities remain underserved, while projects that reinforce political authority are elevated within development agendas.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that patronage networks reinforce dependency among impoverished communities. Informants observed that beneficiaries often feel obligated to maintain loyalty to patrons who facilitate access to resources. This dynamic is particularly evident in rural areas where limited economic alternatives increase reliance on political intermediaries. Rather than fostering sustainable development, such dependency constrains community autonomy and perpetuates reliance on patronage channels for continued support.

The interplay between federal and state-level patronage networks further intensifies these distortions. Federal-level networks frequently influence the allocation of resources to state programs, prioritizing constituencies aligned with the ruling coalition. Informants reported that politically expedient projects received priority, while

essential infrastructure in non-aligned areas was delayed or neglected. This pattern undermines equitable distribution and reinforces perceptions of political favoritism in poverty eradication initiatives.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that patronage networks significantly shape the prioritization of political and socio-economic interests within poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level. Operating within a neopatrimonial governance framework, these networks prioritize loyalty and political consolidation over equitable development. Their influence results in resource misallocation, inefficiencies, and entrenched dependency among marginalized communities. Addressing these structural challenges requires reforms that enhance transparency, insulate program allocation from political interference, and strengthen merit-based and needs-driven decision-making processes. Decentralizing authority, reinforcing accountability mechanisms, and empowering local stakeholders are essential steps toward fostering more equitable and effective poverty eradication outcomes in Sabah.

5.6 Research Objective 3: To Assess How Rent-Seeking Behavior Embedded Within Patronage Practices Affect Effectiveness And Outcomes Of The Poverty Eradication Programs At The Sabah State Level.

The findings of this study, aligned with the objective of examining rent-seeking behavior embedded within patronage practices in the implementation of poverty eradication programs at the Sabah state level, reveal persistent patterns of resource mismanagement and institutional exploitation. Rent-seeking behavior in this context refers to actions by individuals or networks who leverage political or economic connections to extract disproportionate benefits from public resources, often at the expense of program effectiveness and intended beneficiaries. The study identifies multiple dimensions of rent-seeking that distort the implementation of poverty eradication initiatives and undermine their capacity to achieve sustainable outcomes.

At the centre of this behavior is the manipulation of development projects for personal or political advantage. The findings demonstrate how rent-seeking actors, frequently embedded within patronage networks, influence both the allocation and execution of poverty eradication programs. Informants described how contracts are often awarded to politically connected contractors, bypassing transparent procurement

procedures and merit-based evaluation. These contracts may involve inflated budgets, compromised quality, or projects of limited relevance to community needs. For example, infrastructure developments such as roads or telecommunications towers were reportedly constructed in sparsely populated areas, primarily benefiting contractors affiliated with political elites. Such practices divert resources away from vulnerable communities and weaken the substantive impact of poverty reduction efforts.

Rent-seeking behavior is further enabled by institutional weaknesses and limited oversight mechanisms. Informants indicated that gaps in accountability structures allow actors within political networks to redirect funds or reshape project priorities to serve strategic interests. Funds earmarked for essential infrastructure in underserved areas were sometimes redirected toward projects that enhanced the visibility of political figures rather than addressed pressing socio-economic challenges. These dynamics reflect neopatrimonial governance patterns, where informal networks override formal institutional controls. Informants also noted delays in project implementation linked to bureaucratic bottlenecks and the prioritization of politically advantageous initiatives. Such delays reduce program effectiveness and create additional opportunities for budget manipulation and timeline extensions that benefit rent-seeking actors.

Federal–state relations further contribute to the persistence of rent-seeking practices. Informants reported that federal transfers for poverty eradication programs are often shaped by political considerations, influencing which projects receive approval and funding. Within this structure, actors connected to federal or state elites may secure contracts or access to resources through political alignment rather than objective need assessments. Projects in politically strategic areas are prioritized, while marginalized regions experience slower or incomplete implementation. This pattern reinforces extractive institutional characteristics, where centralized power structures facilitate selective distribution of resources.

A critical dimension of rent-seeking behavior identified in the findings is the prioritization of short-term gains over long-term developmental transformation. Informants observed that projects offering immediate financial returns or political visibility are often favored over sustainable initiatives such as education, healthcare, or agricultural development. This short-term orientation limits structural poverty reduction and channels resources toward maintaining patronage networks rather than

empowering communities toward self-reliance. Consequently, poverty eradication programs risk reinforcing dependency rather than promoting sustainable socio-economic mobility.

The findings also reveal operational inefficiencies associated with rent-seeking practices. Informants recounted instances of project duplication, incomplete implementation, or repeated approvals under revised budgets. In some cases, projects were approved multiple times, with funds dispersed incrementally without full completion. These patterns reflect systemic vulnerabilities within governance structures and demonstrate how rent-seeking actors exploit procedural gaps. Such inefficiencies erode public trust, weaken program credibility, and compromise the integrity of poverty eradication initiatives.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that rent-seeking behavior embedded within patronage practices significantly undermines the effectiveness and outcomes of poverty eradication programs in Sabah. Political and economic actors exploit institutional weaknesses to manipulate resource allocation, influence project priorities, and extract personal or network-based benefits. These dynamics are consistent with neopatrimonial governance characteristics, where informal patronage networks dominate formal institutional procedures. Addressing these challenges requires structural reforms that strengthen transparency, accountability, and institutional oversight. Reinforcing merit-based procurement systems, enhancing anti-corruption enforcement, and decentralizing monitoring mechanisms can reduce opportunities for rent-seeking behavior. Moreover, increasing community participation in program planning and oversight may mitigate elite capture and promote more equitable and sustainable poverty alleviation outcomes in Sabah.

5.7 Summary

This study critically examines the dynamics of poverty eradication programs in Sabah through the theoretical frameworks of neopatrimonialism and extractive institutions, revealing systemic weaknesses in governance, resource allocation, and program implementation. The findings demonstrate how political patronage, rent-seeking practices, and institutional inefficiencies undermine program effectiveness and perpetuate inequality within the state. Political patronage functions as a dominant

governance mechanism, where resources are distributed according to political loyalty and affiliation rather than objective community need. This produces entrenched patron–client relationships that foster dependency among impoverished communities and reinforce the authority of political elites over marginalized populations.

Rent-seeking behavior further compromises the integrity of poverty eradication programs. Politically connected actors manipulate project priorities, secure inflated contracts, and redirect development resources for personal or political advantage. These patterns reflect the characteristics of extractive institutions, where public resources are captured by elite networks rather than equitably distributed. As a consequence, resources intended for vulnerable communities are misallocated, resulting in inefficiencies, incomplete projects, and unmet socio-economic needs. Federal–state dynamics intensify these disparities, as resource allocations are frequently influenced by political considerations, often favoring constituencies aligned with the federal government while neglecting rural and opposition-led areas in Sabah.

Institutional weaknesses compound these structural challenges. The findings identify recurring delays in project implementation, limited transparency in fund distribution, and weak accountability mechanisms, all of which create opportunities for rent-seeking and elite capture. These deficiencies distort the objectives of poverty eradication initiatives and weaken public confidence in governance institutions. Moreover, the dependency generated by patron–client networks restricts community autonomy and constrains long-term development, as short-term political benefits are prioritized over sustainable poverty reduction strategies.

The implications of these findings highlight the necessity of systemic reform. Strengthening transparency, reinforcing merit-based allocation systems, and enhancing institutional oversight are essential to reduce patronage influence and rent-seeking behavior. Decentralizing decision-making authority and empowering local institutions can promote context-sensitive and needs-based implementation. Additionally, recalibrating federal–state relations to ensure equitable and consistent resource distribution is critical in addressing Sabah’s structural development challenges.

In conclusion, this study provides a critical assessment of the governance structures underpinning poverty eradication programs in Sabah. The influence of neopatrimonial practices and extractive institutional arrangements has compromised the effectiveness of these programs and entrenched cycles of inequality and

dependency. Addressing these systemic deficiencies requires a shift toward transparent, accountable, and inclusive governance practices that prioritize socio-economic development over political expediency. Strengthening institutional integrity and reducing elite capture are fundamental to establishing a more equitable and sustainable poverty alleviation framework in Sabah.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion, theoretical implications, and practical significance of this study. It synthesizes the research findings, highlights their alignment with the theoretical framework, and discusses their contributions to the broader literature on political patronage and poverty eradication programs. The chapter examines how the findings validate and extend the application of neopatrimonialism theory, particularly within the context of Sabah, and analyses their implications for understanding governance, resource allocation, and institutional dynamics in poverty reduction efforts. Furthermore, it emphasizes the practical relevance of these findings for policymakers and stakeholders by outlining actionable insights to address systemic challenges and promote more inclusive and equitable development strategies.

6.2 Conclusion

This study critically examines political patronage in poverty eradication programs in Sabah through the lens of the “Reversal of Fortune” framework, integrating neopatrimonialism, patrimonialism, and extractive institutions to understand how informal power structures and institutional weaknesses shape developmental outcomes. The findings demonstrate that these programs are not merely weakened by technical flaws but are structurally influenced by political interests and elite networks, resulting in limited capacity to address the root causes of poverty. Formal institutions established to promote equity and socio-economic advancement are frequently subordinated to informal patronage systems and rent-seeking practices that prioritize political loyalty and elite consolidation over community welfare.

At the foundation of these dynamics is patrimonialism, where governance is structured around personal relationships and loyalty-based networks. The study illustrates how patron–client relationships underpin resource distribution in Sabah, with political elites acting as patrons who allocate benefits selectively in exchange for political support. Allocation decisions are rarely grounded in objective assessments of

need; instead, they reflect strategic political calculations aimed at preserving influence. This reinforces dependency, as communities become reliant on political intermediaries for access to resources. Poverty eradication programs are frequently concentrated in constituencies aligned with ruling elites, while rural and marginalized communities remain underserved. Such patterns intensify socio-economic disparities and constrain local autonomy.

The extractive nature of institutional arrangements further compounds these challenges. The findings reveal recurring rent-seeking behavior, in which politically connected actors leverage influence to secure contracts and redirect development funds for personal or political advantage. Resources intended for infrastructure and community development are sometimes diverted toward symbolic or politically strategic projects with limited substantive impact. Inflated contracts and incomplete projects reflect institutional arrangements that privilege elite networks over equitable distribution. These characteristics align with extractive institutional theory, where governance structures function to sustain elite dominance rather than promote inclusive growth.

Neopatrimonialism provides the overarching structure linking patrimonial practices and extractive tendencies within Sabah's governance system. Although formal institutions such as federal and state agencies administer poverty programs, their functions are frequently shaped by informal negotiations and political alignments operating within and alongside official structures. This dual institutional order allows formal legitimacy to coexist with informal dominance, weakening transparency and merit-based allocation processes. Centralized governance further reinforces these dynamics, as federal authorities retain substantial influence over resource allocation to Sabah. This centralization facilitates political intervention in funding decisions, often directing projects toward politically aligned constituencies rather than areas of greatest developmental need.

Federal–state relations illustrate the interaction of these theoretical dimensions. Centralized control over financial transfers and program approvals enables political leverage in the distribution of poverty eradication resources. Allocations may be delayed, reduced, or selectively implemented, reinforcing regional imbalances and limiting the capacity of local institutions to respond to Sabah's distinct socio-economic conditions. This disconnect between centralized priorities and localized realities

exemplifies extractive governance patterns that privilege political alignment over structural reform.

Institutional weaknesses further sustain these dynamics. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited transparency, and weak accountability mechanisms create opportunities for continued patronage and rent-seeking. Delays in fund disbursement and project execution diminish program effectiveness and, in some cases, result in the reallocation of unused funds to politically connected initiatives. These patterns reflect a governance environment where informal networks exert sustained influence over formal procedures, blurring distinctions between public authority and private interest.

In conclusion, the study underscores the necessity of systemic reform to address entrenched patronage networks and rent-seeking practices within Sabah's governance framework. Strengthening institutional integrity through transparent procurement processes, merit-based allocation, and robust oversight mechanisms is essential to reduce elite capture. Decentralizing decision-making authority and empowering local institutions can enhance responsiveness to Sabah's socio-economic context and reduce structural dependency on centralized power structures.

Furthermore, promoting participatory governance and community involvement in resource allocation can challenge patron–client dynamics and foster accountability. By confronting the institutional and political structures identified in this study, Sabah can move beyond patterns associated with “reversal of fortune” and progress toward a governance model grounded in equity, transparency, and sustainable development. Such reforms are critical not only for improving poverty eradication outcomes but also for strengthening public trust and institutional legitimacy in Sabah's development trajectory.

6.3 Theoretical Implication

The findings of this study generate important theoretical implications by extending and applying the “Reversal of Fortune” framework, which integrates neopatrimonialism, patrimonialism, and extractive institutions to examine the governance of poverty eradication programs in Sabah. This framework highlights the interconnected relationship between informal power structures and weakened formal institutions, offering a critical perspective on how systemic governance distortions

perpetuate poverty and inequality. By linking these theoretical strands, the study advances understanding of how power, resource allocation, and institutional arrangements interact within politically fragmented and economically marginalized contexts.

First, the study reinforces the relevance of neopatrimonialism in explaining how formal institutional structures are reshaped by informal patronage networks to serve elite interests. Although governance mechanisms in Sabah are formally structured to deliver equitable poverty reduction, the findings demonstrate that patron–client relationships and informal negotiations significantly influence decision-making processes. Neopatrimonialism therefore provides an effective lens for bridging formal institutional analysis with informal power dynamics, illustrating how institutional rules coexist with personalized authority. The study extends neopatrimonial theory by demonstrating its interaction with patrimonial practices and extractive institutional tendencies, showing that these elements operate simultaneously rather than independently.

Second, the findings reaffirm the continued relevance of patrimonialism in shaping governance practices. Resource distribution in Sabah reflects loyalty-based allocation patterns, where political elites function as patrons who distribute benefits selectively to clients in exchange for political support. Such patterns reinforce hierarchical authority and limit merit-based decision-making. The study demonstrates that patrimonial relationships remain embedded within contemporary governance structures, influencing program implementation and resource prioritization. By situating patrimonialism within the broader “Reversal of Fortune” framework, the research clarifies how personalized authority structures weaken institutional accountability and hinder sustainable poverty reduction.

Third, the study strengthens the explanatory value of extractive institutional theory. Evidence of rent-seeking behavior, contract manipulation, and politically motivated allocation decisions illustrates how governance systems may prioritize elite consolidation over inclusive development. Extractive institutional features manifest in the diversion of public resources, inflated contracts, and incomplete projects, all of which undermine equitable outcomes. By integrating extractive institutions with neopatrimonial and patrimonial frameworks, the study demonstrates that these theoretical constructs operate interdependently to produce systemic inequalities.

The combined application of these three theoretical pillars within the “Reversal of Fortune” framework represents a conceptual contribution. The framework explains how development initiatives designed to promote equity may be reversed in function when formal institutions are captured by informal networks. Rather than advancing inclusive growth, governance structures become mechanisms for sustaining elite dominance. The findings illustrate the cyclical and self-reinforcing interaction between neopatrimonialism, patrimonialism, and extractive institutions, thereby offering a more comprehensive model for analysing governance failure beyond single-theory explanations.

Furthermore, the study contributes empirical evidence from Sabah, a context that remains underrepresented in governance and institutional development scholarship. By applying the “Reversal of Fortune” framework to a federal–state setting characterized by centralization, political contestation, and regional inequality, the research demonstrates how these theoretical constructs manifest within a decentralized yet politically centralized system. This contextual grounding enhances theoretical discourse by emphasizing the role of federal–state relations in shaping institutional dynamics and development outcomes.

Finally, the findings suggest theoretical pathways toward institutional transformation. The transition from extractive to inclusive institutional arrangements requires weakening neopatrimonial and patrimonial practices that privilege political loyalty over equitable distribution. The study underscores the importance of strengthening transparency, accountability, and merit-based governance structures to disrupt cycles of dependency and elite capture. By articulating the interrelationship among these theoretical components, the research provides a foundation for further inquiry into how inclusive institutional reforms may emerge within politically complex and resource-rich environments.

In conclusion, this study advances theoretical discourse by integrating neopatrimonialism, patrimonialism, and extractive institutional theory within the “Reversal of Fortune” framework to analyse governance challenges in Sabah. The findings demonstrate how these concepts collectively explain systemic inequality and developmental stagnation. Beyond extending theoretical understanding, the framework offers analytical clarity for examining governance reform and inclusive development in marginalized regions.

6.4 Summary

This chapter synthesizes the study's findings within the "Reversal of Fortune" framework, which integrates neopatrimonialism, patrimonialism, and extractive institutions to critically analyse the governance and implementation of poverty eradication programs in Sabah. The conclusion identifies recurring patterns of political patronage, rent-seeking behavior, and institutional inefficiencies that undermine the intended objectives of poverty alleviation. The findings demonstrate how informal power networks reshape formal governance systems, converting development programs into mechanisms for political consolidation and resource extraction rather than equitable socio-economic transformation.

Political patronage emerges as a dominant structural feature, with patron–client relationships shaping the allocation of resources and reinforcing dependency among marginalized communities. Rent-seeking practices, including the manipulation of development projects for political or personal advantage, further reflect extractive institutional tendencies. These behaviors contribute to resource misallocation, inflated contracts, and incomplete or symbolic projects with limited developmental impact. Federal–state asymmetries intensify these distortions, as centralized authority and political considerations influence allocation decisions, often favoring constituencies aligned with federal interests while rural and underserved areas remain marginalized. Institutional weaknesses, such as delays in fund disbursement and limited oversight mechanisms, create enabling conditions for informal patronage networks to persist, reinforcing the neopatrimonial character of governance in Sabah.

The theoretical implications reinforce the relevance of the "Reversal of Fortune" framework as an integrative analytical lens. Neopatrimonialism explains how formal institutional structures are co-opted by informal patronage systems, while patrimonialism highlights the persistence of loyalty-based resource distribution and personalized authority. Extractive institutional theory is extended through empirical evidence of rent-seeking and elite capture, illustrating how governance mechanisms may privilege consolidation of power over inclusive development. Together, these concepts reveal the cyclical nature of governance failure, where developmental intentions are reversed as institutions are weakened by political interference and informal power dynamics.

The study's theoretical contributions lie in its integration of these three frameworks within a federal–state context characterized by centralization, political fragmentation, and regional inequality. By grounding the analysis in Sabah's socio-political environment, the research advances governance scholarship through context-sensitive application of institutional theory. The findings also emphasize the necessity of transitioning from extractive to inclusive institutional arrangements by strengthening transparency, accountability, and participatory governance mechanisms.

In summary, this chapter underscores the interconnected roles of neopatrimonialism, patrimonialism, and extractive institutions in shaping the limitations of poverty eradication programs in Sabah. These theoretical constructs collectively explain persistent inequality and structural dependency while offering a coherent framework for analysing governance reform. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the need for transformative institutional change aimed at promoting equity, institutional integrity, and sustainable development in marginalized regions.

CHAPTER 7

LIMITATION AND RECOMMENDATION

7.1 Introduction

This section outlines the limitations and recommendations of the study, offering a critical reflection on constraints encountered during the research process and proposing strategies to address them. The limitations identify areas where the scope, methodology, or data collection may have influenced the depth and breadth of the findings, including regional focus, access to information, and reliance on qualitative methods. These constraints indicate directions for refinement and expansion in future research.

The recommendations present practical, theoretical, and policy-oriented measures to strengthen future inquiry and governance practice. These include expanding comparative research, refining methodological approaches, strengthening institutional reforms, and promoting community-driven strategies to address systemic challenges in poverty eradication programmes. Together, the limitations and recommendations provide a structured foundation for advancing knowledge and improving governance and poverty alleviation efforts in Sabah and similar contexts

7.2 Limitation

This study presents several limitations that shape the interpretation of its findings. First, the research focuses exclusively on poverty eradication programmes in Sabah. While this enables detailed contextual analysis, it restricts the generalisability of the findings, as Sabah's political and economic characteristics may differ from other regions in Malaysia or internationally. The sensitive nature of the subject, particularly issues relating to political patronage, rent-seeking, and informal power networks, constrained access to certain stakeholders and information. Some respondents were cautious in sharing detailed insights, which limited the diversity of perspectives available for analysis.

In addition, the study relies predominantly on qualitative data. Although this approach effectively captures the dynamics of neopatrimonial practices and extractive institutional arrangements, it limits the capacity to quantify the scale of issues such as

resource misallocation or statistically validate emerging patterns. The absence of supporting quantitative indicators may render some findings interpretative rather than empirically measurable.

Furthermore, the temporal scope of the research restricts the ability to assess long-term institutional change or historical trajectories in governance practices. The exclusive reliance on the “Reversal of Fortune” framework, although integrative and analytically robust, may also limit engagement with alternative theoretical perspectives that could offer complementary insights.

7.3 Recommendation

To address these limitations and enhance the contribution of future research, several recommendations are proposed. Comparative studies across other Malaysian states or international contexts should be undertaken to determine whether the governance patterns identified in Sabah reflect broader structural trends. Expanding the empirical base would strengthen theoretical validation and contextual adaptability.

A mixed-methods design is recommended to integrate qualitative insights with quantitative indicators. Statistical analysis of programme allocations, leakage patterns, and distributional disparities would complement interpretive findings and strengthen empirical credibility. Longitudinal research is also necessary to examine how political patronage and poverty programmes evolve over time, providing deeper insight into structural continuity and transformation.

From a policy perspective, decentralising governance authority may enhance responsiveness to local socio-economic realities. Empowering local institutions to design and implement context-sensitive programmes can reduce excessive reliance on centralised decision-making structures. Strengthening transparency and accountability through independent audits, open data platforms, and digital monitoring systems can mitigate rent-seeking opportunities.

Enhanced community participation in planning, implementation, and monitoring processes is essential to reduce dependency on patronage networks and align programme delivery with genuine community needs. Anti-corruption measures, including transparent procurement systems and merit-based funding mechanisms, should be institutionalised to safeguard public resources.

The “Reversal of Fortune” framework may also be refined through integration with complementary perspectives such as institutional change theory or political economy analysis to broaden explanatory scope. Capacity-building initiatives for local institutions should prioritise ethical governance, professional competence, and resistance to informal power networks.

Finally, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should incorporate performance indicators, community feedback systems, and geospatial mapping technologies to detect inefficiencies promptly and strengthen accountability.

7.4 Summary

This chapter critically reflects on the limitations of the study and provides actionable recommendations to address these gaps and enhance the effectiveness of future research and policy interventions. Among the key limitations is the study’s narrow focus on poverty eradication programs in Sabah, which, while allowing for an in-depth understanding of the region’s governance dynamics, limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Additionally, the sensitive nature of the topics, such as political patronage and rent-seeking, restricted access to certain stakeholders and information, resulting in limited diversity of perspectives. The reliance on qualitative data further constrained the study's capacity to quantitatively measure systemic issues like resource misallocation or dependency, while the temporal scope limited the ability to explore long-term trends in governance practices. Moreover, the exclusive use of the "Reversal of Fortune" framework although effective in integrating neopatrimonialism, patrimonialism, and extractive institutions may have restricted the exploration of alternative theoretical perspectives that could provide additional insights.

To overcome these limitations, several recommendations are proposed. Future research should expand its scope to include comparative studies across other states or regions to validate the applicability of the "Reversal of Fortune" framework in diverse governance systems. A mixed-methods approach integrating qualitative and quantitative data is recommended to provide a more comprehensive understanding and allow for statistical validation of findings. Longitudinal studies are also suggested to capture the historical evolution of governance and poverty eradication efforts. Policy recommendations focus on decentralizing governance to empower local authorities and fostering transparency and accountability through independent audits, public access to

information, and strict anti-corruption measures. Greater community participation in program design and monitoring is essential to ensure initiatives meet genuine needs and reduce dependency on patron-client systems. Additionally, refining the "Reversal of Fortune" framework by incorporating alternative theories, such as institutional change or political economy approaches, could enhance its theoretical robustness. Capacity-building initiatives for local governance and improved monitoring mechanisms using technology are also critical to fostering accountability and reducing inefficiencies.

In summary, this chapter underscores the need for broader research and transformative governance reforms to address the systemic challenges identified in the study. By tackling these limitations and implementing the proposed recommendations, future research and policy efforts can create a more equitable and effective framework for poverty alleviation, contributing to sustainable development in marginalized regions like Sabah.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

The Informant

- | | |
|------------|--|
| P1 | * Pegawai Pembangunan, Perniagaan dan Pelaburan, di Bawah CMI |
| P2 | * The Chief Executive Officer of One of State Agency |
| P3 | * Member of Parliament, Serving the state for almost 10 years |
| P4 | * Member of Parliament Sabah West Coast |
| P5 | * Member of Parliament in Sabah state |
| P6 | * The Chairman of APPGM and the Politician |
| P7 | * Top Bureaucrat in Educational Department |
| P8 | * Top Bureaucrat from Agency under KSTI |
| P9 | * Officer of Ministry under the MAFFI |
| P10 | * Officer under the CMI |
| P11 | * Informant from State Statutory Body |
| P12 | * Politically Linked Individual, the ADK |
| P13 | *Member of Parliament of Sabah East Coast |
| P14 | *Assistant Director of State Secretariat Agency |
| P15 | *The Officer Development of Chief Minister Department |
| P16 | *Deputy Chief Minister |
| P17 | *Assistant Director of State Planning Unit |



Dewan Undangan Negeri Sabah
Aras 4, Bangunan Dewan Undangan Negeri Sabah
Peti Surat 11247
88813 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.
Telefon: 088-424415/424405/424406/427533
Faks: 088-427333/439769
<http://www.sabah.gov.my/dun>



Rujukan Tuan : 100-FSPPP(PT.30/7)
Rujukan : DUNS:100-29/8 Jld 25 /()
Tarikh : 7 November 2024

YBhg Dr. Sarina Othman

Ketua Pusat Pengajian Pasca Siswazah,
Fakulti Sains Pentadbiran dan Pengajian Polisi,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Negeri Sembilan,
Kampus Seremban, Persiaran Seremban Tiga/1, Seremban 3,
70300 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan

Puan,

KEBENARAN MENGHADIRI SIDANG SEBAGAI PEMERHATI SIDANG

Dengan segala hormatnya, saya diarah merujuk kepada surat pihak puan dengan rujukan **100-FSPPP(PT.30/7)** yang diterima pada **6 Oktober 2024** mengenai perkara tersebut di atas.

2. Sukacita dimaklumkan bahawa pejabat ini memberi kelulusan dan kebenaran kepada senarai pemerhati seperti ketetapan berikut:

SELASA/RABU/KHAMIS (19,20 & 21 NOVEMBER 2024)	
Nama	Masa
Sitti Aisyah Binti Orlando (941002126884)	10.00 Pagi - 12.00 T.Hari

3. Kebenaran ini tertakluk kepada peraturan-peraturan yang wajib dipatuhi ketika menghadiri sidang seperti berikut:

- 3.1 Mematuhi etika pakaian semasa menghadiri sidang seperti di **Lampiran A**;
- 3.2 Meletakkan kenderaan di Kawasan Parkir C (luar bangunan menghadap laut);
- 3.3 Mendaftar kehadiran dan mendapatkan ID Pemerhati di Kaunter Pintu C (Lapang Sasar), Aras 2;
- 3.4 Bersedia **30 minit lebih awal** sebelum masa yang dijadualkan masuk ke Zon C Dewan Persidangan;
- 3.5 Meminimumkan pergerakan dan memastikan telefon bimbit dalam keadaan senyap agar tidak mengganggu perjalanan sidang;
- 3.6 Mematuhi tempoh masa yang dibenarkan berada dalam Dewan

“SABAH MAJU JAYA”



UNIVERSITI
TEKNOLOGI
MARA

Fakulti
Sains Pentadbiran
dan Pengajian
Polisi

Ruj. Kami : 100-FSPPP(PT. 30/7)

Tarikh : 1446H 4 جمادي الأول

: 6 November 2024

KEPADA SESIAPA YANG BERKENAAN

Tuan/puan

**PENGESAHAN PENGAJIAN DAN SOKONGAN MENGHADIRI SESI PEMBENTANGAN BAJET
DEWAN UNDANGAN NEGERI**

Nama Pelajar : Sitti Aisyah Binti Olando
No. Kad Pengenalan : 941002126884
No. Pelajar : 2022693088

Dengan ini disahkan bahawa penama di atas adalah pelajar Universiti Teknologi MARA dan sedang mengikuti program seperti maklumat dibawah.

2. Butiran pelajar adalah seperti berikut:

Program : AM990 - Doktor Falsafah (Sains Pentadbiran)
Fakulti : Fakulti Sains Pentadbiran dan Pengajian Polisi
Kampus : UiTM Shah Alam
Mod Pengajian : Sepenuh Masa
HPNG : Sedang Maju
Sesi Masuk : 20224 (Oktober 2022)
Jangka Tamat : 20262 (Mac 2026)
Status : Aktif

3. Pihak fakulti dengan ini menyokong permohonan pelajar untuk menghadiri sesi pembentangan bajet Dewan Undangan Negeri sebagai memenuhi kriteria dalam kajian beliau.

Sekian, terima kasih.

اوسنها، تقوى، مليا

"MALAYSIA MADANI"
"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

DR. SARINA OTHMAN
Ketua Pusat Pengajian Pasca Siswazah

s.k. 1. Fail Pentadbiran (Akademik) FSPPP, UiTM Shah Alam

Fakulti Sains Pentadbiran dan Pengajian Polisi
Universiti Teknologi MARA
Cawangan Negeri Sembilan
Kampus Seremban
Persiaran Seremban Tiga/1, Seremban 3
70300 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA
Tel: (+606) 6342024/2026 Faks : (+606)633 5815



Reference : 500-FSPPP(PT.23/4/8)
Date : 05 March 2024

SITTI AISYAH BINTI OLANDO (2022693088)
FACULTY OF ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCE AND POLICY STUDIES
UTM Shah Alam

Mr/Mrs,

DEFENCE OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL (DRP) RESULT

STUDENT'S NAME : SITTI AISYAH BINTI OLANDO
NO. STUDENT : 2022693088
PROGRAM CODE : AM990
THESIS TITLE : POLITICAL PATRONAGE & POVERTY ERADICATION PROGRAMS IN SABAH
DRP DATE : 05 March 2024
DRP COUNT : 1

2. With reference to your Defence of Research Proposal (DRP) session on 05 March 2024, the panel of examiners has agreed to grant you the result as stated below:

Ranking	Description
2	Proposal accepted with minimal amendments. The amendment must be verified by the main supervisor and submitted within two(2) weeks from the date of DRP

3. Please refer to the supervisor for further action.

Thank You

"MALAYSIA MADANI"
"BERSIHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Your sincerely,
Dean

c.c

1. Dean, Institute of Postgraduate Studies (IPSts)
2. Head of Centre for Graduate Studies

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UNIVERSITI
TEKNOLOGI
MARA

Pejabat
Timbalan Naib Canselor
(Penyelidikan dan Inovasi)

Reference : 600-TNCPI (5/1/6)
Our reference : REC/08/2024 (PG/MR/374)
Date : 1445H 3 صفر
8 August 2024

Ms Sitti Aisyah Olando - 2022693088
(Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr Firdausi Suffian)
UiTM Sabah Branch
Kota Kinabalu Campus, Beg Berkunci 71,
88997 Kota Kinabalu
SABAH

and Greetings
وسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

Ms

APPROVAL LETTER - UiTM RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Research Ethics Committee (REC). After considering your application, the Committee approved your proposal titled "Political Patronage and Poverty Eradication Programs in Sabah (*Politik Naungan dan Program Pembasmian Kemiskinan di Sabah*)" at Menara Kinabalu, Kota Kinabalu Sabah. Details of the approval are as follows:

Ref. number:	REC/08/2024 (PG/MR/374)
Approval Period:	8 August 2024 until 1 January 2025
Authorised personnel:	1. Sitti Aisyah Olando 2. Assoc. Prof. Dr Firdausi Suffian 3. Dr Sharifah Nursyahidah Syed Annuar

The UiTM Research Ethics Committee operates in accordance to the ICH Good Clinical Practice Guidelines, Malaysian Good Clinical Practice Guidelines and the Declaration of Helsinki. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with these guidelines and declaration.

We draw to your attention the requirement that a report on this research, must be submitted every 12 months from the date of the approval or on the completion of the project, whichever occurs first. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of consent for the project to proceed. Amendments, if any, to the study documents are to be submitted to the REC for approval.

If you require further information, please contact the REC Secretariat at 03-55448069/03-55442794 or email at recsecretariat@uitm.edu.my.

اوسهيا، تقوى، موليا

"MALAYSIA MADANI"
"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"

Yours sincerely,

(EMERITUS PROFESSOR/DATO' DR RAYMOND AZMAN ALI)
Chairman
UiTM Research Ethics Committee

c.c.: Deputy Rector (PJIM&A), UiTM Sabah Branch

Universiti Teknologi MARA
Aras 3, Bangunan Wawasan
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA
Tel: (+603) 5544 2004/2255
Faks: (+603) 5544 2070





Nama saya Sitti Aisyah Orlando (Nombor Pelajar-2022693088) dari fakulti Sains Pentadbiran dan Pengajian Polisi, sedang melanjutkan pengajian Doktor Falsafah dalam Sains Pentadbiran dan kini sedang menjalankan penyelidikan mengenai 'Patronage Politik dan Program Pembasmian Kemiskinan di Sabah'.

Struktur soal selidik ini adalah soalan terbuka dan spesifik, yang mana memberikan peluang kepada informan untuk berkongsi pengalaman yang berkaitan dengan kajian ini. Pendekatan ini bertujuan untuk mewujudkan pemahaman yang menyeluruh tentang kajian dan juga cara pelaksanaannya khususnya diperingkat negeri Sabah.

Saya amat menghargai sekiranya pihak informan dapat meluangkan masa untuk menjawab wawancara ini. Saya berharap pihak informan dapat membenarkan sesi wawancara ini untuk dirakam, dan untuk makluman, segala maklumat semasa sesi wawancara ini akan dirahsiakan dan hanya bertujuan untuk tujuan akademik sahaja.

Sekiranya mempunyai sebarang maklum balas atau cadangan untuk soalan tambahan, bolehlah berhubung terus dengan penyelidik.

Terima kasih atas kerjasama dan sokongan anda dalam proses ini. Saya berharap dapat mendengar maklum balas yang positif daripada pihak informan.

Sekian

Sitti Aisyah Orlando (012-8013484)

Pelajar Calon Kedoktoran

University Teknologi MARA



Tajuk Kajian : Politik Patronage dan Program Pembasmian Kemiskinan di Negeri Sabah

Penyelidik : Sitti Aisyah Orlando (2022693088)

Nama Informan : Top Bureaucratic (Code: P1/P2/P3/P4.....)

Lokasi : Tarikh/Masa :

A) Pendahuluan :

1. Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera. Saya pelajar PhD dari UiTM ingin menjalankan kajian berkaitan dengan politik patronage dan program pembasmian kemiskinan di Sabah.
2. Terima kasih kerana Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan sudi untuk ditemubual pada hari ini. Juga terima kasih kerana sudi untuk berkongsi pengalaman dan kepakaran Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan

B) Soalan Pengenalan :

1. Boleh Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan perkenalkan diri dan kongsi pengalaman Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan berkenaan dengan penglibatan Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan dalam pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan khususnya di peringkat negeri Sabah ini.
2. Pada pendapat Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan apakah cabara yang dihadapi oleh negeri Sabah dalam membasmi kemiskinan?
3. Pada pendapat Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan adakah perubahan terhadap pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan setelah Kerajaan negeri melalui fasa pertukaran Kerajaan?
4. Adakah Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan merasakan terdapatnya unsur-unsur campur tangan daripada ahli politik dalam pentadbiran samaada daripada Persekutuan mahupun negeri?
5. Adakah Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan rasa campur tangan politik daripada Persekutuan ataupun negeri mempengaruhi pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan di peringkat negeri Sabah?

C) Penutup :

1. Terima kasih sekali lagi Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan kerana sudi untuk meluangkan masa bagi menjayakan temubual ini.
2. Perkongsian ini memberi makna yang besar bagi saya dalam menyiapkan penyelidikan saya ini.

¹Soalan temubual ini bersifat semi-struktur yang mana penyelidik dapat mengemukakan soalan tambahan secara spontan semasa sesi temubual dijalankan



Tajuk Kajian : Politik Patronage dan Program Pembasmian Kemiskinan di Negeri Sabah

Penyelidik : Sitti Aisyah Orlando (2022693088)

Nama Informan : Policy Maker (Code: P5/P6/P7)

Lokasi :

Tarikh/Masa :

A) Pendahuluan :

1. Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera. Saya pelajar PhD dari UiTM ingin menjalankan kajian berkaitan dengan politik patronage dan program pembasmian kemiskinan di Sabah.
2. Terima kasih kerana Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan sudi untuk ditemubual pada hari ini. Juga terima kasih kerana sudi untuk berkongsi pengalaman dan kepakaran Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan

B) Soalan Pengenalan :

1. Boleh Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan perkenalkan diri dan kongsikan pengalaman Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan berkenaan dengan penglibatan Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan dalam pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan khususnya di peringkat negeri Sabah ini.
2. Apakah pandangan Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan terhadap program pembasmian kemiskinan di Sabah?
3. Apakah peranan besar yang dimainkan oleh pembuat dasar seperti Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan dalam melaksanakan program pembasmian kemiskinan di negeri Sabah ini?
4. Menurut pendapat Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan adakah berlakunya unsur-unsur seperti patronage ataupun pertimbangan politik khususnya dalam menjalankan program pembasmian kemiskinan di negeri Sabah ini?
5. Adakah Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan rasa campur tangan politik daripada Persekutuan ataupun negeri mempengaruhi pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan di peringkat negeri Sabah?

C) Penutup :

1. Terima kasih sekali lagi Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan kerana sudi untuk meluangkan masa bagi menjayakan temubual ini.
2. Perkongsian ini memberi makna yang besar bagi saya dalam menyiapkan penyelidikan saya ini.

²Soalan temubual ini bersifat semi-struktur yang mana penyelidik dapat mengemukakan soalan tambahan secara spontan semasa sesi temubual dijalankan



Tajuk Kajian : Politik Patronage dan Program Pembasmian Kemiskinan di Negeri Sabah

Penyelidik : Sitti Aisyah Orlando (2022693088)

Nama Informan : (Code: P8)

Lokasi : Tarikh/Masa :

A) Pendahuluan :

1. Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera. Saya pelajar PhD dari UiTM ingin menjalankan kajian berkaitan dengan politik patronage dan program pembasmian kemiskinan di Sabah.
2. Terima kasih kerana Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan sudi untuk ditemubual pada hari ini. Juga terima kasih kerana sudi untuk berkongsi pengalaman dan kepakaran Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan

B) Soalan Pengenalan :

1. Boleh Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan perkenalkan diri dan kongsi pengalaman Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan berkenaan dengan penglibatan Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan dalam pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan khususnya di peringkat negeri Sabah ini.
2. Apakah pandangan Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan terhadap program pembasmian kemiskinan di Sabah?
3. Menurut pengalaman Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan adakah Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan pernah terlibat dalam proses pemilihan kontraktor yang menjalankan projek pembasmian kemiskinan di Sabah ini?
4. Menurut pendapat Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan bagaimanakah proses lantikan kontraktor itu dibuat?
5. Adakah Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan rasa campur tangan politik daripada Persekutuan perlu dalam menjalankan program pembasmian kemiskinan di peringkat negeri ini?

C) Penutup :

1. Terima kasih sekali lagi Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan kerana sudi untuk meluangkan masa bagi menjayakan temubual ini.
2. Perkongsian ini memberi makna yang besar bagi saya dalam menyiapkan penyelidikan saya ini.

³Soalan temubual ini bersifat semi-struktur yang mana penyelidik dapat mengemukakan soalan tambahan secara spontan semasa sesi temubual dijalankan



Tajuk Kajian : Politik Patronage dan Program Pembasmian Kemiskinan di Negeri Sabah

Penyelidik : Sitti Aisyah Orlando (2022693088)

Nama Informan : (Code: P9 & P10)

Lokasi :

Tarikh/Masa :

A) Pendahuluan :

1. Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera. Saya pelajar PhD dari UiTM ingin menjalankan kajian berkaitan dengan politik patronage dan program pembasmian kemiskinan di Sabah.
2. Terima kasih kerana Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan sudi untuk ditemubual pada hari ini. Juga terima kasih kerana sudi untuk berkongsi pengalaman dan kepakaran Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan

B) Soalan Pengenalan :

1. Boleh Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan perkenalkan diri dan kongsi pengalaman Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan berkenaan dengan penglibatan Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan dalam pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan khususnya di peringkat negeri Sabah ini.
2. Bolehkah Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan terangkan bagaimana sebenarnya proses pemilihan dan pelantikan kontraktor di jalan diperingkat negeri Sabah?
3. Bagaimana pula dengan kontrak yang melibatkan program pembasmian khususnya di negeri Sabah ini Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan?
3. Menurut pengalaman Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan adakah Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan adakah proses pelantikan kontraktor dalam menyumbang kepada kelewatan pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan di peringkat negeri Sabah ini?
4. Adakah terdapat bentuk-bentuk tingkah laku pelobi yang Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan dapat lihat setelah proses pengagihan tender dikeluarkan?

C) Penutup :

1. Terima kasih sekali lagi Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan kerana sudi untuk meluangkan masa bagi menjayakan temubual ini.
2. Perkongsian ini memberi makna yang besar bagi saya dalam menyiapkan penyelidikan saya ini.

⁴Soalan temubual ini bersifat semi-struktur yang mana penyelidik dapat mengemukakan soalan tambahan secara spontan semasa sesi temubual dijalankan



Tajuk Kajian : Politik Patronage dan Program Pembasmian Kemiskinan di Negeri Sabah

Penyelidik : Sitti Aisyah Orlando (2022693088)

Nama Informan : (Code: P11 & P12)

Lokasi :

Tarikh/Masa :

A) Pendahuluan :

1. Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera. Saya pelajar PhD dari UiTM ingin menjalankan kajian berkaitan dengan politik patronage dan program pembasmian kemiskinan di Sabah.
2. Terima kasih kerana Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan sudi untuk ditemubual pada hari ini. Juga terima kasih kerana sudi untuk berkongsi pengalaman dan kepakaran Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan

B) Soalan Pengenalan :

1. Boleh Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan perkenalkan diri dan kongsi pengalaman Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan berkenaan dengan penglibatan Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan dalam pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan khususnya di peringkat negeri Sabah ini.
2. Bolehkah Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan terangkan bagaimana sebenarnya organisasi Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan terlibat dengan programs-program pembasmian kemiskinan khususnya di peringkat negeri Sabah?
3. Bagaimana idea program pembasmian kemiskinan sebenarnya tercetus? Menurut pendapat Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan?
4. Menurut pengalaman Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan siapakah yang banyak mempengaruhi Keputusan dalam pelaksanaan program kemiskinan di peringkat negeri Sabah ini?
5. Apakah cabaran paling besar yang dihadapi oleh organisasi Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan yang melibatkan pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan?

C) Penutup :

1. Terima kasih sekali lagi Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan kerana sudi untuk meluangkan masa bagi menjayakan temubual ini.
2. Perkongsian ini memberi makna yang besar bagi saya dalam menyiapkan penyelidikan saya ini.

⁵Soalan temubual ini bersifat semi-struktur yang mana penyelidik dapat mengemukakan soalan tambahan secara spontan semasa sesi temubual dijalankan



Tajuk Kajian : Politik Patronage dan Program Pembasmian Kemiskinan di Negeri Sabah

Penyelidik : Sitti Aisyah Orlando (2022693088)

Nama Informan : (Code: P13)

Lokasi :

Tarikh/Masa :

A) Pendahuluan :

1. Assalamualaikum dan salam sejahtera. Saya pelajar PhD dari UiTM ingin menjalankan kajian berkaitan dengan politik patronage dan program pembasmian kemiskinan di Sabah.
2. Terima kasih kerana Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan sudi untuk ditemubual pada hari ini. Juga terima kasih kerana sudi untuk berkongsi pengalaman dan kepakaran Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan

B) Soalan Pengenalan :

1. Boleh Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan perkenalkan diri dan kongsi pengalaman Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan berkenaan dengan penglibatan Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan dalam pelaksanaan program pembasmian kemiskinan khususnya di peringkat negeri Sabah ini.
2. Bolehkah Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan terangkan bagaimana sebenarnya organisasi Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan terlibat dengan proses pengagihan programs-programs pembasmian kemiskinan khususnya di peringkat negeri Sabah?
3. Bagaimana program pembasmian kemiskinan dilaksanakan sebenarnya? Menurut pendapat Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan?
4. Menurut pengalaman Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan adakah proses pengagihan ataupun penyaluran program pembasmian kemiskinan dipengaruhi oleh ahli politik?
5. Apakah cabaran paling besar yang dihadapi oleh organisasi Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan terutamanya apabila melibatkan proses pengagihan dan penyaluran program pembasmian kemiskinan khususnya di peringkat negeri Sabah ini?

C) Penutup :

1. Terima kasih sekali lagi Datuk/Datin/Tuan/Puan kerana sudi untuk meluangkan masa bagi menjayakan temubual ini.
2. Perkongsian ini memberi makna yang besar bagi saya dalam menyiapkan penyelidikan saya ini.

⁶Soalan temubual ini bersifat semi-struktur yang mana penyelidik dapat mengemukakan soalan tambahan secara spontan semasa sesi temubual dijalankan

Azwan Ahzran bin Perman
Pusat Pengajian Pascasiswazah
Universiti Teknologi MARA
88997 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

14 June 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I, Azwan Ahzran bin Perman, confirm that I have thoroughly proofread the interview questions of the student. The proofreading included a detailed review of grammar, punctuation, spelling, consistency, clarity, and formatting. All necessary corrections have been made to ensure the document is of high academic standard.

Should you have any questions regarding the proofreading process, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Azwan Ahzran bin Perman

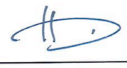
Postgraduate Coordinator UiTM Sabah

**SENARAI KEHADIRAN BAGI SESI KEDUA PERBINCANGAN KUMPULAN FOKUS DASAR TEMA KEMISKINAN
(SABAH)
PARLIMEN ANJURAN KUMPULAN RENTAS PARTI PARLIMEN MALAYSIA BERKENAAN**

**TARIKH: 5 OGOS 2024
MASA: 10AM-12PM
TEMPAT: INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
SESI: PERBINCANGAN BERSAMA AGENSI-AGENCI KERAJAAN SABAH**

Agensi-Agensi Kerajaan:

No.	Nama	Jawatan/Agency	Nombor Telefon	Tandatangan
1	Encik Mohd Izwan Izzudin bin Ramlan	Penolong Pengarah SSMJ, Jabatan Ketua Menteri		
2	Puan Faridah Giau	Timbalan SUT 2 KKTP, Kementerian Kerajaan Tempatan dan Perumahan		
3	Tuan Hassan Mahali	Timbalan Setiausaha Tetap, Kementerian Kerja Raya Sabah		
4	Puan Hani Sandra Musli	Timbalan Setiausaha Rendah Gred N52/Unit Anggaran Kementerian Kewangan Negeri Sabah		

5	Puan Faridah Ilah Latip	Kementerian Pembangunan Luar Bandar Sabah (KPLB)	019 244 5517	
6	Leong Kat Fun	Pihak Berkuasa Pembangunan Ekonomi dan Pelaburan Sabah (SEDIA)		
7	Encik Iwan Hermawan bin Haji Masrul	Pihak Berkuasa Pembangunan Ekonomi dan Pelaburan Sabah (SEDIA)		
8	Puan Salbia Binti Abas	Ketua Penolong Pengarah (BLTK), Jabatan Pembangunan Sumber Manusia (JPSM)		
9	Zamzul @ Rosmadi Bin Rebbin	Kementerian Kemajuan Desa dan Wilayah (KKDW) Sabah		
10	Tuan Haji Hanafiah bin Diman	Corporate Secretary YS, Yayasan Sabah		
11	Sanisah Binti Lairy	Pejabat Pembangunan Negeri Sabah		
12	Walter Alliun	PPN SABAH - ICU JPM		

13	✓ Encik Yahyah Sidek	Pengurus Pembangunan Perniagaan dan Pelaburan SEDCO		
14	Encik Azreen M Baham	Pegawai Pembangunan Perniagaan dan Pelaburan SEDCO		
15	Encik Raizal Pinjaman <i>Ramlee Duleah</i>	Pegawai Pembangunan Perniagaan dan Pelaburan SEDCO <i>Pada Usahawan</i>		

Pakar Bidang:

No.	Nama	Jawatan	Nombor Telefon	Tandatangan
1	Jain Yassin	Pensyarah, UiTM Sabah		
2	Sitti Aisyah Orlando	UiTM Sabah		
3	Mary Anne K. Baltazar	Advocates for Non- Discrimination and Access to Knowledge (ANAK)		

Wakil-wakil Institute of Development Studies (Sabah):

No.	Nama	Jawatan	Nombor Telefon	Tandatangan
1	Masneh Abd Ghani	Head of Sustainable Development Division		✓
2	Muntazillah Rhadiah Ramlee	Head of Corporate Services & PR Unit		
3	Siti Farizan Omar	Research Associate		
4	Mohd Rizal Bin Muslihin	Research Associate		
5	Norzila M. Fawzi	PR/Research Associate		
6	Faridah Suffian	Research Officer		✓
7	Sophia Hong	Research Officer		
8	Nurul Hafizah Abd Suhud	Research Officer		
9	Nur Fazila binti Jainal	Research Officer		
10	Rian Sanseh Masi	Multimedia Officer		
11	Isaac Xavier Leopaldo	Junior Multimedia		✓

12	Kathleen Anne Fernandez	Multimedia Officer		
13	Fernando Jerry	PR/Special Officer		✓
14	Gary Joel Melvin Majanga	IT & Data Management Officer		✓
15	James Minol	Admin		
16	Stephanie De Mercy Low	Secretary cum Research Asst.		St

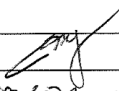
Wakil-wakil All Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG):

No.	Nama	Jawatan	Nombor Telefon	Tandatangan
1	Teo Sue Ann	Pengarah MySDG-CSI		✓
2	Khairil Ahmad	Konsultan MySDG-CSI		✓
3	Lydia Ann	Pegawai Penyelidik MySDG-CSI		Lydia Ann
4	Fazlina	Pegawai Penyelidik CCU-APPGMSDG		Fazlina
5	McJeanet	Pegawai Penyelidik CCU-APPGMSDG		McJeanet
6	Fatimah binti Mohd Yasin	Pegawai Penyelidik		Fatimah

		CCU-APPGMSDG		
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Lain-lain (Extra) :

No.	Nama	Jawatan	Nombor Telefon	Tandatangan
1	Junaenah Sulehan	Penyelidik		
2	Jamal	Penyelidik		
3	Aisyah	Penyelidik		
4	Tham Yui Tok (Job - Penyelidik Kuantan Sabah)	Petua Penyelidik Kuantan		Tham Yui Tok
5	Secixon Muhamin	kpp - STK Sbh.		Secixon Muhamin
6	Muhammad Farid Rozan	Penyelidik		Muhammad Farid Rozan
7	Paniirselvam Jangaman	APPGM-SDG		Paniirselvam Jangaman
8	Murad Abd Rahman	APPGM-SDG		Murad Abd Rahman
9				

10	WORSIH BNNUSR	KEMENTERIAN	010 982 800	
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PENTAMIN, PENTAMON DAN INOVASI MAMPUAN

No.	Nama	Jawatan/Agency	Nombor Telefon	Tandatangan
1				
2				
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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



Sitti Aisyah Orlando is a dedicated researcher pursuing her PhD at UiTM, specializing in governance, political economy, and sustainable development. Her doctoral research investigates the intersection of political patronage, institutional frameworks, and poverty eradication programs in Sabah, Malaysia. Through an integrated theoretical approach combining institutionalism, patrimonialism, and neopatrimonialism, her work explores how formal institutions, and informal networks shape the design, implementation, and outcomes of poverty reduction policies. Her research not only contributes to academic discourse but also seeks to inform policy reforms aimed at promoting equity, accountability, and sustainable development. Sitti Aisyah actively contributes to both academic and policy-making spheres. She has served as a member of the Technical Working Group (TWG) providing input to the Institute of Youth Research Development Malaysia, where her insights influence youth-focused policies in Sabah. Additionally, she is a representative of the FELO Sabah Maju Jaya (SMJ), where she collaborates with policymakers to advance state development initiatives. Her engagement with the FELO SMJ includes courtesy visits and strategic discussions with senior government officials to align state development policies with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Her involvement in research and policymaking has earned her accolades, including the Best Paper Award at the IMAC 2024 Conference, highlighting her impactful contributions to scholarly and practical knowledge in her field.

List of Publication:

- Orlando, S. A., & Suffian, F. (2020). The Role of Institutions in the Politics of Poverty Eradication Programmes: The Case of Sabah, Malaysia. In *Charting a Sustainable Future of ASEAN in Business and Social Sciences: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on the Future of ASEAN (ICoFA) 2019—Volume 1* (pp. 509-517). Springer Singapore.
- Orlando, S. A. (2021). The Politics of Poverty Eradication Programs in Sabah under Barisan Nasional Administration
- Orlando, S. A., & Suffian, F. (2023). The Development of Political Patronage Behinds The Social-Welfare State Policy. *Journal of Administrative Science*, 20(1), 283-296.
- Orlando, S. A., & Suffian, F. (2023). The Politics for Staying Poor: Populism & Elitism, Unraveling the Political Thread. INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON HUMAN RESOURCE ECONOMICS 2023 (ISHRE2023). e ISBN : 978-967-19892-7-2
- Orlando, S. A., & Ibrahim, K. (2024). Transformational Leadership: Examining the Linkage on Stimulating Innovative Work Behaviour within the State Public Service. 8th Regional Conference on Campus Sustainability 2024
- Orlando, S. A., & Suffian, F. (2025). Nurturing Good Governance: The Confluence of Patron-Networks, Institutional Dynamics and Tassawuf in A Manners of Exercising Political Power.
- Orlando, S., A., & Suffian, F. (2025). The Political Economy of Resources Curse. International Conference of Public Policy and Social Science
- Yun, W. S., Yassin, J. A. I. N., Nikensari, S. I., Gabir, J. A. M. A. L., Orlando, S. A., & Sitorus, B. A. (2025). Assessing industrialization and urbanization impact on environment sustainability in Malaysia. *Journal of Sustainability Science and Management*, 9.