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Diluting and Distorting Agrarian Reform:

Elite Influence on State Capacity in the Philippines

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Abstract

Land inequality remains a pressing global issue, and redistributing land is widely regarded as an important tool for reducing poverty and promoting rural development. Prior land redistribution efforts have produced inconsistent results, raising questions about the factors shaping implementation effectiveness. This thesis examines how the landed elite, a group whose power is rooted in landownership, influenced the redistributive implementation of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) during its first decade in the Philippines. Theoretically, the thesis combines state capacity theory with elite theory, creating a framework for examining how elite influence impacts policy-making and the utilization of state resources.

The study employs a theory-guided qualitative case study design, drawing on secondary sources such as academic literature and policy documents. The findings show that during policy formulation, the landed elite shaped CARP's design in ways that weakened the coercive character of redistribution, allowing landowners to comply formally while retaining control over land. During implementation, landed elites influenced or exploited weaknesses in information systems, funding structures, credit access, bureaucratic appointments, and local administrative practice. The thesis contributes to the literature by demonstrating how elites can influence institutional and resource conditions that enable the exercise of state capacity.

Keywords: agrarian reform, Philippines, landed elite, state capacity, policy implementation.

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Abbreviations

ALRP	Accelerated Land Reform Program
ARB	Agrarian Reform Beneficiary
ARC	Agrarian Reform Community
AVA	Agribusiness Venture Arrangement
CA	Compulsory Acquisition
CAC	Cabinet Action Committee
CARL	Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law
CARP	Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program
CARPER	Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms
CLOA	Certificate of Land Ownership Award
DAR	Department of Agrarian Reform
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
LBP	Land Bank of the Philippines
LGU	Local Government Unit
LRA	Land Registration Authority
OLT	Operation Land Transfer
PD 27	Presidential Decree No. 27
RA 1400	Republic Act No. 1400 / Land Reform Act of 1955
RA 3844	Republic Act No. 3844 / Agricultural Land Reform Code
RA 6657	Republic Act No. 6657 / Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law
SDO	Stock Distribution Option
VLT	Voluntary Land Transfer
VOS	Voluntary Offer to Sell

1 Introduction

Agrarian reform, including land redistribution, has long been considered a central instrument for addressing inequality and promoting rural development (Berry, 2024, p. 15; Jacobs, 2013). While some countries have had successful reforms, others have produced limited and uneven outcomes (Lipton & Saghai, 2017). Some explanations emphasize administrative and institutional constraints, arguing that limited state resources hinder policy implementation (Tuaño & Cruz, 2023). Others focus on power relations, highlighting how landed elites shape, resist, or redirect reform efforts to protect their interests (Diprose & McGregor, 2009). While both perspectives are well established in the literature, the relationship between elite influence and state capacity is often treated separately or given different analytical weight.

This thesis establishes how elite influence affects state capacity, defined here as the state's ability to turn policy into intended outcomes. Instead of treating elite theory and state capacity as competing explanations, this thesis examines their practical interaction. More specifically, it explores how elites may influence the informational, financial, and human capital resources underpinning agrarian reform implementation. Elites are defined as actors who, through control over key resources and embeddedness in political and economic structures, shape formal policy and its implementation. The empirical focus is the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) in the Philippines, with a particular emphasis on "landed elites," referring to individuals or groups whose power is rooted in, or closely tied to, control over large landholdings. CARP is a particularly relevant case because it combined ambitious redistributive goals with persistent implementation difficulties in a political context characterized by strong landed elite influence (Timberman, 2018, p. 296).

This thesis will address the following research question:

How did the landed elite influence the redistributive implementation of CARP during its first decade in the Philippines?

By redistributive implementation, the thesis refers not only to the formal transfer of land, but also to the institutional and resource conditions shaping whether land redistribution could be carried out in line with CARP's redistributive objectives. The aim is not to provide a complete explanation of why CARP implementation was uneven. The aim is to examine one theoretically important dimension: elite influence on state capacity.

To answer the research question, the thesis combines insights from state capacity theory and elite theory into a combined analytical tool. Drawing from Lindvall and Teorell's definition of state capacity as the state's ability to translate policy into intended outcomes, the study develops a set of theoretically derived propositions concerning how elite influence is expected to shape key implementation resources (Lindvall & Teorell, 2016). The propositions guide the analysis by directing attention to theoretically relevant patterns in the case, and the findings are used to assess and refine the analytical framework.

The thesis further argues that elite influence may operate not only through implementation itself, but also through the political processes that shape policy design. Policies are shaped through institutional and political struggles in which elite actors may influence policy content, scope, and enforceability. The study, therefore, distinguishes analytically between elite influence on the formulation of agrarian reform policy and on the resources that affect the state's capacity.

The analysis is structured around four theoretically derived propositions:

1. Elite actors shape policy design in ways that protect their interests and limit intended policy outcomes.
2. Elite actors shape the availability and use of information in ways that constrain effective policy implementation.
3. Elite actors shape the allocation and distribution of financial resources in ways that constrain effective policy implementation.
4. Elite actors influence the recruitment and behavior of bureaucratic actors in ways that constrain effective policy implementation.

This thesis contributes to making explicit the link between elite influence and policy implementation by embedding aspects of elite theory within a state capacity framework. Applied to CARP, these propositions guide the analysis of how the landed elite influenced the design of agrarian reform and its redistributive implementation.

The remainder of this introductory chapter provides a historical overview of the Philippine political structure, the origin and consolidation of landed elites, and the Philippines' land reform efforts prior to CARP. A literature review is presented in the second chapter, and the theoretical framework, derived from the two theories, is thoroughly described in the third chapter. Chapter four describes the thesis's method and data collection process, as well as the study's limitations. The analysis is presented in chapter five, and the thesis concludes with a discussion of the findings and potential future research in chapter six.

1.1 Background

Before reviewing the literature, this background section provides context for understanding the challenges and dynamics of agrarian reform. First, an overview of the Philippines' political system and the entrenchment of elite families helps explain the enduring influence of landed elites in the policy process. Second, a review of earlier land reform attempts highlights persistent obstacles that shaped the landscape inherited by CARP. Finally, CARP itself is introduced.

1.1.1 Political structure and landed elite power

The political development of the Philippines has been tightly tied to the consolidation of landed elite power. Spain began its colonization of the Philippines in the 16th century, which named the archipelago after Philip II (Romein, 1962, p. 69). The Spaniards created highly unequal landholding structures, including large estates known as haciendas. By the late nineteenth century, the land was mainly owned by the Spanish church and state, colonial authorities, and local elites (Silarde, 2020, p. 463). After the United States defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Philippines was transferred to the United States. This was despite a revolutionary Philippine government led by Emilio Aguinaldo, which had proclaimed Philippine independence (Romein, 1962, p. 69; Thompson, 2018, p. 118).

The Americans did not dismantle the highly concentrated land ownership through their colonial rule. Instead, the landed elites were transformed into a national political class. The feudal system remained, and the great estates, the haciendas, were left untouched (Winters, 2012, p. 54). The Americans restricted mass participation and discouraged popular mobilization, which could threaten elite dominance. Together with military suppression of the Filipino-American war, they strived to obstruct any attempts at large-scale Filipino organization through an anti-sedition law stating that "advocacy of independence is a crime punishable to death" (Hutchcroft & Rocamora, 2012, p. 100). The US focused on creating representative institutions rather than a modern

bureaucracy, and as a result, “patronage-seeking politicians” quite easily overwhelmed the Philippine bureaucracy (Hutchcroft & Rocamora, 2012, p. 101). A political system was hereby created that focused on electoral competition but was strongly mediated by elite families, patronage networks, and weak bureaucracies.

From 1907 onward, when elections were introduced, the landed elites were provided an arena to expand and consolidate their power (Kuhonta & Truong, 2020, p. 155; Rivera, 1994, p. 166). In summary, the colonial period created multiple significant legacies: the exclusion of the masses, elite-controlled democratic institutions, the decline of ideological differences within the elite, and highly concentrated land ownership throughout the country (Fuwa, 2000, p. 30; Hutchcroft & Rocamora, 2012, p. 102). Within a decade of independence, 0.36 % of the population controlled 42 % of the land, and 70% of agricultural workers owned no land (Ventura, 2016).

After independence in 1946, landed elites continued to exercise economic and political power. Landowning families entered industry, creating overlaps between landed and capitalist interests. This led to a contradictory class structure, in which elites had limited incentives to support reforms that would weaken their agrarian base (Rivera, 1994, p. 163). Once outside pressure on agrarian reform declined, the landed oligarchy was able to preserve its economic base through its representation in Congress (You, 2005, p. 28).

The declaration of martial law and suspension of the democratic process in 1972 by President Ferdinand Marcos disrupted but did not eliminate oligarchic power. Although Marcos attacked a few oligarchic rivals and forced the takeover of corporate assets, he did not fundamentally expropriate the oligarchy’s landed base (Rivera, 1994, p. 157). Oligarchs later played the central role in Marcos’s downfall, particularly after the assassination of wealthy and powerful political contender Benigno Aquino in 1983,

which shocked elite sectors and helped unify powerful actors against the regime (Winters, 2012, p. 62).

President Marcos announced a snap election in 1986, which Benigno's wife, Corazon Aquino, contested. When Marcos' victory was proclaimed, Aquino's supporters challenged the results, and the overall discontent culminated in a nonviolent demonstration in which hundreds of thousands of Filipinos joined, dubbed the EDSA People Power Revolution, leading to the ousting of President Marcos. Corazon Aquino was elected the new president in 1986, and electoral democracy was restored (Putzel, 1999). However, the return did not facilitate a diversion from the family-based and oligarchic character of Philippine politics. Elected offices have been disproportionately concentrated among fewer than 200 families (Tuaño & Cruz, 2023, p. 171). After the 1992 election, 130 of the 197 members of the House of Representatives had relatives in public office (Riedinger, 1995, p. 208).

Many of Marcos's supporters switched sides to Aquino after his downfall, and it took only 10 years for members of the Marcos family to be re-invited into the political power house, with Imelda Marcos serving in Congress, her daughter Imee elected to the House of Representatives, and her son Marcos Jr. serving as governor (Putzel, 1999, p. 212). Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was elected president of the Philippines in 2022, serving until the end of his term in 2028. These enduring political elites are often referred to as *trapos*, short for "traditional politicians" (Fang, 2016, p. 510). The term also carries a derogatory meaning, as *trapo* means "old dirty rag" in Tagalog (Putzel, 1999, p. 213). This continuity matters since it shows that landed elites are embedded within the formal state institutions.

1.1.2 Land reform before CARP

Land reform is defined as the reorganization of landholding arrangements in terms of tenure and ownership (Martin, 1999, p. 184). Conversely, agrarian reform encompasses a broader approach, including regulations on land use, agricultural productivity, and rural livelihoods (Tekwa, 2025, p. 13). A Philippine government handbook on CARP defines agrarian reform as land reform plus support services, including physical and economic infrastructure, human resource development, and institutional strengthening (World Bank, 2005, p. 5). CARP was therefore not only concerned with land redistribution but also with whether beneficiaries could become economically viable producers.

Agrarian reform in the Philippines is linked to political stability, partly because it is tied to rural development and inequality (Martin, 1999). Land has not only economic value but also political, social, and cultural significance (Borras Jr., 2005, p. 94). The Philippines has a long history of tenant and peasant mobilization, often connected to demands for land redistribution and greater protection from landlords (Kimura, 2018, p. 22). One example is the communist-led Huk Rebellion, which recruited landless farmers to fight powerful landlords and nearly toppled the government in the late 1940s. The government, with significant US support, managed to suppress the rebellion (Rivera, 1994, p. 166). Since the 1950s, agrarian reform has remained a central demand of peasant groups, progressive organizations, communist movements, and technocrats (Timberman, 2018, p. 299).

Redistribution weakened by landlord resistance, congressional dilution, inadequate funding, and bureaucratic weakness are patterns common to earlier agrarian reforms. Ramon Magsaysay was elected in 1953 with 68 percent of the vote and substantial rural support, while Congress was full of landowners (Albertus, 2015, p. 275). Magsaysay's Land Reform Act of 1955 (RA1400) was amended by Congress so that most of the large estates could easily avoid expropriation (Albertus, 2015, p. 275; Rivera, 1994, p. 166; You, 2005, p. 25). Several defects are identified in the Act, including weak

incentives for landowners to sell, unclear land pricing, high retention limits, and insufficient assistance for tenants seeking to purchase land. High officials, under the influence of landlords, were determined to block the implementation (Murray, 1972, p. 158).

The Agricultural Land Reform Code of 1963, RA 3844, introduced under President Diosdado Macapagal, also failed to produce a redistributive change (Martin, 1999, p. 196; Tadem, 2015). Since the decision to change the tenancy contracts was largely voluntary, and many unfavorable consequences for tenants were not addressed, very few opted for this (Sodusta, 1981, p. 260). By 1968, only 5% of the tenants had become agricultural lessees. The main causes were insufficient funds for implementation, cumbersome bureaucracy, and landlord resistance. In short, the Code was deemed “a failure” (Sodusta, 1981, p. 261). Again, the issue was not the lack of legislation, but the interaction between weak implementation and elite resistance.

Ferdinand Marcos issued Presidential Decree 27 (PD 27) in 1972, which implemented Operation Land Transfer (OLT), targeting rice and corn lands exceeding 7 hectares. Eligible tenants received Certificates of Land Transfer, giving them the right to purchase the land they cultivated by paying amortization to the Land Bank over fifteen years, while tenants on smaller farms were included in leasehold arrangements (Koirala et al., 2016, p. 372). A broad consensus in the literature, according to Fuwa, holds that the poorest rural groups did not gain from PD27 and may even have been worse off due to tenant evictions triggered by the reform (Fuwa, 2000, p. 16).

These earlier reforms provide context for CARP. They show that reform has repeatedly been weakened through elite resistance, restrictive policy design, inadequate funding, and weak bureaucratic capacity. This historical pattern points to an analysis that encompasses both administrative and technical aspects, as well as landed elite influence.

1.1.3 The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP)

Corazon Aquino became president in 1986 after President Marcos' fall from power and promised land reform as one of her key goals (Putzel, 1999, p. 211). Agrarian reform carried strong political and symbolic significance in the post-Marcos period, as it was linked to social justice, rural inequality, peasant mobilization, and democratic legitimacy. The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program was established in 1988 through the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law, RA 6657. CARP was considered "comprehensive" partly because it expanded land reform beyond rice and corn and covered all agricultural land (Karaan, 2021, p. 410).

CARP had three major goals: establishing social justice and equity in access to, use of, and control over land; increasing agricultural productivity and income; and developing reform beneficiaries into self-reliant producers. The beneficiaries of CARP are commonly referred to as agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) (World Bank, 2005). The law defined agrarian reform broadly as the redistribution of land to landless farmers and regular farmworkers, together with support services and alternative arrangements such as profit-sharing and stock distribution (Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988, 1988). This broad definition will provide a framework that is important for the following analysis.

The program was initially designed for a ten-year implementation period. Fidel Ramos, elected in 1992 with Aquino's endorsement, continued CARP (Riedinger, 1995, p. 208). During Fidel Ramos' administration, CARP was extended for another ten years. The extension expired in 2009, prompting President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to pass the CARPER law, which extended the program until 2014, when the program was officially ended (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 29).

2 Literature review

This chapter presents and synthesizes existing research on state capacity and elite influence on policy outcomes, with an extra focus on agrarian reform. The chapter contains five sections. First, it outlines key debates on state capacity and its concepts. Second, it examines the literature on implementation failure resulting from weak state capacity. Third, it reviews elite theory and empirical work on how elites influence policy processes. Fourth, it explores emerging research on the interaction between elites and state capacity. Finally, it identifies the main gaps in the literature and situates the contribution of this thesis.

2.1 State capacity

The term “state capacity” appears frequently in the political science literature, yet there is no consensus on how to define it, even though the state itself is always the center of analysis (Cavalcante & Pereira, 2022). In its early use, it was primarily associated with state formation and economic growth, but it has gradually expanded its scope to encompass public policies and governance (Gomide et al., 2018, p. 2). In a review of the existing literature on state capacity, Luca Cingolani identifies at least seven definitions of the concept, emphasizing both its analytical depth and its ambiguity (Cingolani, 2013). Regardless of definitional differences, the literature broadly agrees that state capacity is an important factor in achieving intended policy outcomes across a range of sectors (Suryanarayan, 2024, p. 224).

Whereas some concepts focus on the type of government, state capacity concerns the effectiveness and capability of government institutions (D'Arcy & Nistotskaya, 2021, p. 760). Classical literature on the modern state offers the theoretical foundations of the concept. The monopoly over the legitimate use of force and administrative centralization are highlighted as the main features states need to extract resources and maintain order, according to Charles Tilly (Tilly, 1985). In addition, Max Weber emphasizes the importance of bureaucratic organization and rational-legal authority for effective governance (Gomide et al., 2018, p. 3).

One way to split up state capacity is to, on the one hand, talk about functional approaches of state capacity, which focus on specific capacities (e.g., fiscal or coercive), and on the other, generalist approaches, which emphasize the state's overall ability to implement policy decisions (Cavalcante & Pereira, 2022; D'Arcy & Nistotskaya, 2021, p. 760). Michael Mann provides another kind of division, which distinguishes between despotic power, defined as the ability of state elites to make decisions without societal consultation, and infrastructural power, defined as the capacity to implement those decisions across territory (Mann, 1984). Mann thereby theorizes that states can have high decision-making authority without actually being able to implement those decisions.

One analytical challenge associated with state capacity is that the myriad of concepts and definitions can lead to conceptual stretching and operationalization challenges (D'Arcy & Nistotskaya, 2021, p. 760; Hanson & Sigman, 2021, p. 1495). There is also a risk of circular reasoning, in which poor policy outcomes are explained by low state capacity, and the low capacity in turn is explained by the poor policy outcomes (Gomide et al., 2018, p. 8). Conflating capacity with political prioritization or with observed performance is another concern (Hanson & Sigman, 2021, p. 1498; Suryanarayan, 2024, p. 230). These challenges point to the importance of specifying the underlying components of capacity rather than treating it as a residual category.

2.2 Weak state capacity and its outcomes

A broad range of literature analyzes policy implementation constraints due to a lack of state capacity or its components. For instance, Tuaño and Cruz (2023, p. 200) describe the Philippines' inability to regulate economic sectors and implement development programs as a case of weak state capacity. Their explanation for this is a weak bureaucracy, limited fiscal extraction, and the absence of a professional administrative core. Although they acknowledge that landed elites may influence implementation, this relationship is not explicitly conceptualized in terms of its connection to the state's capacity, and the focus remains on institutional and administrative deficiencies (Tuaño & Cruz, 2023, p. 200).

Other accounts focus more on resource constraints and their effects on implementation. The implementation of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) in the Philippines, for example, was hindered by "limited funding, insufficient manpower and bureaucratic inefficiencies," which reduced the state's ability to deliver services effectively (Ampater et al., 2024, p. 113). The study centers on administrative shortcomings but also mentions manipulation by powerful actors (Ampater et al., 2024, p. 117), suggesting that capacity constraints may coexist with elite interference. Revenue extraction, particularly from agriculture, has historically been central to the development of state capacity (Nieto-Matiz, 2023, p. 701). At the same time, research on land distribution shows that initial land inequality can shape long-term development outcomes, although the mechanisms linking these patterns to state capacity are often underdeveloped (İşcan & Lim, 2022). Liu et al. (2025) provides a different perspective, demonstrating how institutional arrangements affect the allocation of human capital, identifying an "entrepreneurial land trap."

Mokone, examining land reform in South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, identifies a persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation (Mokone, 2025, p. 34). A lack of coherent policies, weak governance structures, and limited administrative capacity has supposedly caused this gap. The influence of powerful landholding elites is recognized, but it is treated as a separate factor rather than as a component that drives or shapes the underlying resource constraints (Mokone, 2025, p. 42). More broadly, Karadag et al. (2025) argue that land reform outcomes in African contexts have been limited by the state's inability to reorganize agricultural production, address complex distributional challenges, and operate within constrained timeframes.

Historical evidence from the Philippines regarding land reform reinforces these findings. Earlier reform efforts were constrained by severe shortages of administrative resources. For instance, while millions of farmers required technical assistance, only a small number of agricultural technicians were available, severely limiting implementation capacity. At the same time, policies often failed to create incentives for landowners to comply with redistribution efforts (Murray, 1972, p. 158). At a more general level, it has also been argued that land reform itself can contribute to state building by strengthening administrative and fiscal capacities over time (Karadag et al., 2025).

These explanations for weak state capacity and insufficient implementation primarily focus on administrative and resource limitations, such as a lack of funding, weak bureaucracies, or poor information systems. As a result, the political origins of these constraints remain underexplored, and the extent to which they are shaped by powerful actors is often left unspecified.

2.3 Elite influence on policy outcomes

Classical elite theory, standing in stark contrast to pluralist perspectives that assume a balance of power, provides the foundation for the view that unequal access to power is central to understanding political and economic power (Anyebe, 2018, p. 3). Early works by Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Robert Michels argue that all societies are governed by a minority, regardless of whether they are democracies. Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy" states that, despite an organization's decision-making dynamics, power will always concentrate in the hands of a few, leading to distortions of power (Sb, 2024, p. 342). Elites for Mosca were a political class that included both those making the political decisions and those who influenced them (Salawu, 2023, p. 3). This is still the core of elite theory literature, where elites possess a disproportionate ability to shape when and what decisions are made. A common view is that elites are disproportionately drawn from the upper socio-economic class (Anyebe, 2018, p. 4). Elite theory divides society into two major groups: the ruling class in the form of an oligarchy or a political party, and the majority, also referred to as the masses (Omoregie et al., 2025, p. 40). Later additions to elite theory center on policy outcomes as the product of elite negotiations rather than broad public participation (Cherop & Koech, 2025; Fofah, 2026, p. 457; Pokharel, 2019, p. 172).

Motivations and behaviors of elite actors are also covered in the elite theory literature (DiCaprio, 2012, p. 8). A recurring argument is that elites primarily seek to preserve their power and organizational position, and that their political decisions are shaped by this (Field et al., 1990, p. 152; Fofah, 2026, p. 457; Salawu, 2023, p. 3). From this perspective, corrupt or self-serving behavior is seen as rational, since they have strong incentives to maintain their powerful positions. At its extreme, elites avoid corrupt behavior only when they are forced to do so by strong internal or external political pressure (Mungiu-Pippidi et al. 2011). Similarly, Fukuyama and Recanatini (2021, p. 486) state that improved governance is supported only at a surface level by elites, only to maintain good relationships with external actors, such as aid-providing countries,

rather than to actually change established protocols. This suggests a divergence between formal policy commitments and actual implementation.

The concept of elites using their resources, such as money or force, to steer political outcomes was introduced by Robert Dahl (Ataşer, 2025, p. 671). The concept of "elite capture" can be useful for describing how powerful actors may redirect public resources to their own advantage (Tang et al., 2026). However, the scope of this thesis is broader, so the term "elite influence" is used instead. Beyond formal power over decision-making, elites can also have resources in the form of information channels, thereby influencing the political narrative (DiCaprio, 2012, p. 7). Power over recruitment is also highlighted as an important tool for elites, since they can limit access to top positions to only those who subscribe to their worldview (Anyebe, 2018, p. 4; Ataşer, 2025, p. 668).

Elite theory, similarly to state capacity, faces conceptual and methodological challenges (Field et al., 1990, p. 149). Definitions of "elites" vary widely, ranging from narrow political elites to broader categories including economic, military, and social actors. Collectively, the definitions hold that elites have the ability to influence and shape political or social outcomes (Field et al., 1990, p. 152; Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2021, p. 219; Salawu, 2023, p. 1; Osei, 2018, p. 21). Importantly, elites can be, in contrast to early definitions, not just those at the top of society as a whole, but those at the top of every level of society (DiCaprio, 2012, p. 5). In the Philippine context, elites have been defined to include political families, business leaders, and other influential actors embedded in key institutions (Timberman, 2018, p. 296). Additionally, elite influence is often difficult to observe directly, as it operates through informal networks and indirect mechanisms (Henriksen & Seabrooke, 2021, p. 218).

Depending on the elites' interests, they can favor differing policies. In a comparative article on South Korea and the Philippines, Chen (2008) argues that the lack of land

reform created the chaebols and the landed oligarchy in the Philippines, both family-based conglomerates seeking policies that benefit them. The chaebols used political protection to compete in the global market, while oligarchs in the Philippines used their power to oppose industrial transformation, leading to exceptionally different effects on their respective national economies (Chen, 2008, p. 92). Adamopoulos (2008) argues that if a country has sufficiently high land concentration, the landed elite will lobby the government to oppose industrialization so they can protect their rent income from rural incomes. Acemoglu and Robinson argue that elites may concede political power when the costs of repression are sufficiently high, and concessions are necessary to preserve social stability (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2009, pp. 26–27). Applied to agrarian reform, this suggests that landed elites may accept reform or political concessions when the costs of resistance outweigh the benefits of preserving the status quo.

2.4 Elites and state capacity

While the literature on state capacity and elite influence has largely developed separately, a growing body of research examines their interaction. This work suggests that elites not only shape policy outcomes directly but also influence the state's underlying capacities. Overall, it is common to associate the elite paradigm with a "weak state," which need not correspond to weak state capacity (Brillo, 2011, p. 59). In particular, in post-colonial societies, state formation is often explained in terms of the role of elites (Ali, 2020).

Several empirical studies demonstrate how elites can significantly shape the implementation of policies across sectors. For example, households with connections to people with political power are more likely to receive public benefits, demonstrating how elite networks can shape the distribution of resources (Caeyers & Dercon, 2012; Panda, 2015). Research has also shown that when elites themselves inhabit governance

roles, they can achieve higher compliance rates in areas such as taxation, suggesting that their positions can influence administrative effectiveness (Balán et al., 2022).

There is some divergence in the literature over whether elites support or undermine state capacity. One argument is that agrarian elites resist the development of strong states to avoid taxation and redistribution of their assets. Conversely, some scholars show that wealthy landowners may support a higher capacity of the state when they can benefit from it. They might, for example, benefit from higher government spending, suggesting that their preferences depend on incentive structures (Pardelli, 2024, p. 739; Simpson, 2024). Robson suggests that elites can act as stewards of state capacity, supporting or protecting bureaucratic institutions (Robson, 2024, p. 606). Fiscal, coercive, and administrative dimensions of state capacity do not always develop in tandem, and elites can support one dimension while resisting another (Suryanarayan, 2024).

Other scholars focus on types of elites or on how elites function socially. For instance, Bourguignon & Verdier (2012, p. 261) argue that business elites have little incentive to build state capacity when starting from low levels, leading to a weak capacity trap. Wang instead centers the structure of elite networks and argues that it influences whether they support or undermine state institutions (Wang, 2023). Li & Wright show how political party structures influence bureaucratic behavior, arguing that personalist party systems allow elites to reduce administrative autonomy (Li & Wright, 2023, p. 2035). There are instances of research where not the elite's effect on state capacity is researched, but how the capacity affects the power and behavior of the elite. Tang et al., for example, find that robust administrative oversight in China limited elite interference in poverty alleviation programs (Tang et al., 2026).

The connection between state capacity and elite influence has also been researched in the context of agrarian reform. Michael Albertus argues that the state's capacity and

cooperation between political and landed elites determine the success of land reform (Albertus, 2015). Philippine scholarship specifically shows that land reforms have repeatedly been diluted or obstructed by landed elites, both during policy design and implementation (Borras Jr, 2005; Fuwa, 2000; Martin, 1999, p. 197; Riedinger, 1995). Differences in elite structures and land reform outcomes can further shape broader development trajectories, as seen in the divergence between South Korea and the Philippines (Chen, 2008; Doner, 2012).

2.5 Competing explanations, research gap, and contribution

The literature reviewed above offers several explanations for why policies fail to achieve their intended outcomes. One body of literature emphasizes state capacity constraints, pointing to limited financial resources, weak bureaucratic structures, and insufficient administrative reach as key obstacles to effective implementation (Gomide et al., 2018; Hanson & Sigman, 2021; Tuaño & Cruz, 2023). As discussed in section 2.2, this perspective highlights how implementation failures often stem from shortages in funding, manpower, and institutional capability, particularly in the Philippine context (Ampater et al., 2024; Murray, 1972).

A second strand highlights elite actors, emphasizing how powerful elites shape policy design and implementation to protect their interests. Empirical studies demonstrate the ways elites can distort the allocation of public goods, influence bureaucratic behavior, and shape policy outcomes through both formal and informal mechanisms (Bourguignon & Verdier, 2012; Caeyers & Dercon, 2012; Fukuyama & Recanatini, 2021; Panda, 2015; Wang, 2023).

As mentioned, Hickey & Sen (2024) show how political settlements and elite coalitions shape institutional outcomes, including state capacity. Similarly, research discussed in section 2.4 highlights that elites can both undermine and support state capacity depending on their incentives (Pardelli, 2024; Robson, 2024). However, even in these accounts, the mechanisms through which elites influence the specific components of state capacity remain under-specified. In particular, there is limited attention to how elites shape the allocation of key resources that enable policy implementation.

This gap is especially evident in the literature on land reform. While it is well established that land reforms are often weakened by elite resistance (Albertus, 2015; Martin, 1999) and that implementation is constrained by limited state capacity (Borras Jr., 2005), the relationship between these two factors is rarely explicitly theorized. This thesis addresses this gap by linking elite influence directly to the resource foundations of state capacity.

In doing so, the thesis contributes to the literature in two ways. First, it integrates state capacity and elite theory into a single analytical framework. Second, it clearly investigates state capacity by specifying potential mechanisms through which elite actors shape the link between policy and outcomes. This approach allows for a more precise understanding of why policies such as land reform may fail, even when formally adopted, by examining how elite influence operates across both policy design and implementation stages.

3 Theoretical framework

This thesis examines how elite influence affects the state's capacity to implement reforms. The policy process involves multiple actors, institutions, and forms of power, and no single theory captures all these dimensions (Weible & Sabatier, 2018, p. 300). The fact that these elements contain concepts and subelements that are handled differently across separate theories can complicate comparisons (Weible & Sabatier, 2018, p. 304). This creates a challenge for integrating theories, and because state capacity and elite theory conceptualize the state and power differently, the chapter first presents them separately before developing an integrated framework.

3.1 State capacity

Given the concept's rich analytical and conceptual toolbox, it is crucial to be explicit about what is encompassed by state capacity in this thesis. Another important aspect to consider when measuring or studying state capacity is that it is a latent variable, meaning it is not directly observable (Gomide et al., 2018, p. 8). To solve this issue, this thesis follows the interpretation of state capacity proposed by Johannes Lindvall and Jan Teorell in the article "State Capacity as Power: A Conceptual Framework" (Lindvall & Teorell, 2016, p. 11). They build their framework on the concept of infrastructural power, and define state capacity as "the state's power to achieve the intended outcomes" (Lindvall & Teorell, 2016, p. 7). The state apparatus is understood as an organization that transforms inputs into outputs (Lindvall & Teorell, 2016, p. 19).

Lindvall and Teorell use the power definition provided by Dahl: “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would otherwise not do”, where A is the state (or agents of the state), and B is society (or members of society). State capacity is therefore a probabilistic rather than deterministic causal relationship between state policies and economic, political, and social outcomes. The state is understood as an organization that implements policies p to achieve outcomes y, and the state capacity is then the strength of the causal relationship between p and y. This relationship is illustrated by the arrow in: p→y. When a high-capacity state implements policy p to achieve y, it is more likely that it will succeed than if a low-capacity state implements the same policy. The intended outcome need not be a public good but can be almost anything. Lindvall and Teorell argue that the state has three broad types of policy instruments, sticks, carrots, and sermons, to influence behavior and increase the likelihood that policy objectives are translated into intended outcomes. This way to conceptualize state capacity is quite close to Mann’s definition of the infrastructural power of the state (Andersson & Teorell, 2025, p. 981; Mann, 1984).

Lindvall and Teorell argue that the effectiveness of policy instruments depends on underlying resources, with the most important being revenue, human capital, and information. The more resources r the state has, the more it can strengthen the link between p and y. Revenue is crucial to finance all state structures and to compensate relevant actors. The quality of state workers is seen as higher where officials are selected on the basis of skills, education, and training, and rewarded for loyalty and effectiveness. Informational resources are crucial because states need accurate knowledge of populations and territories to target policies, enforce rules, and evaluate whether policies are working (Lindvall & Teorell, 2016, p. 12). In sum, they stretch the concept of state capacity to include “the quality of the bureaucracy, revenue extraction, and information capacity,” all of which affect the implementation of a stated policy (Lindvall & Teorell, 2016, p. 7).

Lindvall and Teorell explain that, although the causal relationship between p and y is not directly observable, this model enables observation of the resources used. It is therefore possible to measure the inputs of state capacity, meaning to collect data on government revenue, the quality of the bureaucracy (human capital), and information-gathering institutions, and then treat state capacity as a function of these underlying factors (Lindvall & Teorell, 2016, p. 20). Lindvall & Teorell say that the quality of government focuses more on how the state does things, whereas state capacity focuses more on whether they can do it (Lindvall & Teorell, 2016, p. 9).

State capacity, state legitimacy, and state autonomy are divided concepts in this framework. In short, state autonomy is the extent to which it is not controlled by external forces, and state capacity is the extent to which it controls the outcomes it attempts to. This thesis does not conceptualize elite influence as a loss of state autonomy; this is explained further in section 3.3 (Lindvall & Teorell, 2016, pp. 12, 15).

The approach presented by Lindvall and Teorell works well for the objectives of this study for two reasons. First, rather than attempting to measure state capacity directly, the framework allows analysis of the resources and institutional features expected to shape implementation. This aligns well with the empirical strategy of the thesis, which relies on secondary data and seeks to identify patterns consistent with theoretically derived propositions rather than establish precise causal mechanisms.

Second, and more importantly, the framework provides a clear entry point for integrating insights about political influence into the study of implementation. While state capacity theory often assumes that sufficient resources lead to effective policy execution, this assumption may not hold in contexts where the political elite have incentives diverging from the policy goal. By conceptualizing capacity as dependent on underlying resources and the effective use of policy instruments, the framework

enables examination of how these components may be shaped by political actors. At the same time, the framework maintains an important analytical distinction between state capacity and state autonomy. Rather than treating elite influence as a loss of autonomy, this thesis examines how such influence shapes the resources and processes that underpin the translation of policy into intended outcomes.

3.2 Elite theory

Elite theory posits that a relatively small group of actors, the elites, consistently occupy dominant positions in political, economic, or social structures and exert a disproportional influence over policy processes and outcomes (Field et al., 1990, p. 151). Building on both classical and more recent formulations, this thesis defines elites as actors who, through their control over key resources such as landholdings and their embeddedness in political, economic, or social power structures, can significantly shape formal policy and its implementation (Salawu, 2023, p. 3). In the Philippine agrarian reform context, the analysis focuses primarily on landed elites, meaning families, landowners, and politically connected actors whose power is rooted in, or closely tied to, control over land.

This approach reflects the theoretical assumption that, although elites are often recruited from within the same social stratum (Ataşer, 2025, p. 668), they are not restricted to national leadership but also occupy pivotal positions at multiple levels of institutional hierarchies (DiCaprio, 2012, p. 5). Importantly, elites are assumed to act primarily to protect and maintain their organizational and economic interests (Field et al., 1990; Salawu, 2023, p. 3).

The goal is not to explain elite motivations in detail. However, the analysis proceeds on the premise that landed elites have strong incentives to resist or reshape redistributive reforms that threaten their economic position, particularly control over land. While acknowledging that elite behavior is not uniform, this assumption establishes a consistent analytical focus throughout the thesis on how these actors operate within and around state institutions to influence both the design and implementation of land reform policy.

3.3 Integrating the theories

In this thesis, a theoretical framework is developed integrating state capacity (p→y) with elite theory. The framework identifies the concepts and expected relationships guiding the analysis of elite influence on policy implementation.

To successfully integrate the theories, the definition of the state needs clarification. State capacity is the ability to translate p into y, where the state is an organization that transforms inputs into outputs. A potential tension arises when elite actors are understood as operating within the state itself. If elites are political actors, constituting the state, and those elites do not want y, how is that then a failure of the state? Resolving the tension requires a definition of the state that accommodates divergent interests within it. In this thesis, the state is understood as a set of institutions and a large organization responsible for implementing formally adopted policies. Elite actors simultaneously operate both within and around it, using their positions and resources to shape policy content and the conditions under which it is implemented. This allows the thesis to focus on state capacity without conceptualizing such influence as a loss of state autonomy, which Lindvall and Teorell define as “freedom from external control” (Lindvall & Teorell, 2016, p. 14).

A state capacity perspective highlights administrative and resource constraints, such as insufficient funding, a shortage of trained personnel, or inadequate information systems. These are beneficial arguments for understanding implementation failure that appear as a generalized inability. But the case of Philippine agrarian reform points to outcomes that are distorted through resistance in different ways. Solely a resource-based interpretation is therefore insufficient. Elite theory highlights systematic and selective patterns that align with the interests of powerful actors, such as preferential treatment or the dilution of reform measures. While both theories may account for implementation failure, they do so in different ways. State capacity theory does not predict systematic bias toward particular groups, while elite theory does not predict generalized administrative failure without a clear winner. Each theory captures part of the story, and their interaction is theoretically meaningful and underexplored.

The integration of the theories is further justified by their shared concern with power. As Hill argues, when discussing the public policy process, it is crucial to know "who dominates" (Hill, 2013, p. 8). Both state capacity and elite theory are power-centric, but they locate power differently. In state capacity, the central actor exercising power over the public is the state, whereas in elite theory, the power is concentrated within a small group of actors. The elite have the power to control the public. Integrating the theories enables us to see how elite power affects the state's ability to exercise implementation power.

This thesis argues that elites indirectly affect state capacity. It accepts, according to Teorell and Lindvall's framework, that state capacity is unobservable, but that the resources available to states are observable. Consider the state implementing p in order to achieve y. If it is also accepted that the concepts and theoretical assumptions of elite theory are valid, it is concluded that a small group of people wields disproportionate power in the political system. These can include both actual decision-makers and a

wider circle of individuals who influence government decisions and policy implementation. It is also assumed that the elite group(s) protect their own interests and are disproportionately drawn from the upper socio-economic class. These actors may benefit from reforms that are formally in place but are weakened in practice. In Lindvall's and Teorell's framework, the effectiveness of the policy instruments depends on revenue, human capital, and information. Elites may therefore affect these inputs to state capacity and, indirectly, affect the link between policy and outcome.

The combined theoretical description is shown in Figure 1, where elite influence, illustrated by the vertical arrow, affects the strength of the link between p and y, i.e., the state capacity. This also means that elites do not wield full control over the link between p and y, since they do not affect state capacity directly but only the resources that go in to it.

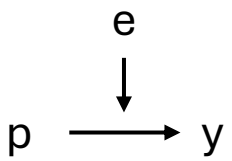

Figure 1.

- p = the legally mandated land redistribution under CARP
- y = land redistribution effectively carried out in line with policy objectives
- e = individuals who, through control over key resources and embeddedness in political and economic power structures, can influence policy decisions and implementation outcomes

While state capacity is defined as the ability to translate policy p into intended outcomes y, this thesis introduces an additional step, derived solely from elite theory. It considers how the deliberation stage of the policy process shapes the policy's content.

This stage is analytically relevant because it is argued that elites strongly influence how the policy is written. Even if state capacity concerns the implementation of policy (p→y), the policy's content affects how demanding it is to put into practice. If elites shape policy during the deliberation stage in ways that reduce its scope, introduce loopholes, or complicate its execution, this affects the state's ability to implement policies.

Granted that it is not the aim of this thesis to measure the state capacity of the Philippines, it requires a further extension of the presented model to fully grasp the influence of elites. This thesis will therefore distinguish between p_0, the publicly stated, initially intended policy goal, and p*, the formally adopted policy. There are essentially two levels of elite influence: 1) shaping the adopted policy (p_0→p*) and 2) shaping implementation capacity (p*→y). Although the exact content of p_0 is not the focus, it refers to the broader redistributive ambitions and initial policy proposals articulated by government personnel before debate. State capacity is then the link between p* and y, meaning that a state can have high capacity while failing to realize its initial policy goals.

The extended model is illustrated in Figure 2.

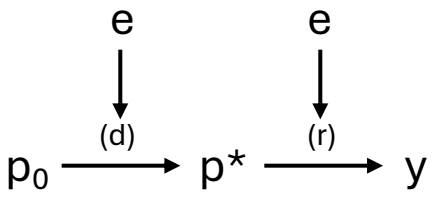

Figure 2.

p_0 = broader redistributive ambitions or reform intentions,
p* = the policy as formally adopted after elite influence.
(d) = deliberation

(r) = resources

Everything considered, the following four propositions were derived:

1. Elite actors influence the design and structure of the policy in ways that protect elite interests and constrain effective policy implementation.
2. Elite actors influence the production, availability, and use of information in ways that constrain effective policy implementation.
3. Elite actors influence the allocation and distribution of financial resources in ways that constrain effective policy implementation.
4. Elite actors influence the recruitment, appointment, and behavior of bureaucratic actors in ways that constrain effective policy implementation.

Developing a new general theory of policy outcomes or state capacity is not the aim of this thesis. It seeks instead to integrate insights from state capacity theory and elite theory into a coherent analytical framework applicable to a specific empirical context. The theoretically derived propositions are not treated as hypotheses to be tested, but rather as theory-guided expectations that help structure the analysis and identify which aspects of the case are most relevant for refining the framework. The contribution is therefore primarily conceptual and analytical, in that it makes explicit a relationship that is often implicitly acknowledged but rarely systematically examined in the literature.

4 Methodological framework

4.1 Research philosophy

This thesis rejects a strict understanding of what is political, taking into account a myriad of "extra-political" factors to make inferences about a (political) policy process (Hay, 2008, p. 69). It is assumed that social reality is structured by power relationships and that phenomena like elite influence and state capacity are real, even if they cannot be directly observed in their entirety (Kozhevnikov & Vincent, 2019; Mason, 2018, p. 9). Instead, they are inferred from empirical patterns and existing research.

It is essentially accepted, in line with elite theory, that agents have the capacity to make decisions that shape the course of events, rather than adopting a fully structuralist approach (Hay, 2008, p. 89). However, elite influence is not treated as a socially constructed narrative; it is treated as a real phenomenon with observable effects. In addition to accepting personal agency, the thesis assumes that not everything can be explained by elite decision-making. The structure in which they are acting, the state, etc., needs accounting for. A middle ground in the state-structure debate of political science is assumed (Hay, 2008, p. 95).

The study assumes that knowledge of political processes is indirect and theory-dependent. Elite influence and state capacity are understood and examined through the interpretation of empirical material grounded in theory, not through direct observation (Sayer, 2010).

4.2 Research design & case selection

This study employs a case study design, defined as an intensive analysis of a single case based on observational data (Gerring, 2016, p. 28). A case study enables you to "shed empirical light" on theoretical concepts contributing to a broader theoretical understanding beyond the case examined (Yin, 2018, p. 38). The study is not descriptive but theory-guided, drawing on a theoretical framework combining state capacity and elite theory (Gerring, 2016, p. 56). The propositions derived from theory in Chapter 3 identify relevant dimensions of the case and guide the analysis. The design is therefore deductive in its approach, where an analytical tool is derived prior to empirical research (Esaiasson, 2024, p. 81; Hay, 2002, p. 30).

The empirical focus is on land reform in the Philippines, specifically the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). The case was selected in line with the guidelines provided by Robert K. Yin in that it should be related to the study's theory and theoretical propositions of interest (Yin, 2018, p. 49). CARP is treated as a case of elite influence on policy implementation. Historically, Philippine land reform has been characterized by contested design and uneven implementation. This, in combination with the strong elite influence related to challenges in state effectiveness, makes it a suitable setting to explore the interaction between elite actors and state capacity (Winters, 2012).

Since CARP is also the most extensive and ambitious redistribution plan in the Philippines, it is increasingly relevant. Compared to earlier programs, such as PD 27, RA 3844, or RA 1400, CARP covers a broader range of land types and involves a more complex administrative governance structure. This makes it particularly appropriate for analyzing how elites may shape both policy design and implementation, and how this affects the relationship between formally adopted policy and observed outcomes.

In addition, as both theories are power-centric, agrarian reform is seen as a valid choice because land distribution is essentially a form of power distribution (Borras Jr., 2005, p. 93). The case is thus chosen not for representativeness, but for its relevance to the theoretical framework.

4.3 Data and sources

As described in the background, CARP was implemented from 1988 to 2015. During that time, the implementation changed significantly and underwent multiple revisions. This study focuses primarily on the initial phase of CARP, from its adoption in 1988 through the end of the Ramos administration in 1998. Since implementation patterns change significantly depending on who is in power, it is prudent to draw the line when an administration changes. However, examining the reform only during Aquino's era is considered too brief since not enough implementation occurred during that time. This specific decade is chosen for its relevance to policy design and initial implementation patterns, which are central to the theoretical analysis.

This thesis relies exclusively on secondary sources, including academic literature, historical scholarship, policy documents, and development reports, for methodological and practical reasons. Methodologically, the study aims to synthesize a broad body of existing research in order to apply and refine the theoretical framework across multiple dimensions of CARP's design and implementation. In practice, collecting primary material in the Philippines, such as interviews with policymakers, bureaucrats, beneficiaries, or local elites, was beyond the scope of this master's thesis due to time and financial constraints. Secondary sources are treated not merely as background information, but as empirical material through which patterns of policy design, resource allocation, and implementation can be identified and compared. Broad

inclusion of sources is important to reduce the risk of selection bias, particularly in qualitative research (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 25).

Given the extensive body of literature on CARP, purposive sampling, a non-probability, deliberate selection of units deemed useful, is employed to select sources based on their relevance to the research question and theoretical framework. This includes criteria such as analytical relevance, empirical depth, and diversity of perspectives (Gerring, 2016, p. 190). Each source is critically evaluated for credibility, bias, and the context in which it was produced (Beach and Pedersen, 2019, p. 207). As a result, material from peer-reviewed research and well-established scholarly accounts is prioritized, while corroborating findings across several sources where possible. This is to mitigate potential bias (Tajik et al., 2024, p. 5). Instead of aiming for strict data saturation, this study pursues informational richness. Finally, data collection and analysis are conducted iteratively, allowing emerging patterns to guide further source selection (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025, p. 1472).

4.4 Analytical strategy

4.4.1 Theory-guided analysis

This thesis adopts a theory-guided and exploratory approach, and knowledge of complex political processes is understood as indirect and mediated through interpretation (Hay, 2008). The data collection and analysis as a whole were guided by the theoretical propositions (Yin, 2018, p. 168). They function as analytical tools focusing on specific aspects of the empirical material. The purpose is not to prove or disprove them but to develop a model linking elite theory and state capacity and apply a conceptual framework, rather than testing an already established theory.

The analytical execution was essentially conducted in three steps. First, the theoretical framework was used to derive propositions concerning expected forms of elite influence during the policy process. Second, these propositions guide the empirical analysis of CARP's design and implementation during its first decade. Third, the findings are used in the discussion chapter to examine what the framework captures, what it overlooks, and how it may be further developed. In line with this approach, the analysis considers multiple levels of observation, including national policy design and local implementation practices, in order to examine how the framework captures variation across different stages and arenas of CARP's implementation (Gerring, 2016, p. 182).

4.4.2 Operationalization of propositions

The analytical framework builds directly on the theoretical model presented in Chapter 3. Policy p is defined as the implementation of legally mandated land redistribution under CARP, and outcomes y are defined as the extent to which land redistribution is effectively carried out in line with policy objectives. The deliberation stage is included as an important phase, as it is expected that elite actors may influence the design and scope of the policy itself, thereby indirectly shaping the relationship between p and y.

To guide the empirical analyses, the propositions are translated into empirical manifestations. Their purpose is to structure the reading of the empirical material and to make the application of the framework transparent. The first proposition's observable indicators are focused solely on elites, introducing beneficial exemptions or ambiguities into the policy structure. For the three others, the indicators capture patterns in the allocation and use of key state resources—financial, human capital, and information—that are theorized to underpin state capacity. All of which are presented in Table 1.

Propositions	**Guiding empirical manifestations**
Elite actors shape policy design in ways that protect their interests and limit intended policy outcomes.	● Elite participation or domination in policy deliberation. ● Amendments introduced by elites that weaken the redistributive scope. ● Ambiguous implementation rules that allow avoidance of redistribution. ● Design features enabling formal compliance while preserving effective control over land.
Elite actors shape the availability and use of information in ways that constrain effective policy implementation	● Landowners withholding or misreporting information about landholdings. ● Elite influence over how land information is produced or verified. ● Data opacity that benefits landed interests.
Elite actors shape the allocation and distribution of financial resources in ways that constrain effective policy implementation	● Elite influence over budget allocations and funding priorities. ● Financial practices that limit redistributive scope. ● Evidence that compensation rules or funding structures favor landowners financially.
Elite actors influence the recruitment and behavior of bureaucratic actors in ways that constrain effective policy implementation.	● Evidence of patronage appointments or politically connected officials. ● Collusion between landowners and administrative actors. ● Pressure, harassment, or bribery directed at implementing officials.

Table 1.

The empirical manifestations are illustrative rather than exhaustive. The analysis remains open to empirical patterns not specified in advance, especially patterns which illuminate, complicate, or require refinement of the framework. Since elite influence is

often informal and indirect, it is not necessary to find explicit evidence linking individual actors to specific decisions or outcomes to infer elite influence.

4.5 Validity, delimitations, and ethical considerations

This study achieves internal validity through a transparent, theory-guided analytical strategy. Concepts, propositions, and empirical manifestations are clearly specified and applied consistently throughout the analysis. The use of multiple sources and the identification of recurring patterns across different types of material strengthen the robustness of these inferences. The focus on CARP's first decade, from 1988 to 1998, is a temporal delimitation due to time constraints. It allows a more focused analysis and less empirical material to assess.

Single-case designs are often critiqued for having limited external validity, but these findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable. This study contributes instead to refining theoretical expectations about how elite influence may interact with the resource foundations of state capacity in policy implementation (Yin, 2018, p. 21). Relying on secondary data can be detrimental, as it depends on the quality, scope, and potential biases of the existing research (You, 2005, p. 4). This is addressed through critical source evaluation and the inclusion of diverse perspectives. Relying on secondary sources was necessary due to the study's practical limitations. It would have required too many resources and much time to collect primary material through fieldwork and interviews. Not to mention the requirement of access to such persons and places. Secondary sources limit analysis of causal sequences and direct testimonies of elite influence, but do allow for broad recurring patterns.

As Bazeley (2013, p. 148) argues, qualitative analysis inevitably involves the researcher's interpretive judgment. Instead of aiming for neutrality, this study focuses on transparency and a consistent application of theory. Ethical considerations are limited, as the study does not involve human subjects. However, this study presents an accurate and fair representation of existing research, proper citation practices, and avoids plagiarism or misinterpretation (Hammett et al., 2015, p. 84).

5 Analysis

The analysis is structured around the four theoretically derived propositions. Each section examines how landed elites shaped CARP's policy design, information systems, financial flows, and human capital, highlighting both direct and indirect mechanisms of influence. At the end of each section, the analytical value of the proposition is briefly assessed.

5.1 Proposition 1 - Policy design

Elite actors shape policy design in ways that protect their interests and limit intended policy outcomes.

5.1.1 Elite influence during deliberation

The introductory chapter demonstrated how landed elites achieved and consolidated their power in the political and economic spheres during the Philippine state-building. They played a critical role in all previous land reform attempts during the 20th century. The deliberation period preceding the passage of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law, therefore, provides an important opportunity to examine whether landed elites also influenced the design of post-authoritarian agrarian reform under the Aquino administration. Central questions concern who participated in the reform process, who

controlled decision-making authority, and to what extent landed interests shaped the final direction of policy.

The Philippine political system has faced criticism for failing to represent the broader population and being dominated by elites. In 2004, a great majority of the legislators were a part of families that had been in public office for 2 or more generations (Mendoza & Thompson, 2018, pp. 109–110). This pattern was also clear in the elected congress in 1986, which deliberated CARP, where more than half of the members were landowners. Out of the 200 elected members of the house, 129 were believed to be members of traditional clans, and an additional 38 related to them (Fuwa, 2000, pp. 6, 39). From the perspective of this thesis's propositions, this composition is significant because it placed actors with direct economic interests in landownership in positions to shape redistributive legislation.

President Corazon Aquino herself came from a family owning a significant amount of land (You, 2005, p. 25). Following the collapse of the Marcos regime in 1986, Aquino enjoyed especially strong executive powers before Congress reconvened (Riedinger, 1995, p. 149). During this period, she appointed the Constitutional Commission, charged with developing a new constitution, consisting of 48 members carefully selected by Aquino's closest advisors (Putzel, 1999, p. 211). The resulting 1987 constitution includes provisions mandating agrarian and social justice reforms (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 83; Hanstad, 1988). The administration also created the Cabinet Action Committee (CAC) to formulate agrarian reform proposals. CAC was immediately pressured by powerful interest groups seeking to dilute its recommendations (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 83). The committee proposed the Accelerated Land Reform Program (ALRP), which was created to address the provisions of the constitution and mandated better land reform measures (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 84).

Although Aquino publicly identified land reform as a central policy objective, implementation was repeatedly delayed. Scholars have interpreted Aquino's support for reform partly as a response to growing communist insurgency and peasant mobilization, and partly as an attempt to consolidate political legitimacy following the Marcos period (Fuwa, 2000, p. 39). This theory is strengthened by the recurring pattern of land reform policy resurfacing in Philippine politics as an election nears (Fuwa, 2000, p. 41). When the decision to implement land reform was delayed, the peasant groups demanding reform grew frustrated. Thousands of farmers marched toward the Malacañang Palace in January 1987. The demonstration, after state forces fired at protesters, ended in at least 13 deaths and over a hundred wounded. The scandal put significant pressure on Aquino's administration (Albertus, 2015, p. 277; Timberman, 2018, p. 299).

While still exercising particularly strong executive authority, Aquino issued Proclamation No. 131 and Executive Order No. 229 (EO 229). The former announced the state's commitment to land reform, and the latter established mechanisms for implementation, defined administrative structures, and authorized land-acquisition processes. The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) was granted operational authority. Notably, EO 229 was ultimately not a product of CAC but of a select group of presidential advisers, where "excluded cabinet members were told to comply or resign" (Riedinger, 1995, p. 150). This shows that the earliest movement from reform ambition to formal policy was controlled by Aquino and her closest advisers, who defined the initial institutional shape of reform.

EO 229 did not provide a detailed description of how implementation would commence. They shifted much of the detailed authority and final structure to Congress. One interpretation of this move is that Aquino, being part of the landed elite herself, would rather dilute the law than focus on quick, efficient implementation through a decree (Rabecs, 1989, p. 449). Decision-making shifted from a narrow executive circle

around Aquino to the legislative arena, which was also heavily populated by landed interests. At this point, the government had stated several examples of what can be called p_0. The state's commitment to land redistribution is clear, although p* has not yet been formed.

In 1987, Congress reconvened, and once it took over, the reform became subject to negotiation, dilution, and compromise (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 85; Rabecs, 1989, p. 449). In the 8th Congress (1987-1992), 83 percent of House of Representatives members came from long-established political clans (Mendoza & Thompson, 2018, pp. 109–110). And so, the deliberation period was marked by significant contestation over the scope and substance of reform. Both houses produced their own land reform bills: Senate Bill 249 (SB249) and House Bill 400 (HB400). The more radical provisions were introduced in the house, HB 400, proposing progressive legislation that would deny compensation to landowners with more than 50 ha. The landowner bloc instead argued for a land valuation based on the owner's declaration of fair market value (Riedinger, 1995, p. 169). HB 400 would have the Department of Agricultural Reform (DAR) and the landowner determine the value. The debate led to SB 249 being revised to include a wide array of valuation considerations (Riedinger, 1995, p. 170).

Section after section disappeared from the first proposal, and it was eventually so different from the start that initial supporters withdrew their endorsement (Fuwa, 2000). The final outcome of these negotiations was introduced in June 1988 (Riedinger, 1995, p. 177): The Republic Act No. 6657, or the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (CARL), which mandated the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 84). The period of deliberation shows how the landed elites operated within the state organization, participating in drafting, negotiating, and approving reform. They could moderate and restructure the redistribution proposal to be more compatible with landed interests. To summarize, elite actors, many with landed interests, did indeed shape policy design.

5.1.2 Policy design of CARP

The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) was to be implemented during a ten-year period (Albertus, 2015, p. 277). The final policy reflected a compromise between redistributive goals and the interests of landed and business elites, combining state-led and market-oriented approaches to redistribution. The final legislation contained ambiguities and legal loopholes, creating opportunities for selective compliance and uneven implementation (Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 35; Jadina et al., 2025, pp. 2, 6). The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) became the main implementing agency (Riedinger, 1995, p. 200).

The succession of implementation is telling. The initial phases prioritized the redistribution of rice and corn lands already covered under Operation Land Transfer (OLT), as well as abandoned, idle, and government-owned lands (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 15; Rabecs, 1989, p. 450). By prioritizing public and less politically contentious lands first, CARP postponed the most conflictual aspect of redistribution: the compulsory acquisition of privately owned estates. This structure meant that redistribution of private land was "postponed, contested, or circumvented". The largest sugar and coconut estates were not dealt with until after Ramos' presidency, in the early 2000s (Timberman, 2018, p. 299). From this thesis's perspective, such sequencing reflects a policy design that reduced immediate pressure on landed elites while preserving the appearance of comprehensive reform.

The law provided several ways for acquiring land: Operation land transfer (OLT), compulsory acquisition (CA), voluntary offer to sell (VOS), and Voluntary land transfer (VLT). Under VOS, the state purchased the land from the landowner and then redistributed it to an Agrarian Reform Beneficiary (ARB). In contrast, VLT was a negotiation between the landowner and the ARB, although it was the DAR's formal responsibility to ensure the agreement's fairness (Karaan, 2021, p. 410). CA meant that

the government forcibly took over the land and paid the landowner in government bonds. CARP also allowed Agribusiness Venture Arrangements (AVAs), including leaseback arrangements, and stock distribution options (SDOs) (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 29). Several of these mechanisms, like VOS and VLT, were explicitly designed to reduce resistance from landowners (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 17).

The complexity of the law itself became a recurring theme in both scholarly and policy discussions. CARP has been described as "complex and confusing" (Rabecs, 1989, p. 449), while Timberman (2018, p. 303) argues that it was "designed to delay and minimize the impact on landowners." Agrarian reform advocates similarly characterized the program as "exceedingly flawed" (Aguilar, 1992, p. 2). Although many critics point to financial constraints as a key factor in shaky implementation, which will be raised later, others point to the design as the main contributor (Fabella, 2014, p. 14).

The inclusion of Voluntary Land Transfer (VLT) was particularly beneficial for landowners seeking to avoid redistribution, as it relied heavily on negotiated agreements, weak verification procedures, and self-reported information. This reduced the state's direct role in redistribution and created opportunities for manipulation (Ballesteros et al., 2018, pp. 11, 17; Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 39; Karaan, 2021, p. 410). Rather than representing unintended implementation problems alone, these vulnerabilities were embedded in the reform's institutional structure.

Given the broad anti-reform base in Congress, some scholars discuss why no amendments further restricting CARP were adopted after its initial implementation. The new Congress elected in 1992 was seen by some to be even more conservative than the previous one. 117 of the 197 members of the House were medium- and large-scale landowners (Fuwa, 2000, p. 40), and 183 of the 199 elected members were (peso) millionaires (Riedinger, 1995, p. 206). One speculation is that it reflects the inaction of

Congress committees. Another is that the threat of the amendments was enough to slow down and derail reform, and that landowners could successfully evade reform either way, so no amendments were actually needed. Legislators also did not want to be labeled “anti-reform” openly (Riedinger, 1995, p. 187). This continuity reinforced the influence of landed interests over the interpretation and evolution of the reform framework.

5.1.3 Strategic compliance and retention of control

The final structure of CARP enabled forms of formal compliance that allowed elites to retain effective control over land. The stock-distribution option (SDO) is one of the most discussed options. It enabled corporate landowners to comply with reform requirements by selling corporate shares to farm workers rather than the land itself. The idea was to avoid breaking up large, integrated plantations, which might lose efficiency while also providing workers with income streams and land title participation. Critics have described it as one of the legal loopholes landowners could use to avoid distributing their land. The most well-known SDO example is Hacienda Luisita, a 6,200 ha sugarcane plantation owned by the family of President Aquino (Fuwa, 2000, p. 23).

Land under SDO has been said to be undervalued, while non-land assets have been overvalued, reducing the value of the stock offered to ARBs. Some research indicates that the additional income following the SDO per beneficiary ranged from 30 pesos to 133 pesos per month, a few American dollars, and included no real ownership or control of the land (Fuwa, 2000, p. 23). Further analysis indicates that farmers would be neither worse off nor better off if they could purchase the land under the reform law. Aquino’s decision to exercise the SDO on her own property was criticized both by landowners and farmers (Riedinger, 1995, p. 180). To summarize, SDO enabled

compliance with the formal requirements of reform while preserving existing ownership structures and control patterns.

Another way to comply with the reform's formal requirements while preserving existing ownership structures and control was through leaseback arrangements. This meant that ownership of the land was formally transferred to the ARB, which then leased it back to the original corporations for cultivation and management (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 24). In practice, this meant that the operational control stayed with the original owners, the economic hierarchies did not shift, but the land had, on paper, been redistributed.

Additionally, the legal and procedural structure of CARP also enabled delay strategies. Landowners frequently used litigation to contest inclusion in the program, challenge compensation levels, or delay transfers altogether (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 10). Filing legal cases was a common strategy among landowners, and such disputes could delay transfers for years or even decades. Farmers were sometimes afraid to join the program altogether because they feared eviction or legal action by landlords (Jadina et al., 2025, p. 7). The conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural use has also been used to evade agrarian reform provisions (Bankoff, 1996). These strategies were facilitated by the complexity of the law, overlapping administrative procedures, and extensive opportunities for legal contestation embedded within the reform framework itself.

5.1.4 Implications for Proposition 1

The empirical evidence suggests that CARP did not simply move from ambition to implementation. These ambitions were filtered through legislative bargaining and compromise before becoming the formally adopted policy (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 85;

Rabecs, 1989, p. 449). Proposition 1 captures a stage of elite influence prior to implementation, highlighting how elites shaped the reform design to, in fact, protect their interests and limit intended policy outcomes. Elites did not need to reject reform outright. They could instead introduce alternative compliance mechanisms into the reform.

The composition of Congress and the shift in decision-making from executive decree to a landed elite-dominated legislature illustrate the proposition's relevance. Design features such as VLT, SDO, leaseback arrangement, and phased implementation also point to policy sections that limit redistributive implementation. The deliberation process, in sum, shows how elite influence shaped the reform's institutional structure. This affected the clarity, coercive strength, and administrative demands of the policy, thereby shaping the conditions under which implementation later occurred.

The proposition is analytically useful because it shows that elite influence may occur before the state capacity relationship $p^* \rightarrow y$ begins, suggesting that the $p_o \rightarrow p^*$ relationship is meaningful to add. This suggests that a framework linking elite influence and state capacity must account not only for resources used during implementation, but also for how elites shape the policy whose implementation is later assessed. This does not mean that CARP was simply an elite project or that redistributive ambitions disappeared. The policy still established a formally broad agrarian reform program (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 84). However, the final design incorporated mechanisms that made redistribution more negotiable, delayed, and vulnerable to evasion.

5.2 Proposition 2 – Informational resources

Elite actors shape the availability and use of information in ways that constrain effective policy implementation.

5.2.1 Administrative information weaknesses

There were several limitations associated with the information system needed to implement CARP. For example, there existed no comprehensive registry of farmers, agricultural workers, and tenants, and the record-keeping that existed was considerably fragmented (Lorayna & Caelian, 2020, p. 138). This was due to the fact that land records and cadastral information were maintained across multiple agencies, including DAR, DENR, and the Land Registration Authority, without a unified database or coordinated system for information sharing (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 10). This complicated both the determination of which land should be redistributed and who qualified to become an agrarian reform beneficiary (ARB), i.e., the person buying the land. To qualify, a person must be 1) landless as defined by RA 6657, 2) a Filipino citizen, 3) a permanent resident of the barangay (village) where the landholding is, 4) at least 15 years of age, and 5) willing, able, and equipped with the attitude to cultivate and make the land productive (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 11).

The informational weaknesses also affected the state's ability to monitor and evaluate CARP implementation itself. Data collected and presented by DAR suffer from underreporting, changes in reporting periods, changes in data aggregation, and a strong possibility of double-counting (Fuwa, 2000, p. 18; Riedinger, 1995, p. 194). Double counting has been specifically linked to leasehold operations, as there is no database of leasehold contracts (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 24). The declared targets from different years and the ambiguities in reported "accomplishments" further complicate the evaluation (Fuwa, 2000, p. 19). Misreporting by administrators has also been explained by pressure to report progress from the government (Borras, 2005, p. 95). Although these shortcomings point to misreporting by state officials, the accounts did not connect them to elite pressure, suggesting elite influence on information systems. No literature could account for whether misreporting was more common in specifically elite-

dominated areas. Unambiguous, however, is that the administrative system was flawed, proving important for the next section.

5.2.2 Elite exploitation of informational weaknesses

This lack of registry meant that DAR had to conduct ocular inspections and barangay (village/district) mapping (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 13), an extremely slow process (Lorayna & Caelian, 2020). More importantly, it meant that beneficiary identification and landholdings were often mediated by local officials, including the DAR, and by landowners themselves (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 83). This introduced opportunities for individuals with personal incentives to obscure the data collected (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 13; Diprose & McGregor, 2009, p. 53).

For example, landowners could understate the number of hectares they owned or deny the existence of tenants (Borras, 2005, p. 95). The informational weaknesses severely affected the VLT redistribution option, where negotiations were supposedly conducted directly between the seller and buyer. Landowners would register relatives or fictitious beneficiaries (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 11; Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 39; Rabecs, 1989, p. 449). Sometimes, ARBs were even totally unaware that the landowner had registered them as beneficiaries, and they kept working there as tenants. As much as 70% VLT "accomplishments" have been reported to be transferred to non-legitimate ARBs (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 17).

5.2.3 Unjust land valuation

The informational dimension was also central to the issue of land valuation and compensation. Under CARP, land sellers should be "justly compensated," and the Land Bank is tasked with determining land values (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 19). Land

valuation under CARL should be based on: 1) the cost of acquisition of the land, 2) its current value, 3) its nature, 4) its actual use and income, 5) the sworn valuation, 6) tag declaration, and 7) the assessment made by government assessors (Llanto & Dingcong, 1991). The compensation calculation required 10 factors, and the absence of reliable land valuation data (Börjesson, 2003, p. 67) directly affects the ability to determine compensation and implement redistribution. It also created opportunities for tampering with land sales data, sometimes leading to land overvaluation (Llanto & Dingcong, 1991). Other sources say that the land valuation data does not indicate overpricing (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 18).

In general, the unclear data and procedures enabled landowners to contest land valuation to prolong or avoid redistribution (Riedinger, 1995, p. 169). The just compensation formula was clarified only in 2009, more than 20 years after its initial implementation (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 13). Rather than representing a purely technical limitation, the informational weaknesses of CARP appear to be reinforced by elite influence, as actors with vested interests were able to shape, distort, or withhold key data (Riedinger, 1995, p. 181).

5.2.4 Implications for Proposition 2

Overall, the empirical material indicates that the proposition captures an important dimension of CARP implementation. The lack of centralized and reliable information systems weakened the state's ability to identify beneficiaries, map landholdings, determine compensation, and monitor implementation. This created opportunities for manipulation by actors with strong interests in shaping redistribution outcomes, due to the reliance on self-reporting. It led to documented manipulation of beneficiary and ownership data and consistently created opportunities that benefited landed interests. Since beneficiary status depended on several legal criteria, the absence of reliable

records made verification highly dependent on local-level interpretation and documentation. The VLT schemes are a clear example of how data opacity benefited landowners and enabled them to provide faulty information. This way, they could formally comply while preserving effective control over land.

The evidence does not demonstrate that informational channels were fully created or controlled by elites. Fragmented agency records and inconsistent reporting categories reflect broader bureaucratic limitations more than elite intervention. This points to an important distinction developed further in the discussion: elites did not always create informational constraints, but often exploited and reinforced constraints that already existed. Overall, the analysis suggests that informational resources should not be treated as neutral administrative inputs. Control over and access to information heavily shaped who could be included in redistributive schemes. In terms of the framework, informational weakness, exacerbated by elites, weakened the p*→y relationship.

5.3 Proposition 3 – Financial resources

Elite actors shape the allocation and distribution of financial resources in ways that constrain effective policy implementation.

5.3.1 Program costs and funding

The scale of CARP required substantial financial commitments from the Philippine state. Early estimates of program implementation ranged from P60 billion ($2,9 billion) to P402 billion ($19,2 billion) (Riedinger, 1995, p. 173). While the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) was responsible for financing land surveys and subdivision activities, the inspection and approval of survey plans depended on other agencies such

as the Land Registration Authority (LRA) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 12). The implementation process thus relied on a particularly expensive, administratively complex structure that required substantial resources. Moreover, the Philippines' financial state at the beginning of the 1990s was heavily constrained. The funding of CARP implementation, therefore, became heavily dependent on foreign assistance (Vellema et al., 2011, p. 312).

Despite financial assistance from foreign countries, CARP suffered from financial shortages (Fuwa, 2000, p. 21). Budgetary politics became particularly important because Congress had significant authority over funding allocations. Several studies note that Congress repeatedly limited appropriations for key implementation components, including land acquisition and support services (Borras, 2005, p. 101; Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 35). However, the relationship between elite influence and financial limitations is not completely straightforward. Research contradicts the assumption that landlord influence in Congress alone explains CARP's financial constraints. Instead, the study points to persistent underspending and a poor utilization of allocated resources (Drbohlav et al., 2017).

Regardless, scarce state funding for agriculture created opportunities for traditional politicians, *trapos*, to use rural infrastructure spending as a form of patronage through pork barrel politics. Fang argues that this affected agriculture in two ways. Firstly, politicians wanted "their" projects to be big and visible, neglecting smaller, less visible (but equally important) projects such as extension services. Secondly, significant proportions of funds meant for pork barrel projects were diverted to other forms of patronage. Uses included "casework," in which politicians gave money (directly or through gifts) to voters to secure votes (Fang, 2016, p. 510).

5.3.2 Access to credit and financial constraints for ARBs

The ARBs had to pay either the government or the landowners to retain title to the land they acquired through CARP. To afford this, they had to sustain a certain degree of agricultural production after redistribution. A significant factor in achieving this was access to credit. If farmers had access to credit, they could invest in infrastructure and tools to increase their production. Access to rural credit, therefore, became an important component of whether redistribution could be consolidated in practice.

Philippine rural finance has historically been divided between formal credit institutions, such as banks, and informal credit systems consisting of moneylenders, traders, landlords, relatives, and cooperatives (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 228). Fabella mentions that the "just compensation" CARP promised the landowners was based on land values that assumed full property rights, including collateral value. But since the land received by the ARBs was subject to restrictions on sale, the banks were unwilling to accept it as collateral. This limited the ARB's ability to obtain credit and, by extension, to increase productivity and pay for the land (Fabella, 2014, p. 7; World Bank, 2005; World Bank, 2009, p. 23).

Through the Program Beneficiaries Development (PBD), ARBs were supposed to be assisted in making their lands productive and income-generating (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 231). However, less than 30% of the ARBs received support services from DAR (World Bank, 2009, p. 57), and the support services under CARP had a limited impact in improving farmers' access to credit (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 85; Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 37). Only about about 11% of Filipino farmers had access to bank credit (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 230; Eshleman & Hunt, 1991, p. 31). This is significant since it meant that financial resources continued to be mediated by local elites, traders, landlords, and informal lenders even after formal redistribution had occurred. As a result, financial resources were not redistributed to enable independent agricultural

production, and ARBs instead continued to operate in existing rural patronage structures.

This has been described as a “land titling and payment loop” where ARBs became stuck in a cyclical dilemma. They had to complete their payments to obtain land titles, but to access the formal credit market and increase farm production and income, they needed the titles. Some are still paying off the land after 15 years and are in significant debt, and it is unclear whether they will ever repay the government (Jadina et al., 2025, p. 6). Only about 11% were fully paid in 2018, and 30% are classified as accounts in default, meaning they have not made payments for 3 years (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 22). The lack of financial resources restricted ARBs’ independence and prolonged their economic vulnerability, thereby helping preserve local elite power or reinforcing existing rural power relations. Sources indicate that elites or brokers could step in when repayment was absent to try to retake the land (Fabella, 2014, p. 13).

5.3.3 Implications for Proposition 3

The empirical material confirms the analytical value of Proposition 3. The state’s ability to allocate adequate funding for policy implementation was significantly shaped by Congressional decisions, in which the landed elite exerted considerable influence. The persistent limitations in budget appropriations can be linked to this. Furthermore, evidence of the use of agricultural budgets for political patronage demonstrates how elites act directly and indirectly to shape financial flows, favoring projects that reinforce their interests and networks. Both aspects indicate that elite actors are shaping financial resources in ways that constrain effective policy implementation. The second aspect, however, cannot be tied specifically to landed lites.

Furthermore, the stipulation that redistributed lands could not be easily used as collateral for formal loans left most ARBs dependent on informal lenders, often local elites or former landlords, thereby reinforcing economic dependency and limiting the transformative potential of land reform. CARP's compensation scheme ensured timely payments to landowners, while ARBs faced long, often insurmountable repayment periods. This is a funding structure favorable to landowners, while potentially opening up for the takeover of the land if payment is absent.

While the evidence does not unequivocally demonstrate that landed elites unilaterally created all financial constraints, it shows that the overall financial structure embedded in CARP was compatible with the preservation of elite power. Financial limitations did not simply reflect technical or administrative failures, but were often the outcome of elite-mediated contestation. Within the theoretical framework, financial arrangements weakened the relationship between formal policy adoption p* and tangible redistributive outcomes y by limiting both the state's capacity to implement redistribution and beneficiaries' capacity to consolidate the benefits of land transfer.

5.4 Proposition 4 – Human capital resources

Elite actors influence the recruitment and behavior of bureaucratic actors in ways that constrain effective policy implementation.

5.4.1 Pressure on state agents and corruption

Historically, the Philippines has had trouble with unclear and complicated institutional structures. Prior to martial law, for example, there was no single agency coordinating economic planning, and overlapping institutions weakened bureaucratic coherence

(Rivera, 1994, p. 168). As mentioned, CARP relied heavily on administrative coordination across multiple agencies, including DAR, DENR, the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP), and local government units. The complexity of implementation heightened the importance of competent, autonomous bureaucratic actors, while simultaneously creating multiple points at which political influence could shape outcomes (Börjesson, 2003, p. 66). Delays in redistribution often stretched across decades, reflecting limitations in personnel, coordination, and administrative infrastructure (Jadina et al., 2025, p. 5).

Several studies point to the influence of landed elites over local implementing bodies. Drbohlav et al. (2017, p. 40) report that focus group participants described collusion between DAR officials, landowners, and real estate developers in order to evade land acquisition (Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 40). Landowners reportedly made security guards harass DAR land surveyors, while some local government officials were described as being “in the pay of landlords” (Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 39). There are also reports of landowners themselves exerting pressure and engaging in harassment against DAR officials (Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 35).

This was exacerbated by the devolution reforms introduced through the Local Government Code of 1991, which transferred greater authority over land-use conversion decisions to local governments. This led to increased pressure on municipal agrarian reform officers to approve such conversions (Fabella, 2014, p. 13; Riedinger, 1995, p. 183). Devolving authority to local government bodies has often favored local elites (Bankoff, 1996, p. 45), already having influential positions in local administrations (Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 35).

The implementation of Voluntary Offer to Sell (VOS) schemes further illustrates how bureaucratic discretion could be exploited through cooperation between officials and the landed elite. The most well-known is the Garchitorena estate scandal, where land

that was initially purchased for P3 million in April 1988 was presented to the DAR eight months later as VOS land for almost P63 million. DAR agreed to the deal, but it was stopped when LBP objected. Other similar scandals followed, which culminated in the resignation of the DAR secretary (Fuwa, 2000, p. 22; Riedinger, 1995, p. 178). These examples showcase how the VOS program could be exploited through cooperation between DAR officials and landowners, leading to land overvaluation. Following the scandal, Aquino, who blamed corruption within DAR, issued an EO transferring valuation responsibility to LBP. But even LBP valued the Garchitorena estate at a price almost ten times its initial purchase price. Importantly, most officials implicated in the scandal returned to their positions (Riedinger, 1995, pp. 178–179). This suggests that the problem was not merely isolated corruption, but institutional arrangements that enabled bureaucratic discretion to be used in ways beneficial to landed interests.

5.4.2 DAR leadership

The literature also indicates that elite influence shaped higher-level bureaucratic appointments and leadership stability within DAR itself. During Aquino's presidency, DAR leadership was characterized by instability, delayed appointments, and conflicts over reform direction. The nominees for DAR secretary under Aquino were significantly inexperienced in agrarian reform, with nominations being delayed and derailed. Reform-oriented nominees such as Miriam Defensor-Santiago and Florencio Abad faced strong resistance from landed interests in Congress, particularly because they advocated stronger compulsory acquisition and opposed land conversion. Their appointments ultimately failed, while less confrontational figures remained in office (Riedinger, 1995, p. 184). Some spectators interpret this as Aquino wanting to look pro-reform by naming such candidates but being unwilling to see them through due to her "underlying ambivalence, if not hostility" toward agrarian reform. Eventually,

Benjamin T. Leong, described as neither pro-landlord nor pro-reform, was appointed and served until the end of the Aquino administration in June 1992 (Riedinger, 1995, p. 185). One interpretation of the secretary's position's insecurity is that it hindered the reform from gathering momentum during Aquino's time in office (Borras, 2001, p. 542).

In contrast, several studies identify the Ramos administration (1992-1998) as a partial shift in bureaucratic orientation. DAR leadership was, unlike under Aquino, stable during Ramos's time. Ramos appointed DAR secretary Ernesta Garilao, who served during the six years of the Ramos presidency. Garilao recruited many NGO activists into DAR leadership positions and worked to improve the bureaucracy through training and education. The new leadership led to a major shift in CARP implementation, with greater cooperation between DAR and civil society (Borras, 2001, p. 543; Diprose & McGregor, 2009, p. 53; Fuwa, 2000, p. 24; Olano, 2004, pp. 17, 20).

The total amount of land transferred/acquired, under CA, VOS, and VLT combined, increased eightfold between the Aquino and Ramos periods (Fuwa, 2000, p. 19). It was also during this time that the ARC program was launched (Olano, 2004, p. 1). CARP was more successful during the period 1992-2000 due to cooperation among NGOs, civil society groups, and the agrarian reform bureaucracy, despite the landed elite's dominance of the political environment (Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 36). This variation across administrations is analytically important because it suggests that bureaucratic composition and leadership mattered for implementation outcomes, despite continued elite influence. The seemingly impressive achievements under Ramos have also been interpreted as the reform simply gaining momentum, suggesting that there might not have been a significant difference in how "pro-reform" the administrations were (Fuwa, 2000, p. 43).

5.4.3 Implications for Proposition 4

Proposition 4 is useful because it shows that bureaucratic capacity is not only a matter of personnel numbers, training, and administrative procedures, but also of officials' ability to act autonomously from landed interests. The evidence suggests that elite influence operated at both local and national bureaucratic levels, but in different ways. Locally, it appeared through harassment, collusion, and influence over land conversion decisions. Substantive evidence showcases landowners pressuring state agents to constrain effective policy implementation. Nationally, it appeared through contested appointments, unstable DAR leadership, and resistance to reform-oriented officials. At both levels, collusion and corruption between landed elites and the agrarian reform bureaucracy are evident, reducing the redistributive scope.

The findings do not suggest complete elite control over the bureaucracy. The presence of reform-oriented officials, conflicts within DAR, and periods of comparatively stronger implementation indicate that bureaucratic actors, to a degree, had autonomy to pursue redistribution and that implementation outcomes were contested rather than predetermined. This means the bureaucracy should not be treated as either fully captured or fully autonomous. It functioned as a contested institutional arena in which landed elites, reform-oriented officials, civil society actors, and political executives all shaped implementation outcomes. This is consistent with the thesis's theoretical framework, which does not conceptualize elites as fully controlling the state but rather as shaping the conditions under which implementation occurs. Importantly, administrative structures and overlapping jurisdictions created opportunities for elite pressure, which further weakened bureaucrats' ability to implement the reform consistently. This suggests that bureaucratic and elite pressures reinforced one another.

Overall, the empirical literature suggests that this proposition captures a significant part of the implementation process. Elite influence over human capital resources weakened

the p*→y relationship by limiting the state's ability to translate formally adopted policy into redistributive outcomes.

6 Discussion

This final discussion chapter will briefly revisit the research question and discuss the overall answer. The second section will examine the theoretical implications of the proposed model and the propositions derived from it, including its strengths and limitations. The findings will also be compared with previous research on the case, emphasizing its exploratory nature. The limitations identified during the study will be presented next, along with potential directions for future research. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary and closing remarks.

6.1 Revisiting the research question

This thesis set out to answer the following research question:

How did the landed elite influence the redistributive implementation of CARP during its first decade in the Philippines?

The analysis showed that elites influenced the redistributive implementation in various ways. The decision to include the policy design stage proved useful for understanding the reform and for deepening the analysis of elite influence. The landed elite was deeply embedded in the political process, from initial reform goals to what actually made it into the law. The president herself came from a landowning family, the group that drafted the first policies was closely tied to her, and the landowning bloc had significant political weight in Congress (Fuwa, 2000, pp. 6, 39; Putzel, 1999, p. 211; You, 2005,

p. 25). This led to several design features that enabled strategic compliance. Land could be officially redistributed, while landowners retained the organizational and economic power of the land. The coercive character was significantly toned down during the deliberation, and the focus shifted to public lands rather than private estates (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 15; Rabecs, 1989, p. 450; Timberman, 2018, p. 299). In terms of the theoretical framework, this demonstrates how elite influence shaped the transition from broader redistributive ambitions p_0 to the formally adopted policy p^*. The second, third, and fourth propositions focused on how elites influenced the underlying resources that enabled the state to implement the formally adopted policy.

The second proposition, focusing on informational capacity, displays several administrative weaknesses. The material does not indicate that landed elites necessarily caused the deficiency from the beginning, but that it was exploited and further warped by them. The redistribution required correct information on who owned land and how much, who was eligible to become a beneficiary, and for correct land valuation. The reliance on self-reporting for this data led to significant misreporting and falsified records (Ballesteros et al., 2018, pp. 11, 17; Borras, 2005, p. 95; Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 39).

The findings regarding the third proposition showcase several ways in which national and local elites were able to disproportionately control financial resources, although not always necessarily connected to the landed elite. The constrained funding for CARP meant that political oligarchs could divert resources to agricultural projects they deemed personally best, rather than those that would best support overall implementation. Congress, which has a high percentage of landowners, did have the power to fund the project, potentially exacerbating the shortage of funds to support services. Local elites were able to keep providing credit to beneficiaries as they saw fit, since access to formal credit was extremely poor (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 230; Fabella, 2014, p. 7; World Bank, 2009, p. 23). In many cases, this led to ARBs being unable to

pay for the land they had acquired, which could result in reacquisition from landowners. This strongly affected the redistributive implementation.

Finally, the proposition regarding human capital resources also proved useful for examining how elite actors shaped land redistribution at both the local and national levels. There are clear examples of state workers being coerced or bribed either by landed elites themselves or third parties hired by landowners (Drbohlav et al., 2017, pp. 35, 39–40). In the national political sphere, powerful politicians with landed interests could influence DAR leadership, ensuring it was either fragmented or unified (Borras, 2001, p. 542; Riedinger, 1995, pp. 184–185). This shows that the bureaucracy is not fully controlled by landowners, but rather is a contested arena.

Taken together, the findings suggest that landed elite influence shaped land redistribution under CARP by structuring both the reform's content and the conditions under which it was implemented. The policy that emerged from deliberation was formally redistributive, but institutionally designed in ways that left considerable room for elite maneuver. During implementation, landed elites influenced or exploited weaknesses in information, funding, and bureaucracy, thereby affecting the state's ability to translate formal policy into redistributive outcomes. Redistributive implementation problems were not merely technical failures caused by insufficient administrative capacity. They were created through the interaction between elite influence and the resource foundations of state capacity. This does not mean that landed elites fully controlled the state or determined all outcomes. Rather, the case shows that state capacity was exercised within a political environment in which powerful landed interests shaped both the rules of reform and the resources available for carrying it out.

6.2 Theoretical implications: refining the model

This section evaluates the theoretical implications of the thesis and presents how the data engage with, support, or suggest revisions to the applied framework. It first summarizes how the empirical evidence aligns with the theoretical propositions derived from state capacity and elite theory. Next, it identifies the specific strengths of the analytical approach and discusses necessary refinements revealed by the empirical findings. The discussion is then structured into distinct subsections: (1) the significance of policy design in shaping implementation, (2) the overlap and mutually reinforcing nature of resource dimensions, (3) the mutual interaction between elite influence and weak state capacity, and (4) the need to account for direct forms of elite obstruction that fall outside the resource-based framework. By outlining these points, the section situates the thesis within broader conceptual debates and highlights directions for further theoretical development.

The data generally support the theoretical ideas derived from state capacity and elite theory. The resources highlighted by Teorell and Lindvall—informational, financial, and human capital—seem to have played a central role in the Philippine state's capacity during CARP implementation. The specific provisions added to the reform during deliberation were shown to significantly influence the policy in favor of the landed elite's preferences. The specific resources of information, finance, and human capital played a significant role in the Philippine state's redistributive capacity. Elite actors, to a large extent, elites with their main power in land ownership, were able to divert and redirect these resources. This supports the idea that elites often operate indirectly through the implementation process rather than fully controlling the outcome. The contrast between the Aquino and Ramos administrations also shows support for the thesis's conceptualization of the state as internally contested rather than as a unitary actor. The Ramos period does not show the decrease of elite influence, but rather that implementation outcomes could change despite its persistence.

Overall, exploring how elite influence and state capacity interact, rather than treating them as separate explanations, proved insightful. However, the findings also indicate that the initial framework requires refinement, which will be discussed hereafter. Addressing these limitations will be essential for improving models of elite influence and state capacity, both in the Philippine context and in comparative studies of redistributive reform.

6.2.1 Policy design affecting implementation

This case shows that complete disregard for the deliberation phase of a policy can omit a large part of the story. Not conceptualizing the state as a unitary actor with coherent preferences enabled a more realistic understanding of the case, where elites were embedded within Congress and local implementation structures. This meant that, in addition to influencing the conditions under which they were implemented, they also influenced the policy's content.

CARP was formally ambitious regarding its redistributive claims (De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 84; World Bank, 2005). But aspects such as Voluntary Land Transfer, Stock Distribution Options, leaseback arrangements, phased implementation, and complex compensation procedures did not merely create administrative challenges after the policy had been adopted (Ballesteros et al., 2018, pp. 15, 17, 24; De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 29; Fuwa, 2000, p. 23; Karaan, 2021, p. 410). They built discretion, ambiguity, and negotiated compliance into the reform's structure. Redistributive implementation constraints were built into the reform program itself.

This supports the distinction introduced in Chapter 3 between p_0 and p^*. Broader redistributive ambitions were transformed during deliberation into a formally adopted policy that was more limited, more complex, and more vulnerable to elite maneuver. This does not mean that state capacity is defined as the ability to realize p_0. State

capacity still refers to the ability to implement the formally adopted policy, p*. However, the distinction matters because p* shaped how demanding implementation became and what kinds of redistributive outcomes were possible.

Weak implementation under CARP cannot be fully separated from the political compromises and institutional arrangements built into the reform during the legislative process. This does not make implementation capacity irrelevant. It does show that state capacity alone is insufficient for evaluating redistributive reform.

6.2.2 Overlapping and mutually reinforcing resource dimensions

The propositions were separately examined to the fullest extent possible in the analysis. In practice, however, there was a significant overlap between the resource dimensions and their connection to elite influence. The drawbacks of redistributive implementation cannot be attributed to an isolated weakness within individual resource categories. The reality is a complex interaction among policy design, information limitations, financial constraints, and bureaucratic structures.

A particularly illustrative example is the Voluntary Land Transfer (VLT) scheme. As described in the analysis, the policy was included to enable voluntary agreements directly between farmers and landowners. The fact that an option like this existed at all, which required significantly little state intervention and relied heavily on self-reporting and compliance, is in itself relevant. Following its addition to the reform, the effectiveness of the VLT scheme depended upon accurate land records (informational resources), sufficient administrative oversight (human capital resources), and financial capacity to monitor and enforce agreements.

These interrelated dynamics extended across other implementation mechanisms, where the weaknesses in one dimension of state capacity reinforced problems in others. For example, the lack of a comprehensive and reliable land registry enabled landowners to obscure or misreport ownership, creating major informational barriers. This, in turn, limited bureaucratic actors' ability to verify beneficiaries and enforce policy. Naming fictitious beneficiaries redirected financial resources away from substantive redistribution. Where funding for monitoring, land surveys, and legal enforcement was inadequate, even well-trained bureaucrats could not surmount these obstacles. Conversely, where bureaucratic personnel were weakly resourced or susceptible to elite pressure, informational gaps and financial leakage became more pronounced.

Informational ambiguity also affected land valuation procedures. The processes were fragmented and vulnerable to bribery and pressure from elites, and contributed to disputes and overvaluation. These issues further overwhelmed the already strained administrative structure, resulting in long delays. Complexity and overlapping jurisdictions also contributed to delays and the manipulation of the redistributive process. The Local Government Code of 1991 appears to have reinforced this dynamic by increasing local authorities' responsibilities, thereby creating additional opportunities for manipulation by local landed elites (Bankoff, 1996, p. 45; Riedinger, 1995, p. 183). Another short example is that ambiguity in land ownership records (information) complicated the valuation process, which then influenced compensation arrangements (finance), all of which relied upon coherent administrative action (human capital).

The national and local state agents operated in an overlapping economic and political context. Beyond their vulnerability to pressure from landed interests, the findings indicate pressure to emphasize formal accomplishments to satisfy foreign aid donors. At the national level, Congress retained substantial influence over funding allocations and administrative priorities, while presidential appointments shaped the orientation

and stability of DAR leadership (Borras, 2005, p. 101; Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 35; Riedinger, 1995, pp. 184–185). Financial constraints, therefore, cannot be understood purely as technical limitations, but must also be situated within a broader political context in which elite actors influenced both the allocation and use of state resources. These dynamics affected ARBs through limited access to formal agricultural credit, insufficient support services, and restrictions on land transfers, thereby reducing their ability to develop economically viable farms (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 85; De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 230; Fabella, 2014, p. 7).

The overlap between informational, financial, and human capital resources does not necessarily constitute a weakness of the framework. This interaction can be understood as part of the broader p*→y relationship, since implementation capacity depends on the combined effect of several resources rather than on each resource in isolation.

6.2.3 Weak capacity as a condition for elite influence

A more significant refinement concerns the direction of causality implied by the model. The framework initially emphasizes how elite influence may distort, redirect, or constrain state-capacity resources. However, the analysis suggests that the relationship between elite influence and state capacity was not one-directional, as the model suggests, but mutually reinforcing. The model depicted in Figure 2 portrays the policy process as a linear progression from elite influence to resource allocation to eventual implementation outcomes. But significant elite influence and distortion were possible only because resources were limited in the first place, creating self-reinforcing cycles that the original framework does not adequately theorize. Elite actors influenced the institutional and resource foundations necessary for effective implementation, while existing weaknesses in state capacity simultaneously created opportunities for further elite influence, obstruction, and strategic compliance. The creation of a model more true to life would therefore require a feedback loop mechanism, which the presented

model lacks. It is overly simplistic to capture a true account of what transpired. It is impossible to describe the situation without acknowledging that elites took advantage of the weak state's capacity.

6.2.4 Obstruction beyond the resource-based framework

The framework did successfully capture how elite actors influence key inputs to state capacity, such as information, funding, and bureaucratic organization. It identifies several forms of direct pressure and coercion, but only when they operate through the resource foundations of state capacity. For example, harassment of DAR officials is captured under bureaucratic human capital resources, and misreporting of landholdings is captured under informational resources. However, a significant number of obstructions affect redistributive implementation without primarily operating through information, finance, or bureaucracy. The framework, therefore, misses forms of elite obstruction, including coercion directed against ARBs and tenants, vandalism, and violence. The framework's lack of attention to such mechanisms of elite resistance limits its exploratory reach.

This suggests that a more comprehensive account of elite influence would need to incorporate both indirect (resource-based) and direct (obstructive) forms of influence. Direct obstruction affects the $p^* \rightarrow y$ relationship not by weakening resources, but by interfering with compliance and enforcement dynamics.

The empirical evidence, for example, pointed to landowners bulldozing parcels or dumping construction materials on them, making them unusable for agricultural purposes to obtain government approval for a transfer from agricultural to nonagricultural use (Riedinger, 1995, p. 182). Under VOS, landowners could coerce their tenants and farmworkers into reaching agreements (Llanto & Dingcong, 1991).

There has also been an inconsistent interpretation of the policy, which has led to violence and the criminalization of ARBs (Jadina et al., 2025, p. 2). Some ARBs have formal ownership but are unable to access the land due to violent threats (Adam, 2013, p. 235). Numerous reports have surfaced of ARBs being harassed, intimidated, robbed, evicted, raped, or killed by landlords, their paramilitaries, or hired goons (Drbohlav et al., 2017, p. 35). Other informal arrangements that did not qualify as strategic compliance have also been used by landlords to gain control over lands redistributed under CARP (Adam, 2013).

6.3 Empirical significance of the findings

The most significant distinction for understanding the outcome of CARP in the Philippines, or for designing new land reforms, is between legal redistribution and transformative redistribution. The former is understood as the formal transfer of land-owning title, whereas the latter is a more comprehensive reorganization of unequal power structures that covers land control and economic autonomy.

CARP is a particularly interesting case not because it officially failed to redistribute land like its predecessors (Rivera, 1994, p. 163), but because over the course of CARP, significant amounts of land were redistributed, reaching up to 89% of its overall targets during its extended implementation (Jadina et al., 2025, p. 1). According to DAR records, OLT lands were reportedly nearly fully redistributed by 1998 (Fuwa, 2000, p. 20). What becomes clear in this case is the type and quality of land redistribution. The verdict is similar to what Jadina et al. state, that quantitative indicators of redistribution alone provide an incomplete picture of reform outcomes (Jadina et al., 2025, p. 2). This helps explain why the reform resulted in such uneven socioeconomic outcomes, and it remains debated whether it has truly helped farmers after 30 years of agrarian reform (Timberman, 2018, p. 299).

While land was formally transferred, the institutional arrangements governing redistribution often preserved existing economic hierarchies and dependencies. Mechanisms such as Stock Distribution Options (SDOs), leaseback arrangements, collective CLOAs, and highly discretionary VLT procedures enabled formal compliance without necessarily transforming local power relations. The findings in this thesis strongly support this. In this sense, the empirical analysis indicates that redistribution under CARP frequently occurred in ways compatible with the continued influence of landed elites.

CARP was created on the premise that redistribution and secure land rights lead to socioeconomic development (Jadina et al., 2025, p. 1). However, analysis shows that many ARBs lacked access to the financial, informational, and institutional resources needed to make redistributed land economically viable. Weak access to agricultural credit, inadequate support services, infrastructural challenges, and ongoing reliance on informal lenders restricted beneficiaries' autonomy and productive capacity (Ballesteros et al., 2018, p. 85; De Vera Misa, 2015, p. 230). As Fabella (2014, p. 8) points out, land ownership alone does not automatically create successful agricultural entrepreneurship. He also notes that tenants had no alternatives to opt out of CARP. Some were content with their landlords and not interested in running a farm themselves. This view is echoed in Eshleman & Hunt's discussion of CARP, where they describe the program as assuming that every landlord is exploitative and every government official is dedicated to the common good (Eshleman & Hunt, 1991, p. 29). This is further emphasized by this thesis's discussion on corrupt bureaucratic officials.

It has been illustrated how redistributive reform can coexist with the persistence of underlying power structures. Elites may not simply reject a reform, but they can still shape the design, implementation procedures, and resource environment within which reform unfolded. This is how CARP could simultaneously achieve substantial formal

redistribution while producing more limited transformations in rural inequality and local power relations. The effectiveness of agrarian reform cannot be assessed solely in terms of hectares redistributed or formal implementation targets achieved. Equally important are the institutional conditions under which redistribution occurs, the degree of bureaucratic autonomy, and whether ARBs gain meaningful economic independence following formal land transfer.

CARP relied too heavily on legal compliance, despite having many stakeholders with high incentives and the possibility of not complying. There were not enough incentives to voluntarily cooperate, as Murray noted in previous land reforms in 1972 (Murray, 1972, p. 159). This thesis's empirical findings align with You's statement that "the land-owning elite protected their interests" (You, 2005). They also match Tuaño and Cruz's description that the government's capacity was "handicapped" both because of a lack of institutional capacity and the ongoing influence of landed elites (Tuaño & Cruz, 2023, p. 200).

The continued relevance of these findings is underscored by current patterns of rural poverty in the Philippines. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, farmers and fisherfolk remained among the poorest basic sectors in 2023. Rural poverty also remained considerably higher than urban poverty (Mapa, 2025). These figures suggest that the question of agrarian reform cannot be reduced to whether land has formally been redistributed, but must also include whether rural households gain the resources necessary to convert land access into livelihood security and economic autonomy. This reinforces the empirical significance of the thesis's findings. If formal redistribution can coexist with persistent poverty and dependence, then attention must shift toward the institutional and resource conditions that shape what redistribution means in practice. The Philippine case, therefore, highlights the importance of examining not only land transfers but also support services, credit access, infrastructure, market integration, and bureaucratic capacity.

6.4 Limitations and future research

Although intentional scope delimitations were noted in the methodological chapter, some limitations were unavoidable. First, sources use "elite" differently, sometimes without specifying the exact meaning. It might not align with this thesis's narrower definition, creating some uncertainty in conclusions. Second, it is also not always specified exactly which period of CARP the authors are discussing or analyzing, making it possible that, although an attempt was made to specifically examine the Aquino and Ramos period, some issues described might have been more predominant after that period. Some evidence may, therefore, reflect later CARP/CARPER dynamics.

The reliance on secondary literature, while important and enabling the synthesis of a large body of research, limits the ability to trace the process in greater detail (Bazeley, 2013, p. 148; You, 2005, p. 4). It also means that definite causal effects between elite actions and implementation outcomes. This thesis presents only recurring empirical patterns and plausible mechanisms through which elites shaped redistributive implementation. Future research could take a step towards tracing actual causal mechanisms to specific implementation episodes or local land conflicts to more precisely identify how elite actors influence the process. This could be done using interviews, archival material, or fieldwork to identify more precisely how elite actors influence redistributive implementation.

Although CARP is no longer an active reform program, land reform is still a relevant area of research. Both in the Philippines, where agrarian reform continues to shape rural livelihoods and political debate, and in other countries facing land inequality. Recent research from the International Land Coalition (2020) reports that land inequality is increasing worldwide and affects an estimated 2,5 billion people involved

in small-scale farming. Future research could either apply the framework developed in this thesis or further adapt the model before applying it to other reforms. Assessing whether similar patterns emerge in other redistributive reforms characterized by entrenched landed elites, fragmented state institutions, or post-authoritarian transitions.

Finally, future research could pay closer attention to the post-transfer conditions that determine whether land reform becomes meaningful in practice. The analysis has suggested that legal redistribution does not necessarily transform power relations or improve rural livelihoods. Further research should therefore examine how support services, credit access, infrastructure, secure titles, and bureaucratic protection affect whether land redistribution becomes effective control over land. Such work would help clarify not only whether land is redistributed, but whether redistribution alters the economic and political relations attached to land.

6.5 Conclusion

This thesis examined how landed elites influence redistributive implementation by analyzing the first decade of CARP in the Philippines. The propositions developed in the theoretical framework helped illuminate how the influence of the landed elite operated across multiple stages of the policy process. The empirical material also showed that the framework requires refinement, particularly by incorporating feedback loops between weak capacity and elite exploitation, and by acknowledging more direct forms of obstruction.

The analysis points to elites not simply blocking reform or fully determining implementation outcomes. Instead, they were able to shape the underlying conditions affecting the implementation. Several implementation weaknesses, commonly interpreted as administrative limitations, can be understood as embedded in landed elite

power structures. In the case of redistributive reform, political conflict continues through the institutions, resources, and discretionary spaces that determine how policy is translated into outcomes. The analysis contributes to the literature by theorizing an explicit relationship between elite influence and the resource foundations of state capacity.

The broader significance of this thesis lies in its argument that studies of policy implementation should pay closer attention to how powerful actors shape the capacities through which states act. It has been demonstrated that important dynamics are only fully visible when perspectives from state capacity and elite theory are integrated. Examining either framework in isolation would have missed how their interplay shapes policy implementation.

CARP illustrates that formal policy adoption does not settle the politics of redistribution. Instead, the struggle over reform may continue through less visible mechanisms embedded in information systems, budgetary arrangements, and bureaucratic practice. Understanding implementation, therefore, requires asking not only whether the state has capacity, but how that capacity is used.

7 References

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