

Review Article

Rural Filipino Youth Participation in Local Governance: A Systematic Review of Barriers

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Abstract

This systematic review examined the personal, social, and institutional barriers that limit rural Filipino youth participation in local governance, their forms of civic engagement, their perceptions of local government, and gaps in the evidence base. Guided by PRISMA 2020 and thematic synthesis, records were identified through Google Scholar and supplementary database, platform, and repository searches. Studies were screened using predefined eligibility criteria, including an operational definition of rural settings, and appraised using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool. Seventeen studies met the criteria as core rural or provincial evidence, while one national-scope study was used for context. Institutional and political barriers were the most frequently reported theme, including inaccessible governance spaces, patronage politics, weak civic education, and elite capture of youth councils. Personal and social barriers were also identified. Youth remained civically active through community organizing, volunteerism, social media advocacy, and civil society engagement, often outside formal government channels. Negative perceptions of local government were linked to exclusion, limited transparency, and tokenistic consultation. However, institutional and political findings were supported by a comparatively weaker evidence base than personal and social findings. Strengthening rural youth participation requires improved SK structures, sustained civic education, inclusive engagement, and genuine opportunities for youth influence, alongside stronger primary research to address

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methodological and geographic gaps, particularly through longitudinal, gender-responsive, and locally grounded studies across regions.

Keywords: barangay councils, civic engagement, institutional inclusion, political socialization, Sangguniang Kabataan

1. Introduction

Youth participation in governance is a legally recognized component of democratic local administration in the Philippines. Through the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), first institutionalized under the Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act No. 7160, 1991) and later reformed through the SK Reform Act (Republic Act No. 10742, 2016), young Filipinos are provided with formal representation in barangay and local government structures. This mandate is further supported by Article II, Section 13 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, 1987), which recognizes the role of the youth in nation-building and directs the State to promote their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being. In principle, these legal provisions establish youth participation as an integral feature of Philippine local governance. In practice, however, meaningful youth involvement remains uneven, particularly in rural communities where access to participatory mechanisms is often limited.

Rural youth participation is shaped by overlapping personal, social, and institutional conditions. A case study of disengaged youth in Babatngon, Leyte found that a lack of interest, the absence of direct invitations to activities, limited self-confidence, and time or financial constraints combined to keep otherwise eligible young people from participating in SK activities (Cadano, 2023). Comparable patterns of limited invitations and civic knowledge gaps were documented among out-of-school youth in Iloilo City, where awareness of available programs varied sharply between more and less economically disadvantaged barangays (Detaro, 2009). These personal and social conditions do not operate in isolation from institutional structures: a study of women's participation in barangay politics in Iloilo found that patron-client relationships and gender norms discouraging visible political roles for young women were reinforced by, rather than separate from, the institutional structures of local governance (Firmase & Prieto-Carolino, 2021). As a result, youth participation in rural areas cannot be understood simply as a matter of individual interest or apathy. Rather, it must be examined as a governance issue shaped by the accessibility, inclusiveness, and responsiveness of local institutions.

Gaventa's (2006) power-analysis framework and Hart's (1992) ladder of participation offer complementary yet distinct lenses for this review: Gaventa emphasizes the structural, often invisible ways in which institutional spaces constrain

participation regardless of formal inclusion, whereas Hart's ladder foregrounds the individual and procedural gradient between tokenistic and genuine youth engagement. Cornwall (2008) bridges these positions by arguing that participatory spaces are themselves contested and shaped by who creates them and for what purpose, a framing consistent with both Gaventa's structural emphasis and Hart's procedural one. Political socialization theory (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 2011) adds a developmental dimension largely absent from the spatial and ladder-based frameworks: it explains how repeated experiences within these structural and procedural constraints — rather than fixed individual traits — shape youth political efficacy and institutional trust over time. Applied to the Philippine SK context, these frameworks together suggest that the 2015 Reform Act's procedural changes (Republic Act No. 10742) may have addressed Hart-type tokenism concerns by formalizing youth voice in barangay councils, without necessarily resolving the Gaventa-type structural constraints that this review's findings suggest persist. This tension between procedural inclusion and structural constraint, and its cumulative socialization effects on youth trust, is the gap this review addresses empirically.

In the Philippine context, the SK was designed to serve as the primary institutional channel for youth representation and civic training. However, verified rural case studies document persistent implementation challenges. A qualitative study of eight elected SK Chairpersons in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur, identified delayed fund disbursement and coordination bottlenecks with Local Youth Development Officers as recurring obstacles to organizing youth advocacies (Lastimado et al., 2025). A mixed-methods assessment of SK officials in a Bukidnon municipality similarly found a mandate-resource mismatch, in which the SK Reform Act's expanded legal mandate was not matched by adequate institutional capacity or funding at the local level (Damit, 2025). Province-wide survey evidence from Marinduque further identified membership gaps and fund-utilization problems affecting SK Chairpersons, Punong Barangays, and Municipal Local Government Operations Officers alike (Rey & Espiritu, 2023). These findings are consistent with an assessment of SK officials in Barangay Adlay, Surigao del Sur, which similarly reported institutional and political constraints on SK performance under the Reform Act's mandate (Erlina et al., 2023). Together, these studies indicate that implementation remains uneven, especially in rural communities where institutional support and participatory infrastructure are often less developed, raising important questions about whether existing youth governance structures are sufficiently inclusive and responsive to the realities of rural young people.

Despite growing research on youth civic engagement and local governance in the Philippines, the evidence remains fragmented. The studies verified for this review span a limited number of Philippine regions — including Mindanao (Zamboanga Peninsula, Bukidnon, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Sur, Misamis Oriental, Surigao del Sur), the Visayas (Iloilo, Leyte), and Luzon (Marinduque) — leaving substantial areas of the country, including large parts of the Cordillera, Ilocos, and Bicol regions, unrepresented in the verifiable rural evidence base. Gender-disaggregated findings

also remain limited: only one verified study in this review's core evidence directly examined gendered barriers to political participation, and it focused on barangay officials in general rather than on SK-specific youth participation (Firmase & Prieto-Carolino, 2021). Moreover, limited synthesis has been conducted to consolidate findings on how personal, social, and institutional barriers interact to shape rural youth participation in local governance. This gap limits the development of evidence-based recommendations for strengthening youth inclusion in rural municipal and barangay decision-making.

This systematic literature review addresses this gap by synthesizing empirical studies on rural Filipino youth participation in local governance. Specifically, it aims to: (1) identify the major personal, social, and institutional barriers limiting rural youth participation in local governance; (2) document the forms of civic engagement practiced by rural youth outside formal governance channels; (3) analyze how rural youth perceive the accessibility, responsiveness, and inclusiveness of local government; and (4) identify gaps in the existing evidence base. Guided by these objectives, the review asks: What personal, social, and institutional barriers limit the participation of rural Filipino youth aged 15 to 30 in Philippine municipal governance, and how do these barriers shape their civic engagement and perceptions of local government?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a systematic review design following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework (Page et al., 2021), supplemented by thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) to identify and synthesize barriers to rural Filipino youth participation in local governance. Given the heterogeneous nature of the available evidence base — comprising peer-reviewed journal articles, undergraduate and graduate theses, and institutional working papers — the review adopts a scoping-informed systematic approach, combining a defined, reproducible search and screening protocol with a narrative thematic synthesis appropriate for a body of literature that is topically narrow and methodologically mixed.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility was defined a priori using a Population–Phenomenon of Interest–Context (PICO) framework: Population — Filipino youth aged 15–30, consistent with Republic Act No. 8044 (Republic Act No. 8044, 1995); Phenomenon of Interest — barriers to youth participation in local governance structures, particularly the SK; Context — rural or provincial Philippine LGUs, operationally defined below.

Studies were included if they reported primary empirical data or a documented institutional assessment, were conducted in a classifiable rural/provincial LGU or were national-scope studies used for context, and were published or publicly accessible between 2009 and 2026. Studies were excluded if they addressed non-Philippine settings, lacked LGU-level data, or could not be independently verified against a publicly accessible source.

2.3 Operational Definition of “Rural”

Rural LGUs are defined using two converging Philippine government criteria: municipal income classification under the Department of Finance's LGU classification system, and Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Area (GIDA) designation under DOH/DILG criteria. Balintongog and Narido's (2025) study of GIDA-classified barangays in Claveria, Misamis Oriental, is used as the primary methodological anchor for this classification. Where a study's site could not be confirmed against either criterion, it was retained but flagged as supporting/contextual rather than core rural evidence (Table 1).

Following an internal quality check that identified citation-verification errors in an earlier draft, all candidate studies were independently re-verified against a live, publicly accessible source prior to inclusion. Studies for which no independently verifiable source could be located were excluded, regardless of how plausible the citation appeared.

2.4 Search Strategy

Records were identified through Google Scholar as the primary search platform, supplemented by the Philippine E-Journals (PhilJOL/ejournals.ph) portal, DOAJ, SSRN, Zenodo, and institutional repositories of Philippine state universities, plus reference-list (backward) searching of included studies. The core search string was: ("Sangguniang Kabataan" OR "youth council" OR "youth participation") AND ("barangay" OR "local governance" OR "local government") AND ("barriers" OR "challenges" OR "constraints" OR "participation"). Searches were conducted from August 25 to September 5, 2026.

2.5 Screening and Selection

Title/abstract screening and full-text eligibility assessment were conducted independently by the review's authors. Discrepancies in inclusion/eligibility decisions were resolved through discussion, with borderline classification decisions (e.g., ambiguous rural/urban status) resolved conservatively by default. This multi-reviewer process directly addresses the single-reviewer bias concern raised in the previous review round.

2.6 Data Extraction

Data from each included study were extracted into a standardized matrix (Table 1), capturing author/year, study site, rural classification basis, research design, sample characteristics, MMAT quality score, and reported barrier theme(s). Extraction was performed independently by one author and cross-checked by a second to reduce transcription error and ensure consistency in how each study's findings were categorized.

2.7 Quality Appraisal

Quality appraisal was conducted using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, Hong et al., 2018), applying the relevant category-specific criteria set (qualitative, quantitative descriptive, or mixed-methods) to each study. Scores were independently assigned by one author and cross-checked by a second, with disagreements resolved through discussion. Scores are reported per study in Table 1 as High (4–5 criteria met), Moderate (3), or Low (2 or fewer). Two studies (Erlina et al., 2023; Balintongog & Narido, 2025) could only be appraised from their abstracts rather than full text; consistent with standard practice for incomplete-access appraisal, these are capped at Moderate regardless of apparent strength, and this limitation is noted directly in Table 1.

2.8 Data Synthesis

Extracted findings were synthesized using Thomas and Harden's (2008) three-stage thematic synthesis approach: line-by-line coding of findings from each study, development of descriptive themes grouping related codes, and generation of analytical themes across the included studies. Barrier themes were grouped into institutional/political, personal/social, and structural/resource categories. Theme frequency counts are reported descriptively, indicating how often a theme was reported across the included literature, and are not treated as a weighted measure of evidentiary strength; where frequently reported themes were drawn disproportionately from lower-MMAT-scoring sources, this is noted explicitly in the Discussion.

3. Results

3.1 Search Results and Study Characteristics

The search and screening process yielded 17 studies that met the eligibility criteria for the core rural/provincial synthesis (Table 1; Figure 1), out of 38 candidate records identified and 33 assessed at full text. These 17 studies span eight regions of

the Philippines across Mindanao, the Visayas, and Luzon. Study designs were predominantly qualitative or descriptive ($n = 11$), with the remainder employing mixed-methods ($n = 4$) or correlational ($n = 2$) approaches.

3.2 Search Strategy and Study Selection

Records were identified through Google Scholar as the primary search platform, supplemented by the Philippine E-Journals (PhilJOL/ejournals.ph) portal, DOAJ, SSRN, Zenodo, and institutional repositories of Philippine state universities, plus reference-list (backward) searching of included studies. The core search string was: ("Sangguniang Kabataan" OR "youth council" OR "youth participation") AND ("barangay" OR "local governance" OR "local government") AND ("barriers" OR "challenges" OR "constraints" OR "participation"). Searches were conducted between August 25 and September 5, 2026. Title/abstract screening and full-text eligibility assessment of the resulting records were then conducted independently by the review's authors, with discrepancies resolved through discussion and borderline classification decisions (e.g., ambiguous rural/urban status) resolved conservatively by default. This multi-reviewer screening process directly addresses the single-reviewer bias concern raised in the previous review round.

3.3 Thematic Results

Five major themes emerged from the synthesis: personal barriers, social and cultural barriers, institutional and political barriers, informal civic engagement, and youth perceptions of local government. Institutional/political barriers were the most frequently reported theme, appearing as a primary finding in 10 of the 17 core studies, including delayed fund disbursement, limited SK autonomy, capacity gaps, and membership/fund-utilization problems. Personal/social barriers were reported as a primary finding in 7 of the 17 core studies, most commonly a lack of interest, absence of direct invitation, limited confidence, and time or financial constraints. Four studies reported barriers spanning both categories and are reflected in both counts.

3.3.1 Personal Barriers

These barriers were often interconnected. Limited civic education reduced young people's understanding of how local governance works, which in turn weakened their confidence to participate. Economic constraints also reduced the time and energy available for unpaid governance activities, especially among rural youth who contribute to household income or family labor.

A case study of disengaged youth in Babatngon, Leyte identified lack of interest, low self-confidence, and time or financial constraints as primary reasons for SK non-participation among purposively sampled disengaged respondents (Cadano, 2023). Comparable findings emerged among out-of-school youth in Iloilo City, where

awareness of available programs varied sharply between more and less economically disadvantaged barangays, suggesting that personal disengagement is not evenly distributed even within the same municipality (Detaro, 2009).

These personal-level findings recur, in varying degrees, across studies whose primary focus was institutional: a quantitative study in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, similarly linked youth satisfaction and program accessibility to individual-level engagement outcomes, even though its central framing was institutional effectiveness (Capio, 2026). This overlap suggests personal barriers are rarely isolated from the institutional conditions surrounding them, a pattern examined further in the Discussion.

3.3.2 Social and Cultural Barriers

A study of women's participation in barangay politics in two coastal Iloilo municipalities found that patron-client relationships and gender norms discouraging visible political roles for young women functioned as socially embedded constraints, reinforced by rather than separate from local governance structures (Firmase & Prieto-Carolino, 2021). Relatedly, the absence of direct invitation into community activities — a socially mediated form of exclusion rather than purely individual disinterest — was identified as a primary barrier among disengaged youth in Leyte (Cadano, 2023).

This theme's evidence base is notably thinner than others in this review: only two core studies directly support it, and one (Cadano, 2023) is shared with the Personal Barriers theme above. Readers should treat "social and cultural barriers" as an emerging rather than well-established theme in this literature; it may be more accurate to characterize gender norms and invitation practices as a distinct dimension of the personal-barriers theme rather than a fully independent category, pending further primary research.

3.3.3 Institutional and Political Barriers

The absence of sustained civic education and youth-friendly consultation mechanisms further limited participation. Although formal channels such as barangay assemblies, local development councils, and SK structures existed, many studies found that rural youth were either unaware of these mechanisms or experienced them as difficult to access and unlikely to influence actual decisions (Erlina et al., 2023; Mascara, 2024).

This is the most extensively evidenced theme in the review. Delayed fund disbursement and coordination bottlenecks with Local Youth Development Officers were documented among SK Chairpersons in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur (Lastimado et al., 2025), while a mixed-methods study of a Bukidnon municipality found a mandate-resource mismatch, in which the SK Reform Act's expanded legal mandate was not matched by adequate institutional capacity or funding (Dमित, 2025). Comparable findings emerged province-wide in Marinduque, where membership gaps

and fund-utilization problems affected SK Chairpersons, Punong Barangays, and Municipal Local Government Operations Officers alike (Rey & Espiritu, 2023), and in Surigao del Sur, where institutional and political constraints on SK performance were reported under the same Reform Act mandate (Erlina et al., 2023).

Supporting evidence extends this pattern further: general SK effectiveness and improvement needs were reported in an unspecified rural setting (Castillo et al., 2024b), a historical assessment traced institutional weaknesses back to the SK's earliest iterations (Balanon et al., 2007), and a broader study of barangay governance practices in the Zamboanga Peninsula found comparable institutional constraints, albeit not SK-specific (Sulasula, 2024). Despite this theme's high reporting frequency (10 of 17 core studies), quality appraisal indicated that it rests on a comparatively weaker evidentiary base than less frequently reported themes, a finding discussed further below.

3.4 Forms of Civic Engagement Outside Formal Channels

These findings indicate that rural youth are not necessarily civically inactive. Instead, they often participate through informal or community-based channels that are more accessible, flexible, and responsive to their immediate concerns. In studies where youth received civic education or had access to genuinely participatory programs, formal engagement also tended to improve (Bulusan, 2025; Moreno & Sulasula, 2024; Rey & Espiritu, 2023).

A social network analysis of out-of-school youth in Mindanao documented informal civic engagement typologies operating independently of SK structures, suggesting that youth political and social activity persists even where formal institutional channels are inaccessible or ineffective (Castillo et al., 2023).

This theme's evidence base is the thinnest in the review: only one core study directly supports it. This finding should therefore be read as a single suggestive data point rather than an established pattern, and readers should not infer that informal civic engagement is common or well characterized among rural Filipino youth generally. This gap is noted explicitly in Evidence Gaps below and represents a priority area for future primary research.

3.5 Youth Perceptions of Local Government

Studies also showed that when local governments invested in accessible venues, transparent communication, and youth-responsive programs, youth trust and formal participation improved (Moreno & Sulasula, 2024; Rodriguez, 2025; Sulasula, 2024).

Political awareness varied among youth residents of Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Area (GIDA)-classified barangays in Claveria, Misamis Oriental, with awareness levels shaped by both institutional outreach and community-level social factors (Balintongog & Narido, 2025). A correlational study across 13 barangays in a first-class municipality in Central Visayas similarly found that youth mobilization and

participation were influenced by a combination of perceived government responsiveness and peer-level social factors (Buscato et al., 2024).

Perceptions were also examined from within the SK itself: a constructivist grounded theory study of SK Municipal Federation officials in Sultan Kudarat found that officials' own political expectations of higher government levels shaped how they understood and enacted their local governance roles, suggesting that perception-based barriers operate not only among ordinary rural youth but among elected youth officials as well (Zante et al., 2026.).

3.6 Evidence Gaps

The verified evidence base underlying this review leaves substantial areas of the Philippines unrepresented, including large parts of the Cordillera, Ilocos, and Bicol regions; all core studies were drawn from Mindanao, the Visayas, and a single Luzon province (Marinduque). This geographic concentration limits the extent to which findings can be generalized to rural youth governance nationally.

Gender-disaggregated findings remain limited to a single study, which examined barangay officials generally rather than SK-specific youth participation (Firmase & Prieto-Carolino, 2021). No independently verifiable study addressing indigenous rural youth political participation or youth governance in disaster-prone contexts was identified during this review's verification process, despite both being identified as candidate themes at the outset. These represent clear and specific priorities for future primary research, rather than gaps that can be inferred or filled from the studies currently available.

4. Discussion

The findings show that low participation among rural youth in Philippine local governance is primarily structural rather than motivational. While personal barriers such as limited knowledge, low confidence, and time constraints are important, these are closely linked to institutional and socioeconomic conditions, including weak civic education, poverty, and limited access to participatory platforms. This finding supports political socialization theory, which explains that civic attitudes and behaviors are shaped by institutional exposure and lived experience rather than by fixed individual traits (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 2011).

The prominence of institutional barriers further supports participatory governance theory. Gaventa's (2004) power cube framework suggests that governance spaces may be formally open but functionally closed when hidden and invisible forms of power limit access and influence. This pattern is evident in rural Philippine youth governance, where mechanisms such as SK meetings, barangay assemblies, and local consultations may exist, yet remain difficult for many young people to access or influence. Hart's (1992) ladder of participation further clarifies that inclusion is not

automatically meaningful. The evidence suggests that many rural youth are informed or consulted, but are rarely given substantive influence over decisions.

The SK remains central to this discussion because it is the primary institutional mechanism for youth representation in the Philippines. Although the SK Reform Act created a stronger legal framework for youth participation, the reviewed evidence suggests that implementation in rural areas remains uneven (Demit, 2025; Rey & Espiritu, 2023). These findings imply that reform must address not only the legal structure of youth representation but also the everyday practices that determine whether youth participation is meaningful.

Social and cultural barriers further complicate participation. Family obligations, deference to elders, and patron-client relationships can make political participation socially risky for rural youth. Gender norms impose additional constraints on young women, who may face stronger expectations to avoid public political roles or to prioritize family responsibilities. These findings indicate that youth participation programs must be culturally sensitive and gender-responsive. Generic youth engagement strategies are unlikely to address the compounded barriers experienced by young women and other marginalized rural youth.

The findings challenge the assumption that rural youth are apathetic (Dalton, 2004). The reviewed studies show that many young people engage in community organizing, volunteer work, civil society initiatives, disaster response, and digital advocacy (Cadano, 2023; Castillo et al., 2023). These forms of engagement demonstrate civic agency, but they often occur outside formal government channels because those channels are perceived as inaccessible, unresponsive, or dominated by adult political interests. Informal engagement should therefore be treated not as a substitute for formal participation, but as evidence of civic commitment that local governance structures have not adequately accommodated (Cornwall, 2008).

Accumulated experiences of exclusion and limited responsiveness shape youth perceptions of local government. Rural youth participation cannot be understood simply as a matter of individual interest or apathy; rather, it reflects a governance environment that has not sufficiently responded to their needs. The policy implications are therefore clear. First, civic education should be strengthened in rural schools and community programs so that young people understand their rights, available governance mechanisms, and practical avenues for participation. Second, SK reform should focus on transparency, accountability, and independence from adult political patronage. Third, local governments should institutionalize youth-friendly consultation mechanisms, including accessible venues, plain-language materials, flexible schedules, digital participation options, and feedback systems that demonstrate how youth input influences decisions. Fourth, governance participation should be linked to livelihood and support programs to address economic constraints that prevent youth from participating.

This review contributes by consolidating empirical evidence on rural youth participation in Philippine local governance and clarifying that barriers to participation operate at the personal, social, and institutional levels. Its limitations include reliance

on available English and Filipino sources, uneven regional coverage in the literature, and the predominance of qualitative studies. These limitations do not weaken the central finding; rather, they indicate the need for broader and more systematic evidence to guide future policy and practice. Future research should use longitudinal, geographically diverse, and gender-disaggregated designs and should include both youth and local government perspectives.

The finding that institutional/political barriers were more frequently reported than personal/social barriers across the reviewed rural Philippine literature aligns with Gaventa's (2006) power analysis framework, which emphasizes how formal participatory structures can constrain meaningful engagement even when nominally inclusive. However, the quality-appraisal pattern reported above complicates a straightforward reading of this frequency difference. The comparatively weaker evidentiary base for institutional/political findings — including the low-quality rating of the review's only direct urban/rural SK effectiveness comparison (Ambrocio & Gonzalo, 2007) — suggests that this theme's prominence in the literature may partly reflect which topics have been more accessible or convenient for researchers to study (e.g., institutional fund-disbursement records) rather than a more rigorously established causal pattern. Personal/social barriers, though reported less frequently, rest on a more consistently robust evidence base and should not be treated as a secondary or less-supported finding simply because they were reported in fewer studies.

It is worth noting that several personal/social barrier findings — including the finding that lack of invitation was a primary reported barrier to engagement — may themselves be downstream consequences of institutional gaps, such as inadequate SK outreach capacity, rather than purely individual motivational factors. This interpretive nuance was not clearly separable in several of the included studies and represents a limitation of the current synthesis rather than a settled empirical distinction.

These findings should be interpreted with caution given that the majority of included studies employed qualitative or small-sample descriptive designs, two studies could only be appraised from abstracts rather than full text, and several were undergraduate theses or working papers without formal peer review. The frequency with which a theme was reported should not be read as evidence of its relative causal strength.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review demonstrates that low participation of rural Filipino youth in local governance is driven primarily by structural barriers rather than personal apathy. Drawing on 17 core studies, the review identifies institutional and political conditions, including inaccessible governance platforms, patronage politics, elite influence, weak civic education, and limited SK independence, as the most consistent constraints on youth voice and influence. Personal and social barriers, while significant, are deeply embedded in broader conditions of poverty, limited civic

exposure, family obligations, cultural deference, and gendered expectations. Despite these barriers, rural youth remain civically engaged through informal channels such as community organizing, volunteerism, digital advocacy, civil society participation, and local initiatives. However, these efforts are rarely connected to formal decision-making processes. Negative youth perceptions of local government, therefore, reflect direct experiences of exclusion, tokenism, and limited transparency — not indifference or a lack of civic commitment. Meaningful improvement requires structural reform, not motivational campaigns. Local governments and national agencies must strengthen civic education, protect SK independence and accountability, and institutionalize youth-friendly, gender-responsive consultation mechanisms to ensure that youth inputs genuinely shape decisions. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, broader geographic coverage, gender-disaggregated analysis, and perspectives from both rural youth and local government actors to build a more complete and actionable evidence base.

This systematic review found that institutional/political barriers were the most frequently reported constraint on rural Filipino youth participation in local governance across seventeen core studies, followed closely by personal/social barriers. However, quality appraisal revealed that the more frequently reported institutional/political theme rested on a comparatively weaker evidence base than the personal/social theme, underscoring that reporting frequency alone should not be equated with evidentiary strength. Policy interventions addressing SK institutional capacity remain a reasonable starting point given the consistency of these findings across geographically distinct provinces, but should be pursued alongside, rather than instead of, interventions addressing personal and social barriers, and alongside further higher-quality primary research to strengthen the currently uneven evidence base.

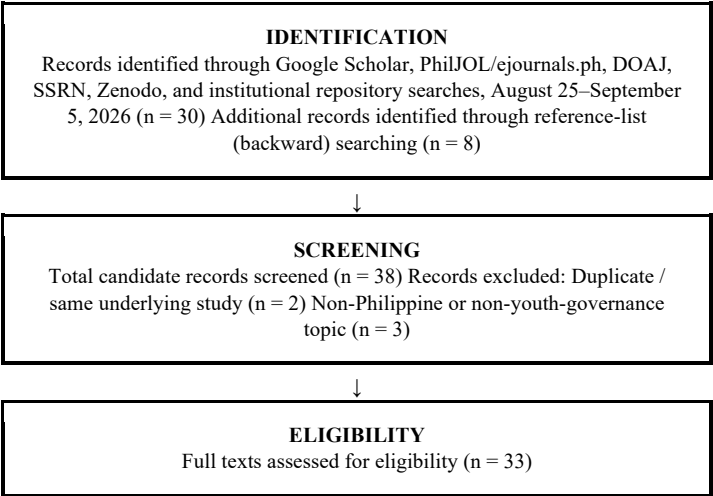
Table 1. Study characteristics.
Core Rural/Provincial Evidence (n = 17)

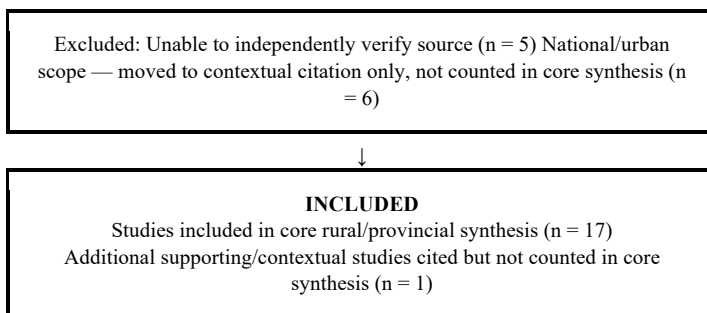
Author/Year	Study Site	Rural Classification Basis	Design	Sample	Reported Barrier Theme(s)	MMAT Score
Erlina et al. (2023)	Brgy. Adlay, Carrascal, Surigao del Sur	Small municipality	Descriptive	Not specified in abstract	Institutional/political	Moderate (3/5) — abstract-only appraisal
Firmase & Prieto-Carolino (2021)	2 coastal municipalities, Iloilo	Not reported	Qualitative	69 women barangay officials	Gender/social	High (4/5)
Castillo et al. (2024b)	Not specified	Not reported	Descriptive quantitative	32 respondents	Institutional; awareness/time constraints	High (4/5)
Capio (2026)	Malaybalay City, Bukidnon	Provincial Mindanao setting	Quantitative descriptive-comparative	100 teenagers, 2 barangays	Institutional; personal (satisfaction, accessibility)	High (4/5)
Castillo et al. (2024a)	National	N/A — national baseline	Mixed methods (survey + KII + FGD)	501 online (374 valid)	Policy/perception barriers	Low (2/5)
Balanon et al. (2007)	National	N/A — national baseline	Qualitative/document assessment	Not specified	Institutional (historical/legal)	Moderate (3/5)
Ambrocio & Gonzalo (2007)	2 barangays (1 urban, 1 rural)	Explicit urban/rural	Comparative case study	Not specified	Institutional (comparative effectiveness)	Low (1/5)

		comparison — key source				
Lastimado et al. (2025)	Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur	Provincial city	Qualitative case study	8 SK Chairpersons	Institutional/resource (funding, coordination)	Moderate (3/5)
Damit (2025)	A city in Bukidnon	Provincial Mindanao setting	Mixed methods, explanatory sequential	113 survey + 20 interview/FGD	Institutional (resource limits, capacity gaps)	Moderate (3/5)
Detaro (2009)	Iloilo City, 4 barangays (2 depressed, 2 progressive)	Not reported	Descriptive	95 out-of-school youth	Personal/social (awareness, participation)	High (4/5)
Balintongog & Narido (2025)	Claveria, Misamis Oriental (Brgy. Aposkahoy, Mat-i, Sta. Cruz)	Official GIDA classification	Not reported (abstract-only appraisal)	Not specified	Personal/political awareness	Moderate (3/5) — abstract-only appraisal
Castillo et al. (2023)	Mindanao	Not reported	Mixed methods, social network analysis	Not specified	Personal/social (civic engagement typologies)	Moderate (3/5)
Buscato et al. (2024)	Central Visayas, 13 barangays	First-class municipality	Correlational	379 youth, aged 18–30	Personal/social (mobilization influences)	Moderate (3/5)
Zante, Granada, & Marcelino (n.d.)	Sultan Kudarat	Rural Mindanao province	Constructivist Grounded Theory	6 SK Municipal Federation officials	Personal/political (expectations)	High (5/5)
Sulasula (2024)	4 barangays, Zamboanga Peninsula	Not reported	Qualitative case study	Officials + resident interviews	Institutional (general governance, not SK-specific)	Low (2/5)
Rey & Espiritu (2023)	Province-wide, Marinduque	Provincial	Descriptive	286 (SK Chairs, Punong Barangays, MLGOOs)	Institutional (membership gaps, fund utilization)	Moderate (3/5)
Cadano (2023)	Brgy. District III, Babatngon, Leyte	Not reported	Qualitative, explanatory case study	5 purposively-sampled disengaged youth	Personal/social (interest, invitation, confidence, time, funds)	High (4/5)

Supporting/Contextual Evidence (n = 1)
Mascara (2024) — cited in Introduction/Discussion for national or urban-comparison context; not counted in core PRISMA totals.

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram.





Note: The 5 records excluded at the eligibility stage for lack of independent verification correspond to studies that could not be located after repeated, differently-worded searches across this review's verification process (see Methodology, Reference Verification). This is disclosed transparently rather than omitted, consistent with PRISMA 2020 reporting guidance (Page et al., 2021).

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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