

# Political Dynasties in the Philippines: Persistent Patterns, Perennial Problems

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# Introduction

**‘Political dynasties’** generally refer to traditional political families or the practices by these political families of monopolizing political power and public offices from generation to generation and treating the public elective office almost as their personal property.

- This paper, therefore, examines the general nature of the current Philippine political dynasties, the reasons for its continuing existence and its adverse impact in the country.



# Introduction

- It will show that the resiliency of political dynasties mainly emanates from the following factors:
  - 1) the formidable political and socio-economic foundations which established political dynasties;
  - 2) the failure to effectively implement constitutional provisions to address its adverse effects; and
  - 3) the weakness of potential countervailing forces against political dynasties.

# I. The General Nature of Philippine Political Dynasties

- Of the 200 elected House of Representatives, 169 (84.5%) were members of pre-1972 traditional families. This signified the continuing general trend in Philippine politics whereby 70 percent of the 15th Philippine Congress is dynastic.



# I. The General Nature of Philippine Political Dynasties

- Furthermore, the 2013 Philippine mid-term national elections established the rule of political dynasties in the country. It showed that all 80 provinces have political families and 74% of the members of the House of Representatives come from political families.



## A. Political Dynasties and the Rise of the Philippine Oligarchy

- 1) The perpetuation of the oligarchy during the American colonial regime (1898-1946)
- 2) Perpetuation of political dynasties after independence (1946)
- 3) Political dynasties during the martial law period (1972-1986).

## B. Situating Political Dynasties in Philippine Patrimonial Politics

- These developments – in the central bureaucracy and local patron-client relations, as well as in the expansion of governmental economic responsibilities – highlight the seeming strengthening of patrimonial features within the postcolonial Philippine state. Because these patterns became more pronounced in recent times, as access to the state began to be more important for securing patronage and rents, the term *neopatrimonial* helps to capture the historical sequence.

## II. Variants of Political Dynasties

- Political families in the Philippines have perpetuated themselves through the following means:

### **A. Rent-seeking**

Eugenio Lopez who used his commercial and legal skills to become the Republic's leading rent-seeking entrepreneur. Simultaneously, his younger brother Fernando maintained the family's political base in the home province of Iloilo and used it to bolster his climb to national elective office.

### **B. Political Violence**

John Sidel (1999) has referred to such a situation as "bossism" whereby in the Philippines, bosses have included small-town mayors, provincial governors, congressmen, and even presidents.





## II. Variants of Political Dynasties

**“Bossism”**, in turn, refers to the interlocking, multilateral directorate of bosses who use their control over the state apparatus to exploit the archipelago’s human and natural resources.

(Sidel 1999, 10).



## II. Variants of Political Dynasties

### **C. Electoral Politics and Networks**

- A third power base of political dynasties in the Philippines is through electoral politics and networks, i.e., “political dynasties which have built their power not through bureaucratic, military or even economic position but by electoral means.
- Resil Mojares points to the Osmenas of Cebu as an example.



## III. Adverse Effects of Political Dynasties

- A. The perpetuation of poverty and underdevelopment.**
- B. The propagation of political and socio-economic inequality.**
- C. The continuing prevalence of massive corruption.**

# IV. Constitutional Attempts to Challenge Political Dynasties

## A. Term Limits

- The term of office of the Senators shall be six years... No Senator shall serve for more than two consecutive terms”, while Section 7 states that “The Members of the House of Representatives shall be elected for a term of three years... No member of the House of Representatives shall serve for more than three consecutive terms...”

# IV. Constitutional Attempts to Challenge Political Dynasties

## **B. The Anti-Dynasty Provision**

## **C. The System of Party-List Representation**

- The party-list representation system, however, is marred by several deficiencies among which are the following:

### ***1) Limited to only a three seat representation***

The party-list law stipulates that only parties or organizations that receive 2 percent of the party-list votes cast nationwide are eligible for one party-list seat. Those that receive 4 percent of the vote are eligible for two seats, with those receiving 6 percent, three seats. However, no party is allowed to have more than three seats, regardless of how many votes it received (Park 2008, 121).



## IV. Constitutional Attempts to Challenge Political Dynasties

2. *Co-optation by the traditional politicians*
3. **Stiff competition from evangelical groups which have their own political dynasties**

### **D. The 1991 Local Government Code**



## V. Other Potential Challenges to Political Dynasties

- A. Inability for political dynasties to adjust to the changing times.**
- B. Individuals toppling political dynasties.**
- C. President Benigno Aquino and political dynasties.**
- D. The pressure for an “inclusive” growth.**

## V. Other Potential Challenges to Political Dynasties

### **E. Weakness of the Philippine left movement.**

- Such a break between the hard-liners (RAs) and the oppositional faction (RJs) occurred in mid-1992. RAs (“Reaffirm”) maintained that the CPP “should continue to strictly adhere to the orthodox Marx-Leninist and Maoist principles that they had advocated from the early days of the CPP, while the RJs (“Reject”) rejected it”.

### **F. Civil society movements against political dynasties.**





## CONCLUSION

Given such a situation, one can only conclude that the challenge to end political dynasties in the Philippines remains bleak at the moment.