

# Political dynasty in the philippines

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In our discussion so far on the Philippines we have seen how the political system was captured by an oligarchy whose consolidation was greatly facilitated by the way the US set up their colony. Marcos tried to break the oligarchy, but he failed and indeed if anything, as Benedict Anderson pointed out, the oligarchy surfaced after 1986 even more powerful than ever. The clearest manifestation of the oligarchy in the Philippines and how it impacts politics is the existence of political dynasties.

Now you'd be right in noting that every country in the world has political dynasties. The US has the Bush dynasty, the Kennedy dynasty, Colombia has the Lopez family, the Lleras family and the grandfather of the current president of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, was president between 1938 and 1942. Winston Churchill's son was even a Member of Parliament for the Conservative Party in Britain. But the extent to political dynasties in the Philippines is off the chart compared to any other country in the world. 0% of congress-people elected in 2007 had a previous relative who were also in congress.

To give some sense of how high this is, the analogous figure in the US was 7%. In roughly half of the 80 provinces of the Philippines the governor is related to one of the congress-people. This family run government is not a new thing in the Philippines and it dates all the way back to the US creation of democracy. In the first elections the US organized, to be eligible to run you had to come from a set of elite families recognized by the Americans, called the principalia.

This was one of the ways in which the oligarchs had a huge head start and incumbent advantage became the way of life in the Philippines. This has led

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to very long-run family advantages. For instance, in the province of Leyte, a member of the Veloso family has been either a congress-person or the governor since 1916. How is it that these families perpetuate themselves in power even today? For one thing, being a member of a political dynasty massively increases your probability of being elected to any political office.

For instance, if you are from a political dynasty and run for congress, you are 22 percentage points more likely to get elected relative to a non-dynastic candidate. This effect is even larger, 40 percentage points, if the dynastic candidate currently has a member of the family in some political office. But this correlation could mean many things. Maybe rich families with large landholdings or wealth or some specific talent form dynasties and it is not really the dynasty that matters but these characteristics correlated with the formation of a political dynasty.

For example, Ted Kennedy came from a dynasty of rich Bostonians with a strong interest (and success) in politics. But perhaps, it wasn't that his father was a senator or his brother a president that made Ted Kennedy likely to be elected, but his family's wealth or other characteristics of this ambitious family. To tackle exactly this issue Pablo Querubin in his research "Family and Politics: Dynastic Persistence in the Philippines" compares non-dynastic political candidates who just win office, to those who just lose (either dynastic or non-dynastic).

The idea with this "just win office" strategy (or as it is called, the regression discontinuity strategy) is that this approximates a situation where the candidate who won did so "almost randomly" relative to the candidate who just lost (think of a coin toss determining whether a candidate with exactly

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50% of the vote gets one more vote or whether his rival does). This in particular should ensure that whether one of these just winning candidates didn't do so because of their special talents or wealth relative to candidates who just lost it.

What Pablo finds is that those who win in these circumstances are 4 times more likely to have a future relative holding political office. This suggests that, given other institutional and political features of the Philippines, just holding office, other things equal, is enough to help create a political dynasty. All this means that it may have been the initial conditions that the US imposed that shaped which political dynasties form, and perhaps even the origins of the power of political dynasties in the first place.