

Political dynasty: advantages and disadvantages



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Filipinos have always been proud of how much value is put into the concept of family. In the Filipino community, it can be seen how close families can be when they go as far as supporting even extended members of the family, despite the hardships and nuisances it may bring. It is not uncommon to see cousins, aunts, and grandparents all living together under one roof in the typical Filipino household. Being “clannish”[1] and family oriented people, Filipinos tend to give in to relatives and friends. Although it could very well serve as a positive trait that Filipinos have, it can also pose as a problem that no matter how principled one may be, it is so easy for one to bend the rules in favor of their beloved “kapamilya”[2]. The same clannish trait of the Filipinos is one that is not forgotten in the arena of Philippine politics.

Since time immemorial, political dynasties have been in the Philippine political arena and still are very much around today. Sons and daughters, nephews and nieces, and even wives of political figures have been seen to enter politics not for merit or expertise, but simply because of affinity by blood to those who hold the political power. Power, in terms of how it is transferred from one family member to another, is handed from a seniority to his or her successor by means of a “padrino”[3] system where the successor is endorsed by an outgoing member of the family so that the successor would rake in the same support that the outgoing member had received from his supporters when he or she was in a position of power. Here it is not seen that it is not merely a show of power but that there is an organized transfer of this same power that runs within these political dynasties that keep them surviving up until today. The most famous or infamous of which, include the Marcoses[4], with Ferdinand, Imelda, Imee

and Bongbong, and the Estradas or Ejercitos[5], with Erap, Loi, Jinggoy and JV (Joseph Victor) (PHILIPPINEPOLITICS. NET., 2000). In the municipal and provincial government, positions of power are usually dominated by a particular clan. Family members simply take turns in alternating between various posts for as long as the term allows. In the May 14, 2007 elections, as much as 53 candidates belonging to a background of political dynasties ran for office. Among which included families like the Aquinos, Biazons, De Venecias, Ortegas, Rectos, Roxases, Remullas and many others (Somosierra, 2007). Also in the recent May 10, 2010 elections, the same candidates from powerful political families landed key positions in government. Senator Benigno Simeon “ Noynoy” Aquino topped the presidential race while Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay surprisingly bagged the position of vice president. In the senatorial race, the likes of Senators Ramon “ Bong” Revilla Jr. and Jinggoy Estrada were re-elected to the same position as they topped the list of winning senatorial candidates.

Influence and Power of Political Dynasties

The political dynasty undoubtedly plays an influential role in Philippine society. Families of political dynasties are sitting side by side to deliberate on important legislations that will affect the future of more than 80 million Filipinos both young and old for generations to come (PHILIPPINEPOLITICS. NET., 2000). It has been often contended that political dynasties go against the values upheld by democracy since it does not provide an equal opportunity for people to hold offices of power and service. With the set-up of the political dynasty, it seems as if positions of power are exclusively dominated by a particular clan or family. Arguably, the political dynasty is <https://assignbuster.com/political-dynasty-advantages-and-disadvantages/>

said to monopolize the system of governance since it limits the chances of other common Filipinos to serve the people. It creates a brain drain in the sense that the new and capable leader who could possibly perform better than those currently in office, would not be given an opportunity when running against someone with a name. Former Mayor, and now DILG Secretary Jesse Robredo of Naga City, who has firmly stood against political dynasties, he believes, “ The right to serve does not belong to one family alone. Ordinary people who deserve to be empowered should be given the opportunity to serve the community,”[6](Medel, 2007). It is undeniable that there are candidates who are voted into office simply because of their name and fame. Sons, siblings and even wives of politicians – people who have no knowledge whatsoever of how to lead and serve, are voted into office simply because of their connection to previous leaders. Electoral votes are not so much based on the capability of one to serve, but rather on the name carried by one who is running. It is quite obvious that the family name of an elected official or a potential candidate plays a big role in the success of one who falls under the category of being part of a political family. It can be identified that power can be seen not only in exercises of excess but also in tangible things such as a candidate’s family name. This symbolic power could be seen as a perpetuation of the power system that runs through a political dynasty since it plays a big role in a dynasty’s continued existence and evolution.

The validity of the political dynasty has always remained a highly debatable matter. Why do traditional political clans that which do not ground their resources based on their economic stance, still exist in the Philippine political arena despite some rejections by others that it does not provide equal

opportunities for other candidates to run for public office? What key elements existing in these political dynasties make them dominant in the political arena up until today? Does the existence of the political dynasty really help the Filipino people, or is it just making the political maturity of the nation stagnant? (PHILIPPINEPOLITICS. NET., 2000). Despite the negative connotation brought about by political dynasties and its detrimental effects throughout Philippine history, political dynasties are not entirely negative and can bring certain positive effects. The solution to stop the negative effects linked to political dynasties is not to ban political dynasties in general, but instead, to educate people to vote more responsibly in choosing a leader. In this paper, I intend to find the factors that make political dynasties relevant today in the face of a democratic Philippine society by taking into consideration Michel Foucault's theory on power and Vladimir Lenin's theory on organization.

In line with what Michel Foucault mentioned in his work, "Discipline and Punish", political dynasties in the Philippines are unique in a way that they possess dynamic qualities that keep them surviving up until today. He stressed in his work that power is exercised in ways that it can be excessive to maintain order and discipline in society. The example would be that of Francois Damiens[7], who was publicly tortured and executed for his attempt to assassinate the sovereign. As Foucault recounts the event, one can see the display of the excessive use of power to punish Damiens for his actions, as seen in his recount wherein "...Damiens, who cried out profusely, though without swearing, raised his head and looked at himself; the same executioner dipped an iron spoon, in the pot containing boiling potion, which

he poured liberally over each wound...”[8](Foucault, 1977). Here we can see the sovereign’s excessive use of power to punish a subject who attempted to challenge his sovereignty by attempting to take his life. Francois Damiens’ public torture and execution was made as an example to others that contesting the king’s sovereignty would be subject to the same level of punishment or worse.

What Michel Foucault was reiterating in his account of Damiens’ torture is that power is primarily being exercised on the body as a means of strategizing the deployments of power rather than to punish the violator by causing physical pain. The crime committed by Damiens was against the body of the king; therefore, the punishment that was given to the violator was also against his body, through the form of torture. The pain caused to the body was clearly not intended only for the body alone but rather reached out to those who have witnessed or heard about the execution. The gravity of such an event still touches on modernity in a way that whoever reads or hears about such an event could still feel the gravity of the excessive use of power.

During the early 18th century, there was a display of excessive torture on the body according to Michel Foucault. In a span of a few decades, the process of torture became a process of organized disciplinary action in the form of a penal justice system. This evolution of torture saw the disappearance of punishment on the body and a loosening of the hold of the sovereign over the body. In the disappearance of punishment, it enters into the abstract consciousness of society rather than of perceptions. Moreover, there is a focus on the effectivity of punishment rather than of spectacles,

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wherein it focuses only on visibility or intensity of punishment such as that of Foucault's account of Damians' torture. On the loosening of hold of the sovereign on the body, one can see that punishment no longer touched the body but rather as Foucault would state, " The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property"[9](Focault, 1977). In the spectacle of scaffolds, executioners served as the king's " hand" in punishing offenders. As time passed, doctors, psychiatrists, guidance counselors, judges and jail wardens now took over the executioner's role of administering punishment. As Foucault aptly put it, " To sum up, ever since the new penal system - that defined by the great codes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - has been in operation, a general process has led judges to judge something other than crimes; they have been led in their sentences to do something other than judge; and the power of judging has been transferred in part, to other authorities than the judges of the offence. The whole penal operation has taken on extra-judicial elements and personnel."[10](Focault, 1977).

Negative Sides to Political Dynasties

" The very excess of the violence employed is one of the elements of glory: the fact that the guilty man should moan and cry out under the blows is not a shameful side - effect, it is the very ceremonial of justice being expressed in all its force. Hence no doubt those tortures that take place even after death: corpses burnt, ashes thrown to the winds, bodies dragged on hurdles

and exhibited at the roadside. Justice pursues the body beyond all possible pain”[11](Foucault, 1977)

Similar to what Foucault had studied about power relations, this paper, uses the same theory but relates it to the phenomenon of political dynasties in the Philippines. Throughout Philippine history, the political dynasty has taken on a negative connotation. Often linked to problems like graft, corruption, and abuse of power, it has taken on a detrimental role to society. Perhaps the most infamous of all would be the political dynasty of the Marcos family. Alleged to have embezzled between US\$5 billion and US\$10 billion from the Philippines, Transparency International[12]has ranked Ferdinand Marcos at second on a list of the world’s most corrupt political leaders of the past two decades; surpassed only by former Indonesian President Suharto (Ferdinand Marcos: Killer File, 2000). Names like the Estradas/Ejercitos and the Singson families have also linked the image of the political dynasty to allegations of graft and corruption. Luis “ Chavit” Singson, governor of the province of Ilocos Sur, alleged that he had personally given Estrada the sum of 400 million pesos as payoff from illegal gambling profits such as “ jueteng”, as well as 180 million pesos from the government price subsidy for the tobacco farmers’ marketing cooperative. Singson’s allegation caused an uproar across the nation, which culminated in Estrada’s impeachment trial by the House of Representatives in November 13, 2000. A more recent example, would be that of the Ampatuans’, whose name has been thrust to the limelight after the event of the “ Maguindanao Massacre”[13]where 58 individuals consisting of their family rival’s, the Mangudadatus, relatives and

some journalists were shot and killed preventing them from filing their patron's certificate of candidacy.

Families linked to political dynasties flood the news with allegations of all sorts of crime ranging from corruption, theft, murder and even rape.

Regardless of whether these are proven or unproven, it all translates into the tarnished and dirty image that the political dynasty holds in today's society.

This is exactly what Michel Foucault talks about in the spectacle of the scaffold wherein there is a display of an excessive use of power through torture. As Foucault mentions, there are three criteria where punishment must follow in order to fall under the category of torture. The first being, that it must manifest pain on a certain degree, that could be seen in the example of Francois Damiens' torture. The second being that such pain is regulated in a way that suffering is maximized rather than imposing death immediately because this suffering would insure a more effective notice of change on the offender's part. Last but not least, perhaps the most important would be that torture marks the individual and that it should serve as a spectacle. Torture marking the individual means that there is a reclaiming of the sovereign by the ruler and that the making of the execution as a spectacle would serve as a public display of the ruler's sovereignty. Such a public execution seeks to reach out to the whole of the society by letting the thought of punishment run through their consciousness making them aware of the total power of the sovereign, them serving as his subjects.

The context of the logic of torture is that there is contempt for body, wherein the body serves a possession of the sovereign. There is a political need for the sovereign to display his power which will serve as a recognition of his

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dominance over his subjects. In addition, this display of power actually runs through an internal organization of politicization and serves as a disciplining factor towards order. As Foucault mentions how the Enlightenment period called torture as an atrocity, “atrocity is one of those that best designates the economy of public torture in the old penal practice.”[14](Foucault, 1977) Further, he states that “insofar as being the crime before everyone’s eyes in all its severity, the punishment must take responsibility for this atrocity: it must bring to light by confessions, statements, inscription that make it public, it must reproduce it in ceremonies that apply it to the body of the guilty person in the form of humiliation and pain. Atrocity is that part of the crime that the punishment turns back as torture in order to display it in the full light of day”[15](Foucault, 1977)

In light of Michel Foucault’s study of power, he shows how the display of excessive power can serve as a negative connotation towards disciplining society. In relation to the existence of political dynasties, their display of excessive power by means of running private armies or reliance on coercion in order to establish and maintain their power, could very well serve as a detriment to public order as well as to their own existence. This is where Vladimir Lenin’s theory on organization can come into play because power alone in a democratic society, especially excessive power, can clash with the values of democracy while power coupled with proper organization could compromise with the said values. Organization, furthermore, would tweak how power is distributed, dispersed and used on the sovereign’s subjects. In the case of political dynasties where power is seen to be a tool used for political domination, power alongside organization can produce an effective

dynasty, which operates on behalf of and for the public rather than for itself and its interests.

Good Sides to Political Dynasties

In his book, “What is to be done?”, Vladimir Lenin talks about the importance of organization to serve as a focusing of all efforts towards a certain goal. An organized exercise of power would mean that there is a proper system that is undergone where it is both regulated and directed towards achieving a goal rather than just a spectacle. In the case of political dynasties, despite the weaknesses that they are prone to, it also has its strengths. Political dynasties provide continuity and political stability – which is particularly obvious in provinces such as those held by the Josons of Nueva Ecija, Ortegas of La Union, and Dys of Isabela. There is minimal political risk and this plays a huge role when it comes to investments. With the continuity offered by political dynasties, investors can be assured that laws do not change mid-stream of an investor’s project and that business agreements made in the past would still be upheld in the succeeding generations. This sparks an interest in terms of foreign corporations doing business in third world countries since it takes out premium on political instability insurance (PHILIPPINEPOLITICS. NET., 2000). Furthermore, this continuity assures that the desired goal is achieved overtime and will be implemented throughout a long-term establishment made by these dynasties. In addition, their continued existence help promote continued progress and development, so long as the succeeding leader is actually capable and not just voted for his namesake. For example, a son who is to take the place of his father’s position in office, would be able to benefit from the experience and guidance

of his father. Assuming that the succeeding leader has been trained from early on by the example of good leaders who have also lead from his dynasty, he would be able to emulate the good qualities and learn from mistakes made in the past as well as assure the constant upholding of the good qualities taught by his predecessors. By this process of learning from the example of the previous generations, they would have a huge advantage in terms of leadership and experience.

An example of a prosperous region, which has been ruled under a political dynasty for over a century, is La Union. “ The family of Ortegas have occupied elective and appointed positions in the province since the 20th century. In 1901, Joaquin Ortega was appointed governor by the US colonial administration. In 2006, ten Ortegas were holding various elective posts in La Union”[16](Medel, 2007). The prosperity of the region speaks clearly, of how well the dynasty has managed. Boasting a 97% literacy rate and a 94.77% employment rate, La Union is classified as a first class province (La Union, 2007). The City of San Fernando is now the seat of national government agencies in Region I and center of trade, commerce, financial and educational institutions, among others. From a “ deep rooted potential of stable community governance, to international shipping, an airport with viable capacity to accommodate international air traffic, natural terrain conducive to tourism development and a people endowed with cultural and virtuous heritage of industry, spirituality, nationalism and aspiration for growth, peace and prosperity, the City of San Fernando has emerged as the booming Metropolis of the North.” (San Fernando City). In response to issues raised regarding the continued existence of a political dynasty in the region,

Mayor Mary Jane C. Ortega replies, “ It is not an issue. Why punish people who deliver? Like in Frankfurt, they have a Mayor for 25 years and she keeps delivering. Look how developed Frankfurt is. It is not an issue if you are in power for a long time. It is not actually the length of service. It is the quality of service that you give. If the leader delivers, why punish him/ her? On the other hand, if you have a term limitation, three years is too long kung hindi naman nagdedeliver,”[17](Medel, 2007).

Another respectable leader belonging to families with a background in political dynasties include Senator Mar Roxas, son of the illustrious Senator Gerry Roxas, and the grandson of the venerable President Manuel Roxas whose public service careers have greatly benefited the country. Mar’s public service life began in the House of Representatives in 1993. After his congressional stint, he was appointed as Secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry; and then in 2004, he was elected to the Senate with a staggering 20 million votes – the largest ever obtained by a candidate in any Philippine election. Mar’s stint in the House is most noted for his principal authorship of RA 7880, also known as the Roxas Law, which ensures fair distribution of the education capital budget among all the provinces. This gave life to his advocacy for fair and equitable access to education, free from regional bias and political patronage considerations. Owing to his record of accomplishments as a public servant and political leader, the international community described Mar as “ one of the young leaders in politics and business who will bring Asia and the Pacific to the forefront of world affairs.” (Senator Mar A. Roxas) At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Mar was named as “ one of the Global Leaders of Tomorrow who is expected

to shape the future.” (Senator Mar A. Roxas) Recently, the Singapore Government has awarded him as the 16th Lee Kuan Yew Fellow (Senator Mar A. Roxas).

Another example of a leader who has chosen to stick by his principles despite the temptations offered by that of a political dynasty is Governor Barbers. Governor Robert Lyndon S. Barbers is the eldest son of Senator Robert “ Bobby” Z. Barbers and Vergie Smith of Makati City. The family has a deep-rooted background in politics. His brother was second district Rep. of Surigao del Norte and was succeeded by other family members who ran for governor in the province. Despite his family’s involvement in a political dynasty, Lyndon Barbers has made a clear stand against nepotism; relatives are banned from benefiting from any project on account of his position as Governor. This has been proven on several instances. A relative of his was once caught operating a sand-gravel quarrying business without a license or permit and was brought to court. In another instance, a cousin of his was arrested for illegal gambling operations[18](Medel, 2007). In addition, there are many other families belonging to political dynasties that have also contributed a great deal into building the nation and serving its people. Families like the Magsaysays, Osmenas, Biazons, Cayetanos, Villars, Duavits, Escuderos, Espinas, Gordons, Madrigals, Mitras Plazas, and Rectos have done a good job of keeping a clean image. These are the leaders who prove that the political dynasty can be beneficial to society so long as it does not abuse its power.

It cannot be discounted that one will not practice the use of power, although, there can be ways wherein this power can be diverted into good reasons to

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achieve societal order and development. This is what Vladimir Lenin is stresses when he mentions in his work that, “ Such workers, average people of the masses, are capable of displaying enormous energy and self-sacrifice in strikes and in street, battles with the police and the troops, and are capable (in fact, are alone capable) of determining the outcome of our entire movement – but the struggle against the political police requires special qualities; it requires professional revolutionaries”[19](Lenin, 1902). In this quotation, Lenin stresses that organizing a mass of people requires a strategic use of power as opposed to a fueling of the mobs emotions. A possible historical example would be that of the American Revolution in contrast to the French revolution. The French revolution had failed to recognize their freedom because they failed to organize their efforts of systemizing their revolution. The leaders of the French revolution relied solely on power and doing so led to the abuse and struggle of power. In the end, the French revolution served as a spectacle of disorganization, wherein towards the end, Napoleon Bonaparte’s emergence to take hold of power was recognized. This emergence of Napoleon from this disorganization is an opposite to that of an organized succession and transfer of power seen in the American Revolution. The American Revolution, through proper organization, gave birth to freedom, liberty and equality among the states. The transfer and succession of power from one president to another required organization as well as a regulation of their, being the presidents’, powers.

The political dynasty has its own share of pros and cons. There are examples of good political dynasties as well as bad ones. However, it is usually the faults of the political dynasty that are highlighted and scrutinized. More often

than not, the news is filled with reports about charges of theft, plunder and whatnot. As a result of which, many have turned to the solution of trying to ban political dynasties completely.

Laws Regarding Political Dynasties

In terms of the legality of political dynasties, Art. II, Sec. 26 of the Constitution says, “ The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law.” However, there is no clear definition of political dynasties and therefore the provision is none self-executing. It is the most ignored policy by Congress due to certain reasons. The framers left it to the congress to define political dynasties – which it has not done (Cruz, 2007). This loophole in the law has allowed the political dynasty to continue up to the present day even if it is technically not allowed. The only law being actively enforced to prevent the abuse of power is the term limits on elective positions. However, providing a term limit for elective officials is easily countered by having families pass on their power. To retain political hold on his constituents, a forcibly retired official arranges to have his wife, a mistress, one of his children, his own siblings, or a parent to occupy his position for one term. After which, he will be qualified again to run for office (Cruz, 2007).

In an effort to ban political dynasties, there was an anti-dynasty bill that was filled by Majority Floor Leader Arthur Defensor of Iloilo. Section Five of House Bill 783, which reads, “ Any person who has a political dynasty relationship with an incumbent elective official is disqualified from running for any elective public office within the same city and/or province where the elective

public official is running.” This bill will only be proactive. It will not affect those who are already currently holding positions. The bill also limits the definition of a political dynasty relationship as existing only among relatives up to the second degree of affinity or consanguinity. Thus, only the spouse, children, siblings or parents of the incumbent are deemed disqualified and similar in-law relationship. The bill disallows a relative of an incumbent from running for a position like governor, vice governor, mayor, vice mayor, as these positions are vested executive power. Another distinct feature of this bill is that it allows relatives of the incumbent to run for posts such as board member or councilor where power is shared owing to the collegial nature of the office. The idea of the bill is to bar relatives from holding positions where power is concentrated in an individual, but not from positions where decision-making is made through deliberation and consensus (Bordadora, 2007).

Solution to Problems Regarding Political Dynasties

Although this new bill seems like a good and effective idea for countering the negative effects of the existence political dynasties, it has yet to have been decided by legislators whether this will be fully implemented or not. It is up to the Congress to decide whether this bill will be passed and it seems highly unlikely that they will do so. This is partly due to the fact that political dynasties have become so much a part of the current system of governance that it is almost impossible to change. “ I don’t think it has much of a chance under the present Congress,” stated Defensor regarding his opinion on possibility of the bill being passed (Bordadora, 2007).

Like it or not, the emergence of political dynasties in the Philippines still operate well within the framework of so-called democracy (PHILIPPINEPOLITICS. NET., 2000). No matter how much effort is put against the political dynasty, it is here to stay. It is simply futile to hope for any change regarding the current laws on political dynasties. Instead of looking at something that is simply out of reach, people should realize that there lies a much simpler solution. It would be impossible to ban all political dynasties in general; however, it is possible to put an end to the bad political dynasties. People should realize that they are the ones who elect their leaders into office. No matter how strong a political dynasty may be, sovereignty is held by the people. At the end of the day, it will be the people to decide whether or not a dynasty will be succeeded. “ Absolute power is when you have a dictatorship. We still have to go through an election. The electorate will be the ones to dictate who are the ones who will lead. The people have the power, not the officials”[20](Medel, 2007). All this talk about outlawing political dynasties and its bad effects would not even be necessary if people were to vote mor