

## Election 2013: Horizontal and Vertical Expansion of Political Dynasties

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Self-preservation and expansion as a means for the continuing rule of political dynasties.

These are the twin objectives behind the formation of senatorial slates by both the pro-Aquino III ruling coalition and the “constructive opposition” of UNA or United Nationalist Alliance. The slates so far formed generally unveil the same faces with a few plucked out from long hibernation. Also ominous is the possible increase in the number of seats occupied by one family (Cayetanos) in the present Senate to four in the next or a total of eight senators coming from their respective dynasties (Cayetanos, Enriles, Estradas, and Magsaysays). If elected, four senatorial candidates (Ramon Magsaysay Jr., Mitos Magsaysay, Paolo Benigno Aquino, and JV Ejercito) will increase the number of senators who are blood relatives of former presidents to seven from the current three (Sergio Osmena III, Jinggoy Estrada, and Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos). In short, hypothetically six former or current presidents - Sergio Osmena, Ramon Magsaysay, Ferdinand Marcos, Corazon Aquino, Joseph Estrada, and Benigno S. Aquino III – will have their kin or descendants represented in the next Senate.

Of course, the figures may still change eight months from now in the May 2013 elections. But what is definitely emerging as a scandalous reality is that political dynasties are more blatant and active today. Conditions to form “more of the same” are more encouraging than ever under

the administration of PNoy, himself a benefactor of this culture of political patronage. The Comelec, as the country's premier election manager, is helpless beyond reproach.

Self-preservation and expansion of political dynasties in the Senate is being replicated not only in the presidency but also in the House of Representatives and in the various local government units (LGUs). A CenPEG study in 2011 showed that the May 2010 elections – where the automated election system was used nationwide for the first time – increased even more the number of political dynasties in both the national and local levels.

The 2013 senatorial slates are basically coalitions of political dynasties involved in the unprincipled party-switching or “turncoatism” of whole political parties for expediency and preservation. Bereft of any principled platform, the traditional political parties – including the opportunist pseudo-left – coalesce for electoral convenience and split later on when their chief patron (the incumbent president) with all the state resources under his command steps down from power.

Including those whose terms end in 2016, many of the Senate re-electionists and those running in 2013 have their dynasty lineage dating back to two up to four generations during the colonial period at the turn of the 20th century. Nearly 50 percent of the country's current political

dynasties owe their ascendancy to post-Marcos (1986) political deals when most elective positions were filled up by appointees of then President Corazon C. Aquino including the Ampatuans of the infamous Maguindanao massacre.

Membership in a political dynasty is a guarantee to its preservation. Whether in the national or local levels, membership provides a political clout to amass more wealth, hence, to secure an enduring political power. Various studies underscore the fact that wealth coupled with the traditional patron-client ties and patronage gives a dynastic politician – no matter how unqualified he is – an uncontested edge over a rival who has no political clan. However, once in a rare chance a non-traditional politician wins he or she begins to create a new dynasty.

The Senate, said to be the stepping stone of future presidents, is a “rich man's chamber”. All the 23 members of the current Senate (15th Congress) are millionaires seven of them multi-millionaires led by Sen. Manuel Villar who is actually a billionaire. While nearly 50 percent register their profession as lawyers and 17 percent are showbiz personalities and celebrities, 18 or 80 percent have big corporate and investment interests. Almost 80 percent of the present Senate members belong to political dynasties – bigger than in previous senates. Although five senators, namely, Joker Arroyo, Franklin Drilon, Gregorio Honasan, Panfilo Lacson, and Antonio Trillanes have no political clans they were at some point aligned with or been beneficiaries of traditional politics. Why the names of young public servants with outstanding track records like Erin Tanada, Teddy Casiño, and Grace Padaca were bypassed from the line-up of the traditional parties of the LP-Akbayan-NPC and UNA is not at all surprising.

Over the past 20 years, political dynasties have been thriving with memberships increasing through horizontal and vertical expansion. Fifteen of the 23 senators have relatives who are currently holding elective positions. Of the 15, 11 have relatives in the lower House a new CenPEG study on the 15th Congress reveals.

In both the lower House and LGUs, the same horizontal and vertical or multi-ladder expansion of political dynasties holds. Members of the lower House expand by

having their kin elected as district representatives in other provinces (e.g., the Macapagal-Arroyos) while those in the LGUs such as governors and mayors have blood relatives as vice-mayors and councilors (e.g., the Ampatuans of Maguindanao and Singsons of Ilocos). Packed with three House representatives and one governor, the Jalosjos dynasty aims to become a political empire by fielding more family members and allies in three provinces of Zamboanga, Mindanao in the coming elections. Not to mention the star-studded dynasty of the Revillas of Cavite, showbiz couple Lucy Torres-Richard Gomez in Leyte and the continued obsession for political turf of Pampanga's absentee congresswoman and former President, Gloria M. Arroyo and her children, “Partylist” representative Mickey Arroyo and new Bicolano citizen, Dato Arroyo.

Traditionally, the turnover of elective positions by end-termers to their heirs-apparent --spouses, children, or other relatives-- helps preserve the dynasties. Elections are tilted in favor of the rich and celebrities and are inherently vulnerable to fraud. Elections provide the mechanism for conferring legitimacy to elite power and create the illusion once every three years that “change” is possible. Election computerization, touted as the means to “modernize democracy”, has been bugged by deficiencies, program errors, and transmission lapses. Being a mere technology, computerization will not be the equalizer in an election process that has always been decided in favor of the political elite and where those in control of the technology will control the votes.

Even the Party-list system has been co-opted by traditional politics with 51 or 91 percent of the 56 seats occupied by millionaires and multi-millionaires; 10 nominees come from political clans. Only progressive Party-list representatives are non-millionaires with Anakpawis' Rafael V. Mariano who has a net worth of Php47,000 as the poorest. Before Mariano, his former partymate, the late Crispin “Ka Bel” Beltran, a three-time outstanding congressman with the most number of pro-poor bills filed in the lower House, was the poorest among the more than 250 members during his time.

So what is the implication of this phenomenon in Philippine politics?

The concentration, expansion, and consolidation of political dynasties over the past 100 years attests to the continuing hegemony of feudal politics, the absence of any form of real democracy, and the continued powerlessness of a vast marginalized majority in the Philippines. Definitely alarming today is the entrenchment of the system of political dynasties on a higher scale making the fair representation of the large majority of Filipinos even more elusive. With the oligarchs-dominated Congress shooting down for the past 25 years all bills filed in compliance with the constitutional prohibition of political dynasties, reforming the reactionary institution of power remains an uphill battle. Expect the present and future congresses to enact more laws that will favor the oligarchs and corporate elite.

Thus this will be the state of politics in the generations to come: A government dominated by oligarchs will not equalize opportunities for growth and development among the vast majority of people. The road to social change under this system – under PNoy – remains a tortuous path to tread. Only when good track record over power inheritance is given more merit and power changes hands in favor of the people will conditions for real social and economic reform begin to bear fruit.

The current national and media uproar against the blatant and ostentatious display of oligarchic power should lead to positive and constructive steps toward people empowerment.

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