

Issue Analysis No. 09  
Series of 2012

## Clan politics vs. new politics

*The undemocratic and anti-progress hegemony of political dynasties can be effectively challenged by a strong “new politics” movement with a critical mass advocating for an end to dynastic politics.*

By the Policy Study, Publication, and Advocacy (PSPA)  
Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG)  
November 16, 2012

As the country gears for the mid-term elections in May 2013, drawing more public attention is the barefaced display of power by political dynasties. Unlike in previous elections, the outcry against political dynasties has been more pronounced today to the extent that groups of anti-dynasty advocates led by former Vice President Teofisto Guingona, Jr. and anti-crime/corruption figure Dante L. Jimenez have asked the Supreme Court (SC) in a petition to compel Congress to enact an anti-dynasty law as the Constitution requires. Similar moves and sounds of fury are coming from other sectors including the media.

Since 1987, several bills have been filed to enact an implementing law to comply with the constitutional provision equalizing access to public service for all Filipinos regardless of class or pedigree and prohibiting dynasties. All the bills were shot down in Congress although some unwavering proponents such as Rep. Teddy Casino have re-filed them a number of times. On the other hand, insensitive legislators and other officials identified with political dynasties defend their position as being mandated by the “sovereign vote” of the people, as their family's public service legacy, and as a right to be elected in public office. Self-proclaimed independent analysts even join the fray by claiming there are “good dynasties” and not all dynasties are bad.

For the May 13, 2013 elections, however, the ruling political dynasties have become more blatant in their bid to capture more elective positions. The poll automation of May 2010, with its inherent defects of exclusiveness and non-transparency has even encouraged the resurgence of old and the entry of new political clans in many provinces. In the 2013 senatorial race, a win by known members of dynasties will see the next Senate having four political families with two members each; six former and current presidents will have eight descendants and blood relatives seating in the same upper chamber (Osmena, Magsaysay, Marcos, Estrada, and the two Aquinos). The same prognosis is expected to happen at the House of Representatives and in local elective posts where political dynasties aside from the 200 dominant ones seek to expand and consolidate vertically and horizontally their domains and spheres of influence.

The renewed public clamor for an end to dynastic rule is triggered not only by the brazen display of oligarchic power in Philippine politics. It is also generated by public perceptions that these political dynasties are above the law, make the playing field of electoral politics exclusive and, worse, generally have nothing to show to voters in terms of doable political platform except promises. In fact, many candidates for Congress in recent elections just

banked on their name recall advantage as celebrity/showbiz star, sports idol or kin to a dynasty patriarch, expensive media mileage and election machinery without conducting provincial sorties and still “won.”

Indeed, recent studies on elections since 1903 to the present show that dynastic candidates have 30% greater chance of winning over their non-traditional rivals. Since feudal politics is personality-oriented with campaign machineries run by a network of kinship and, in most cases, by means of fraud elections are generally a popularity contest. Thus, feudal politics has impeded the maturation of political parties especially since traditional politicians are given to compromise, opportunism, party switching or turncoatism, and patronage. There are no real causes or programs to advocate while promises are meant only to amass votes and not to be kept. Voters are left without a menu of choices based on concrete programs responsive of broad issues such as poverty, unemployment, lack of social services, and so on.

But these are not the only reasons why government is ruled by oligarchs. Attempts by cause-oriented political groups and movements to participate in the electoral arena with some vision addressing real issues are repeatedly suppressed by the powers that be. Illustrative of this policy of suppression by the state run by dynasties are the removal from Congress of winning candidates of the Democratic Alliance (DA) in 1946, the demonization of the Nationalist Citizens Party (led by the nationalists Claro M. Recto and Lorenzo Tanada in 1957), and the unleashing of counter-insurgency operations against the progressive Partido ng Bayan (PNB) in 1987 as well as the progressive bloc of Party-list groups in Congress since 2001. The hegemony of the ruling elite is perpetuated not only by their built-in, undemocratic advantages – which is non-violent, per se – but also by the use of fraud and force – the violent and extra-legal form against non-traditional and progressive forces.

The hegemony of traditional politics can be seen, for instance, in Congress through the dominance since the late 1940s of the landlord, logging, mining, and sugar blocs and, in contemporary times, of lawyers, showbiz personalities, and others whose interlocking interests include corporations, real estate, banking, and other enterprises such as alleged illicit operations. Competing for the presidency are dynasties long entrenched in the Ilocos region, Pampanga, Pangasinan, Visayas, and other provinces. The widespread poverty, income inequalities, frequent financial crises, foreign debts, and joblessness indicate the way government has been misused and been inimical to the broad interests of the people. On the other hand, government has only served to allow political dynasties to amass more economic and political power often through the aid of corruption, political patronage, and the use of state resources to promote vested interests. Political dynasties, cronies, and their underlings have been consistently linked to big-time corruption.

Except in policies and programs that favor the rich, big business, cronies, and other vested interests there is hardly any continuity even in token programs for the people through all the presidencies. The primordial objective of dominant political dynasties is to wrest control of the presidency for the short-term goal of allocating power and resources to their relatives, allies, and supporters.

The undemocratic and anti-progress hegemony of political dynasties can be effectively challenged by a strong “new politics” movement with a critical mass advocating for an end to dynastic politics. Aligned or working in parallel with existing progressive issue-oriented and cross-sector organizations and political parties, the movement of new politics espouses political and economic reform that addresses the country's institutional problems by attacking their structural roots. It represents the broad majority of people because it is of the people – long excluded from governance and whose rights to a better life and justice are undermined by the narrow interests of family dynasties.

Even in the realm of electoral struggle, new politics or politics of change can transform the election into a real competition of programs and alternative policies distinct from the feudal politics of dynastic personalities. It raises the political awareness of the people on the need for a collective response to the basic issues as against the empty promises of traditional politicians. The collective response should be inspired by patriotism, an end to feudal politics and foreign intervention, a self-reliant economy, and people empowerment.

For democratic governance to happen, the solution lies in empowering the people enabling them to play the critical role in government by making it truly representative of the masses as well as by equalizing economic rights through land distribution and the productive use of resources for national industrialization.

In short, the end to the system of political dynasties lies in a strong mass movement that strives for people empowerment altering the existing power relationships in favor of the people. Legislative and judicial interventions can continue but since these are well within the domain of political dynasties these cannot be expected to bear fruit for the greater public. Real people power is the only language understood by the powers that be – and this has been amply demonstrated in two civilian uprisings that led to the removal of unpopular regimes. Whether the present clamor for an end to dynasties will lead to another collective show of force remains a question. For many positive forces, what is important is that such a prospect should be guided by past lessons – when the removal of unpopular regimes only led to a power grab by factions of the old elite – and should aspire instead for the final turnover of power to the people.

For reference:

Bobby M. Tuazon  
Director for Policy Studies  
Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPEG)  
3F CSWCD Bldg., Magsaysay Avenue  
University of the Philippines, Diliman 1101 Quezon City, Philippines  
TelFax +632-9299526  
Email: [info@cenpeg.org](mailto:info@cenpeg.org), [cenpeg.info@gmail.com](mailto:cenpeg.info@gmail.com)  
[www.cenpeg.org](http://www.cenpeg.org)