

Political Dynasty in Public Governance: A Close Encounter with the Cebuanos

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Abstract – This is a qualitative study which described the existence of political dynasties in Cebu, Philippines. The prevailing issues on political equality and perennial rule of political families were also investigated unfolding the Cebuanos' perceptions of political dynasty and its impact on Cebuano bureaucracy. The method of data analysis used in the study was narrative inquiry where storytelling among the selected key informants served as data collection technique. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of key informant politicians while random sampling for key informant voters was determined. The instruments used in data gathering were interviews and observations. The study revealed the true meaning of political dynasty, its advantages and drawbacks to its constituents. Varied rejoinders and call for democracy motivated the selected key informant politicians to continue serving the citizenry. This study recommends that an anti-individualistic voting preferences campaign be promoted by the government, education and youth sectors in transforming intelligent Filipino voters.

Keywords – political dynasty, narrative inquiry, purposive sampling, random sampling, anti-individualistic voting preferences campaign

INTRODUCTION

Democracy as shared by Sanders is commonly associated with political equality and majority rule [1]. The ideology, in its nature and purpose, is to invoke freedom and political equality. The right to public service and political affiliations regardless of race, gender and religion is observed in most democratic societies. However, most of them are embracing the trend of dynastical governance.

Political dynasty commonly refers to a family in which several members by blood or marriage often in several generations or multiple siblings are involved in electoral politics. According to Dal Bo¹, E and P., & Snyder, political dynasty is evident in every country where inequality is sometimes observed in the practice of political power [2]. The situation challenges the significance and existence of political equality. Moreover, it is an example of irony living in democracy. This paper sought to analyze the reasons why in a certain point of democratic principle, people choose to accept political dominance.

The study of Kenawas on political dynasties in Indonesia revealed that the occurrence of regional

political families in the country is brought by three factors, namely; weak party institutionalization, deficient electoral law implementation and a “personalistic” mind-set among the voters during elections [3]. As found out in Indonesian political system, political dynasties are partly caused by the voters' attitude during elections. This becomes necessary to understand why people choose to patronize political clans. By this, a picture about the underlying sources of the existence of political dynasties would be developed.

Moreover, Dal Bó, E and P. and Snyder reiterated the saying, “power begets power” and asserted that when a person holds dominance in power, there is an assumption that this person will be observing political dynasty [2]. This implies that dynastical governance is a consequence of one's dominance in position and authority in the government.

One of the democratic countries that have been ruled by political dynasties is the Philippines. East Asia Forum included in its issue the present plight of both Indonesia and Philippines as the biggest democracies in South East Asia facing the threat of

political family domination [4]. A particular revelation indicated that seventy percent (70%) of the members of the Philippine Congress came from political dynasties.

During the American regime, political dynasties were practiced in Philippine politics. For Trajano & Kenawas, dynastic politicians are returning to the campaign trail to safeguard turf or to recapture old positions in the upcoming polls [4]. The Philippines, being an archipelago with 82 provinces, has one or more ruling dynasties. To enumerate some, the Marcoses are prevailing in Ilocos Norte, Arroyos in Pampanga, Cojuangcos in Tarlac, Ejercito-Estradas in Manila, and others.

One of the country's islands which are also dominated by political families is the popular province of Cebu. Since the dawn of Cebuano democracy, the province has been associated with the names of Osmeña, Rama and Garcia. The birth of political elites has continued until now which sustained the patronage of political dynasties in the government. Further, Myrina revealed that fifty five (55) political families based on the 2013 election have continued to rule without interruptions [5]. One of those which placed ninth (9th) in the ranking is the Durano family reigning for 31 years in Cebu's fifth district. This implies that Cebuanos, either city or province-wide, are espousing political dynasties. By conducting a study about Cebuano dynastical governance and as a pioneering place for political dynasties, the researchers would understand why voters chose to patronize elites in politics. The reasons for the patronage of political families would be a significant instrument in identifying how a political dynasty emerges.

On the contrary, the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines states in its Article II Section 26 that "*the State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law.*" This gives the legislators of the country the basis to propose an anti-political dynasty law. Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago proposed Senate Bill No. 2649 or the Anti-Political Dynasty Bill joint with the House Bill No. 3413 of Rep. Teodoro Casiño. Both are currently in pending status subject for discussion and debate. The failure of the Constitution, rests mainly on its insufficiency. Lores posited that while the Constitution acknowledges the problem, it leaves the solution to Congress [6].

The word "political dynasty" is not specifically defined by the constitution. Politicians, as logical as they are, can form diverse perceptions about the limitations provided by democratic principles. However, Santiago highlighted in her explanatory note in the proposed bill that the domination of political power and the utilization of public resources by such families affect the nation's citizenry [7]. The bill is not just to address the collapse of political equality but also as a socio-economic concern. This study sought to recognize the effects of political family dominance to the citizens. The necessity to identify its effects is helpful to settle the background of the bill because this would affect the whole citizenry and not just the Cebuanos.

The effects of political dynasties in the Philippines are already been underscored by Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre by examining the country's House of Representatives [8]. It is found out that such provinces with dominant political families are more or less capable of being good leaders specifically in areas such as infrastructure developments, health expenditure, criminality issues, employment, and other government services. This conveys that the effects of political dynasties on democratic governance are generally detrimental in terms of the distribution of public goods and services. These effects call the necessity to understand how citizens live under the rule of political clans and to describe how evident the effects of political dynasty to democratic governance are in Cebuano economy. Correspondingly, it is supported then that political dynasties have dominant control over both forcible and economic resources within given territorial jurisdictions. These unequal distributions of public goods and services increase economic gaps between citizens which inclines poverty.

Querubin studied how term limits introduced in the 1987 Philippine Constitution destabilize dynastic patterns in the government. The study revealed that the persistence of elites in the society undermines the effects of such political reform saying that term limits has no "statistically significant impact" on restricting families' persistence for power [9]. Thus, it suggests that political reforms should modify the fundamental sources of dynastic power to effectively shape a political balance. Such results foster importance to analysing the roots of political dynasties. Recognizing the underlying sources of dynastic powers of the dominating political families is needed for the

alteration of politics in a society. Thus, the causes of their emergence will significantly add schemes on improving political systems.

Further, the research conducted by E. Dal Bó, P. Dal Bó, and Snyder emphasizing that “power begets power” also depicts the significance of tracing the dynastic patterns present in Cebuano government [2]. Power, as a self-expanding element in politics, really has a great impact on every civilization. The Cebuano society then, as a great bailiwick of politicians, is a concrete sample for understanding patterns in gaining political dominance.

Mendoza, Beja, Venida & Yap identified poverty as the source that entrenches political dynasties in the Philippines [10]. This suggests that political inequality is an effect of poverty. If poverty causes the existence and persistence of political dynasties, it could be then that people includes personal indulgences as basis in choosing their leaders.

On the other hand, the first paper to exploit findings that tenure length has no significance to the persistence of political families is the formative study of Van Coppenolle on political dynasties in democratic countries [11]. The author highlighted the direct impact of the dynastic status of electoral candidates to the continuity of political families. In terms of voter’s preference, dynastic candidates are more likely to benefit from their surnames bearing credibility for quality governance. This can be associated with the self-expanding nature of authority in which dynastic status itself, is primarily beneficial to dynastic politicians. However, it provides conflict to the findings of E. Dal Bó, P. Dal Bó, and Snyder that the longer the tenure, the greater chance of politicians to establish a political clan [2]. It is but critical to a comparative analysis about the endurance of existing political families. It could either be supplied by the voters’ attitude or by the dynastic attributes of political dynasties.

Cranston emphasized the significance of popularity or name recognition to the persistence of political clans [12]. He had explained that in USA or in most democracies, voters are more likely to be fed up by political advertisements and propaganda during elections. As a result, they forget to recognize some potential candidates in the poll. Voters then, are more likely to vote only the names that are familiar to them. Most of these commonly recognized names came from existing political families. Such political behaviour of voters really adds longevity to the

existence of political dynasties. Similar to Cebu, dynastical governance may appear as a result of such case. Cebuano attitudes during elections are important to analyze in identifying dynastic patterns in Cebuano politics.

Political dynasties as shared by Bershidsky are not that always negative in nature [13]. He even cited the paper of Mendoza, Beja, Venida & Yap stating that political dynasties are engaged in long-term planning and implementation of government projects as compared with politicians with shorter terms of office [10]. This expresses that political families while expanding their powers manage to take care of their constituents as well. The projects implemented by the members of ruling clans are given sustainability through the rule of one political family. This could be a reason why citizens in Cebu choose to patronize political families.

In relevance to historical facts, Cabigao underlined historical roots of political dynasties emerging in Filipino communities [14]. The author epitomized political dynasty as a modern monarchy and aristocracy. Since pre-colonial rule, Filipinos were been ruled by a monarch called “Datu” who possesses all authorities in the government. Successors came from only one family. During the Spanish era, dominance in power and wealth is already prevalent. A town aristocracy called “principalia” is composed of wealthy land owners. The members of these families often had the privilege to acquire positions in the government and the peasants working for their lands were expected to patronize them. These facts challenge the principle of political equality existing in a democratic society. If political dynasty is an incarnation of such political system, then democracy is not really valued by the majority. It gives the idea that democracy, people believe to be well established today, is just a mask of what is called reality.

With the proposed bills prohibiting the establishment of political dynasties, it is significant to know the behaviour and ideas of the target political families towards the raised concern. The case of Cebuano dynastical governance exemplifies the countrywide issue. Political dynasties in Cebu had dwelled for decades and the sustaining forces came from the people. With this scenario, democracy is still undeniably prevalent in the political behaviours of the Cebuanos. Thus people need to know whether

political dynasty is a choice or the state of having no choice.

Moreover, this study aimed to build a concrete illustration of the Cebuanos' political behaviours by which the persistence of political clans is indulged. As this study documents historical and psychological patterns in the evolution of political families, getting the perceptions of the members of the political families could strengthen the validity of such patterns. Further, the views of political elites about the issue of political dynasty may not just appear as a piece of defense or argument but also a providing idea about the source of their tenacity.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study sought to analyze the existence of political dynasties in Cebu. With the issues concerning political equality and perennial rule of political families, this study looked into the Cebuanos' perceptions of political dynasty and described the underlying sources of the dynastic powers existing in Cebuano society. Further, the contributions of political dynasties to Cebuano citizenry as well as their reactions and insights of Cebuano political families on political dynasty were unveiled in the study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a qualitative research which utilized narrative inquiry as method of data analysis. Informants are engaged in narrating their stories while being interviewed. For Bell, narrative inquiry involves meaning making during data collection, interpretation and writing of the findings [15].

Purposive sampling was used in identifying the key informant politicians while random sampling for key informant voters was determined. There were two key informant' politicians who were members of political dynasty families. Both were prominent politicians that came and been rooting political clans in Cebu. Criteria include the number of relatives or family members presently positioned in public office.

There were also five key informant voters per bailiwick who participated in the study. They were selected for being a resident and a registered voter of the territorial jurisdictions housed by the chosen politician informants. The number of key informants determined for every jurisdiction was based on the

number of voters in the certain bailiwick and the availability of researchers for deliberate interviews.

Interviews and observations served as instruments for data gathering. For the identified politicians, a letter was sent to secure an interview schedule convenient to them. For the voter key informants, they were interviewed and observed based on researchers' accessibility and convenience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Unveiling the Sources of Existing Dynastic Powers

A. Perceptions on Political Dynasty

Political dynasty as defined by many is a family wherein most members either by blood or marriage are involved in politics or in acquisition of government position. But in the Senate Bill 2649 introduced by Sen. Santiago, political dynasty is practiced by a family of an incumbent elective official and powers are distributed in different positions in the government [16]. This portrayal affects the perception of citizens and politicians about the issue. Regardless of this, it is still important to know how citizens and political elites understand and instil the word in their minds. When asked to describe political dynasty, the key informants revealed:

Political dynasty is continuity of good projects. (KI-1).

Political dynasty is a sharing of cooperation in the government. (KI-4).

These utterances indicate that political dynasty is project continuation and completion. It is a common scenario in any Cebuano locality. Projects initiated by politician A should be continued by politician B. In terms also of bureaucracy, projects proposed by politician A should be approved by politician B. Among the key informants, most said that the members of a political family usually have cooperation and unity in their decisions. However, there are instances that these projects died like a natural death. Meaning, if politician A is not a party mate of politician B, the initiated project of politician A will just be a waste. Given the situation in Philippine politics, most politicians when put in office try to establish a name or something that would really be credited to them or when the preceding official is from a different party, the programs started by the

incumbent are less to be continued. This condition indicates a source of dynastic powers. People would prefer candidates who can continue the projects that would benefit them. The formative paper of Ronald Mendoza and his colleagues which underlined the sustainability of projects implemented by ruling clans validates this result [10]. It is an undeniable fact that political dynasties are beneficial when implementing programs having long-term goals.

On the contrary, the same key informants commented:

Political dynasty is denying other people from aspiring to become public servants. (KIP-1)

Such utterance describes political dynasty as detrimental to political equality. Despite the fact that political dynasty provides sustainability of projects, it is also symptomatic that it has negative effect to the development of active citizenship.

B. Contributions of Political Dynasties

Loyalty of the people is considered the strongest arm that holds a political family. This loyalty is drawn from the legacies and contributions of a certain political family. When asked about how they benefit from political dynasties, the key informants said:

He's very easy to approach whatever our problems are given that we are poor. He helped me find a job. He extended his financial assistance with my family when someone is admitted to the hospital. Even my neighbors share the same sentiments. He is really good in governance. He is really different. I owe him a lot. (KI-3)

Of course, I benefited. My child was given a scholarship, a big help to us (KI-5).

Like for example, the transportation from this island to the adjacent ones and vice versa was initiated by the political family. They facilitated the construction of sea port from here going to the next island. It is better to take a barge than a small boat especially when if there is weather disturbance (KI-2).

My husband and other physically disabled persons were given an opportunity to get

involved in livelihood programs where the demand for their skills is needed (KI-1).

These revelations uncover the fact that people choose leaders based on the benefits they receive. Most of the financial support, as uttered by the key informants, is a personal benefit the key informants received for patronizing political dynasties. A person is able to establish a political dynasty if he/she had nailed a certain loyalty. These benefits can be described as indulgences that affect the citizens' voting behaviours. The only but great effect revealed by these responses is referred to as the decline of intelligent voting. Four of the five key informants said that they really have something to owe to their leaders. Most of them said that they are really assisted in terms of financial aspect and job assistance. It is then considered as moral obligations in choosing electoral candidates. Such behavior doesn't indicate wise voting. This supports the study of Kenawas which claimed that one of the factors that bring the occurrence of political families is the "personalistic" mind set of voters during elections [3]. Every voter has his/her personal considerations during elections and the greatest gravity that pulls the scenario is their indulgences. Loyalty to a person is unbreakable and so, intelligent voting declines. However, this voting behavior is originally an effect and not a cause. Having underscored historical roots of political dynasties of Cabigao, it is really an assertion that political dynasty existed first for it ruled even before the birth of democracy [11].

The study of Mendoza, Beja, Venida and Yap which unfolded poverty as one of the causes of the existence of political dynasties in the country supports these findings [10]. The poverty prevalent in Cebuano societies really affects the mind set of citizens when choosing electoral candidates. They become individualistic because of the personal indulgences they had acquired. They prefer people who have been helping them through specified programs which had sourced the persistence of political families. The research highlights of Van Coppenolle about the dynastic status of electoral candidates that directly contributes to their persistence also validates this result [12]. It stated that surnames from political dynasties mostly bear credibility for quality governance, the reason why they are preferred during elections. Such credibility comes from their implemented programs and policies that leave

indulgences to citizens. However, this result argues that the findings of Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre about the detrimental effects of political dynasties to the governance is not applicable to Cebuano society [13]. Cebuanos, as unveiled by their responses, are recipient of quality governance brought by political families.

C. Submissive Voters

Political dynasty is often associated with dominance in politics. Consequently, citizens ruled by political clans often become submissive during elections. When asked if they want to continue the persistence of political dynasties, these were their revelations:

For me, it would be really fine as long as they can bring progress and development (KI-1).

If they do well in their policies, then why bother changing them?(KI-2).

I will continue with their leadership because there's no other choice. (KI-3, 4 & 5).

These verbatim accounts suggest two characteristic of democracy. First, democracy would only be the freedom to choose if only there are choices and second, it is the capacity to evade change. Having these responses, it is implied that the persistence of political dynasties is caused by citizens' submissiveness. The courage to accept change and to challenge the existing rulers is necessary for development. As revealed in the study of Querubin that term limits has no statistically significant impact in restricting political families' persistence for power, it can be asserted that the expansion of dynastic powers can only be minimized or stopped by taking the courage to run or aspire for public service [14]. Political dynasties then really exist because of the absence of courageous citizens to challenge the leadership of existing dynasties.

Behaviors and Ideas in Response to the Issue on Political Dynasty

The behaviors and ideas of the members of the political family in response to the issue of political dynasties are clustered into the following themes:

a. Varied Rejoinders

Politicians showed varied reactions regarding the issue of political dynasty. When asked whether they are in favour of the anti-political dynasty bill or not, the key informants' shared:

Yes, I'm in favour of it (KIP-1).

I am against the bill per se. In a small community, there are many relatives who are just as talented, just as dedicated and will be restricted just because they happen to have the same family names (KIP-2).

These responses submit the idea that not all members of political families agree to the persistence of dynastical governance. If KI-1 is not in favour of dynastical governance, it could really be then asserted that political dynasties **were not just brought by dominance but also by democracy**. The response of KI-2 shares a different principle. He/she emphasizes **political equality regardless of surname**. If a person is deprived of the right to run just because of his/her surname, then equality appears to be biased. This now gives a different argument that **the presence of political dynasty is not an indicator in the absence of political equality**.

b. Call of Democracy

People represent democracy, a government where all authority emanates from them. This theme refers to the principle of political families that their persistence was gained through democracy. They persisted because of the people's demand. One key informant said:

When you run for a public office, you owe the people for your mandate and you have leaders in every barangay, every town, and every city. There are a lot of people whom you should consider when deciding to stop because most of them really want you to continue and that from the very beginning; I have endeavoured to establish a leadership for service, not for power. (KI-1)

This relays an idea that their continuous service is mandated by people's call. On the other hand, the second key informant disclosed:

The good old man (the pioneering politician ancestor) had a very good heart. He had a program from birth to grave, He had a vision and he was able to build an empire. (KI-2).

It was said that the pioneering leader of their political family was able to build an empire because of having a good heart and a vision. This just implies that people, when led well by a powerful person, starts to have a patronization. Such behavior is caused by their freedom to choose driven by democracy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The existence and persistence of political dynasties can mainly be attributed to the eccentricity of citizens in response to their political responsibilities. The sources of existing dynastic powers unveiled in this study namely advantages of political dynasties, its contributions to citizens and submissiveness of voters were largely caused by individualistic mind set of voters with regard to their political responsibilities. The voting preference of individuals was drawn from the things they think that would benefit them. The variation of the behaviors in response to the issue of political dynasty coming from the members of political families is also indicative to eccentricity. It implies that politicians, same with citizens, share individuality in behaviors responding to political issues.

This study recommends that the different sectors of the society, namely; the government, the education and youth should develop an anti-individualistic voting preferences campaign during elections. This is not mainly to stop political dynasty but rather, a mechanism in promoting intelligent voting. All citizens should not only consider things that would benefit themselves when voting but also things that would benefit the whole nation.

Quantitative evidences of poverty level in some towns and provinces controlled by political dynasties are highly suggested as subject for further investigations. Such investigations would further validate how political dynasty greatly affects the poverty status of the masses, a detrimental problem in the country.

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