

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Term Limits and Political Dynasties in the Philippines: Unpacking the Links

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Abstract: This paper reviews the empirical evidence linking political dynasties in the Philippines to the imposition of term limits under the 1987 Constitution. It finds evidence that political clans have found a way around this Constitutional constraint by fielding more family members in power—giving rise to more fat political dynasties. Hence, we carefully argue that the introduction of term limits—combined with the failure to introduce other ancillary reforms (notably an anti-dynasty law)—may have brought about instead some unintended consequences. So, it is not term limits per se that created fat political dynasties. We further argue that it is a *non sequitur* to argue that dynasties will be curbed by removing term limits. This is particularly true given fat political clans are already prevalent, and removing term limits will secure the political foothold of many already fat political dynasties. To illustrate their expansion, we use network analysis and illustrations of power concentration over time in particular jurisdictions. We conclude that real reforms should be focused not on removing term limits, but on further strengthening those reforms that should have accompanied it, including enhancing competition in the political sphere, such as by supplying alternative leaders, strengthening political parties, and regulating political dynasties.

Keywords: political dynasty, poverty, network analysis, term limits, Philippines

In a senatorial debate in February 2019, Governor (and now Senator) Imee Marcos—a member of the Marcos political clan from Ilocos Norte—stated that she favors removing term limits (Buan, 2019). She argued that the introduction of term limits by the 1987 Constitution did not effectively dismantle political dynasties; instead, it caused dynasties to proliferate, and that it is only necessary to remove term limits to end dynasties in the country. Perhaps

the House of Representatives was like-minded when they developed the draft federal charter through the Resolution of Both Houses (RBH) 15, which included a provision removing the term limits of legislators (Cepeda, 2018). Could it be that the creation of term limits created the political dynasties? Will removing term limits then abolish these dynasties?

Political families have learned to evade term limits by helping family members get elected to public office. Moreover, it is clear from the empirical evidence that longer terms for entrenched political clans do not necessarily produce strong development outcomes. Literature suggests that politicians enjoy more time for reform with longer terms, but if they become too powerful, it puts their jurisdiction at risk of abuse of power and uncompetitive elections. Based on our review of related literature, entrenched political dynasties with long terms are associated with poor development outcomes (Mendoza and Yusingco, 2019).

In this study, we explain the links between term limits and dynasties, showing how political dynasties have expanded over time, and providing an evidence-based assessment of the possible drivers to this. The latter includes, but is not limited to, the imposition of political term limits under the Philippine Constitution. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. to estimate the growth of political dynasties over time using a unique political dynasties dataset;
2. to illustrate the expansion of fat dynasties in Samar using network analysis; and
3. to demonstrate other cases of power concentration over time in particular jurisdictions using illustrations of clan dominance.

Combining the evidence on the abovementioned points, we also argue that it is a *non-sequitur* to argue that dynasties will be curbed by removing term limits. This is particularly true given fat political clans are already prevalent. Simply removing term limits at this point will secure the political foothold of many already fat political dynasties. Real reforms should be focused not on removing term limits, but on further strengthening those reforms that should have accompanied it, including enhancing competition in the political sphere, such as by supplying alternative leaders, strengthening political parties, and regulating political dynasties.

The study is structured as follows. In the literature review, we discuss current evidence on political dynasties and their effects on development and briefly review the original motivation for creating term limits under the 1987 Freedom Constitution. In the data and results section, we illustrate the

extent to which political dynasties have entrenched themselves in the Philippine political landscape, as well as evidence on the expansion of dynasties over time using network analysis for two dynastic families in Samar, and other case studies. The final section summarizes the results and arguments of the study.

Literature Review

Political Dynasties in the Philippines

Political dynasties have existed even before the introduction of term limits (Simbulan, 1965, 2005; Sidel, 1997). However, new political dynasties emerged, and many old political dynasties re-emerged during the post-Marcos era (Teehankee, 2001). Here, the imposed term limits might have encouraged the rise of dynasties by forcing entrenched politicians to give up their positions once they exhaust their three terms. Nonetheless, these politicians circumvented term limits by passing on or exchanging positions with family members, which is made easier due to the absence of an anti-dynasty law and strong institutions and conditions to create a pipeline of alternative leaders. This practice among politicians has been exercised even before the introduction of term limits, and further aggravated by the deficiencies of other reforms needed to form new or alternative leaders.

Studies of political dynasties in the Philippines provide evidence not only on how political dynasties self-perpetuate and undermine the quality of democracy but also on how persistence could be linked to deeper poverty and underdevelopment (Mendoza et al., 2016; Tusalem & Pe-Aguirre, 2013). Lifting term limits with dynasties in power will be tantamount to giving them even more control of their positions over longer periods of time.

Mendoza et al. (2016) defined “dynastic share” as the proportion of positions occupied by dynastic politicians (as measured by surname) in the same province for the past four electoral terms. They used a regression model to show evidence that dynasties have a worsening effect on poverty in provinces, especially outside Luzon. Mendoza et al. (2019) distinguished between “fat” and “thin” dynasties, and showed evidence for the increasing trend of fat dynasty share since the 1987 constitution. “Fat dynasty share” is the proportion of elected officials in a province who have relatives simultaneously holding positions,

whereas “thin dynasty share” is the proportion of elected officials in a province who follow each other sequentially in office.

A previous study by Labonne et al. (2019) described how political clans manage to prolong their political influence by deploying women members of the family into public office to keep the power within the clan. Meanwhile, Tusalem and Pe-Aguirre (2013) found that Philippine provinces that are dominated by political clans are linked to poorer development outcomes, such as a lower number of barangay health stations, less newly asphalted roads, more crime, less full employment, and a lower Good Governance Index. Intuitively, these suggest that leadership under political dynasties that circumvent term limits by passing on positions to family members while growing in number as time goes by generally fails to reduce poverty and development outcomes as effectively if otherwise.

The rise of fat dynasties can be associated not only with worsening poverty but also with bad governance. Some studies confirm that the persistence of political dynasties is associated with rent-seeking, corruption, and the promotion of self-serving policies (Hutchcroft & Rocamora, 2003; McCoy, 2009).

Other factors beyond term limits may have also shaped the political landscape. For instance, the incumbency advantage could have spillover effects when relatives run for other elected offices. Querubin (2012) found empirical evidence to this effect by running a regression using the difference in difference estimation to test whether relatives of incumbents who run for office have higher vote shares compared to other candidates. (Put differently, Querubin wanted to test whether having a relative in office translated into an advantage in the polls.) The empirical results revealed that under a term-limited environment, the electoral advantage of an incumbent’s relatives when running for office is higher. This enabled political clans to expand their political control over local jurisdictions further.

Querubin (2012) noted that the expansion of political dynasties “...cannot be solely attributed to the introduction of term limits. Changes in incumbency advantage could occur for a variety of reasons including an increase in the penetration of television and other forms of media that give greater exposure to incumbents” (p. 11). The shift could also be explained by changes introduced by the Local Government Code (1991), which granted more

power to local governments, particularly for raising their own revenues. Finally, after 1987, members of Congress had access to pork-barrel allocations such as the Countrywide Development Fund (created in 1990) and the Priority Development Assistance Fund (created in 2000) that may have been used strategically by incumbents to increase their re-election chances.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the growth of dynasties cannot be attributed solely to the implementation of term limits itself. Term limits may have been too weak to withstand the adaptive behavior of political clans. However, it is the entire political structure—no anti-dynasty law, weak political parties, and an underdeveloped economy rife with patron-client relationships—as well as the absence of ancillary political reforms that probably provided over-all fertile ground for political dynasties to proliferate. The term limit was only one of many factors to consider in this environment.

Fat dynasties are already entrenched—removing term limits merely strengthens their position even more. Querubin (2012) succinctly described the adaptability of political clans, even under term limits:

...large cohorts of dynastic incumbents enter office after 1998 when the first cohort of incumbents became term limited. However, this positive effect also captures the fact that open-seat races following a term-limited incumbent are often won by members of other established dynasties not necessarily related to the previous incumbent. In sum, term limits have not changed the dynastic nature of politics in the Philippines and have, if anything, exacerbated it by providing incentives for incumbents to use their relatives as a “survival strategy” when term limits bind. (p. 26)

Why Term Limits?

The link between imposing term limits for elected officials and political dynasties was thoroughly discussed in the 1986 Constitutional Commission. Commissioner Jose Nolleto, one of the main proponents of imposing political term limits, noted the dynastic advantage that incumbents could propagate:

In the Philippines, I think it is known to everyone that a person runs for governor; he becomes a

governor for one term; he is allowed two re-elections under our concept. Then he runs for re-election; he wins. The third time, he runs for re-election and he wins and he is now prohibited from running again until a lapse of another election period. What does he do? Because he is old already and decrepit, he asks his son to run for governor. In the meantime, he holds public office while the campaign is going on. He has control; he has already institutionalized himself. His son will inherit the position of governor, in effect, and then this will go to the grandson, et cetera. The others who do not have the political advantage in the sense that they have no control of government facilities will be denied the right to run for public office. Younger ones, perhaps more intelligent ones, the poorer ones, can no longer climb the political ladder because of political dynasty. It seems to me that the public office becomes inherited. Our government becomes monarchical in character and no longer constitutional. (Constitutional Commission of 1986, 1986, p. 731)

More importantly, Commissioner Nolleto also noted his strong support for an anti-dynasty clause in the Constitution, saying that political dynasty in the Philippines has become a social malady, which turned political positions as an object of family inheritance and inevitably resulted in political families building their own little monarchies, while young, talented but poor candidates are placed at a disadvantaged position to run for public office (Constitutional Commission of 1986, 1986). Even back then, the intention of some of the reformists was to create a package of reforms that would help to institutionalize a more competitive and level playing field for the country's political system.

Correspondingly, Commissioner Edmundo G. Garcia passionately argued that the proclivity of local politicians to consolidate political power necessitate, at the very least, the imposition of term limits:

I know that some of us here have been in politics for a long time and I do not wish to offend them. But I simply think that there should be no special caste of professional politicians. It should not be a life-time profession or a career, but rather an opportunity for public service to be broadened to as great number of people and

there should be no effort to accumulate power. Accumulation of power, at one time, really brings about the desire to accumulate more, and rather than providing a structure or a setup which strengthens this trend, the alternative must be to provide structural safeguards for this kind of practice. Therefore, I would not subscribe to more than one re-election for Senators and more than two re-elections for Representatives or local officials. (Constitutional Commission of 1986, 1986, p. 219)

Notably, for the members of the 1986 Constitutional Commission, the discourse on the link between the imposition of term limits for elected office and the domination of dynasties in the political system lies dead center in the constitutional design of re-establishing republican democracy in the country. Indeed, some members even challenged the incorporation of an anti-political dynasty ethos in the charter. The late Commissioner Blas F. Ople, for example, cautioned that any prohibition against running for public office might impinge on the right of suffrage:

What I feel is an inner demand for logic and rationality so that this provision can be actually attached to some principles of equity without doing violence to the freedom of choice of the voters because they are entitled to as broad freedom of choice as the environment can provide and if they want somebody to run for office even if he is closely related to someone in office, do we have the right to curtail the freedom of the voters? (Constitutional Commission of 1986, 1986, p. 762)

Furthermore, Commissioner Christian S. Monsod argued that adding another hurdle for those aspiring for elected office contradicts the very idea of people power and can even be seen as unconstitutional:

I just want to say that here we are in this assembly, extolling people power and saying that the people have a new consciousness and yet not trusting that they will make the right choice. We want to put a section on political dynasty on the assumption that there will be violations of the Electoral Code, that people in power will use their office to elect

their children. We cannot assume that certain sections of this Constitution will be violated and then try to cover and compensate for them in another section. We have in this Constitution qualifications of those who seek elective office. We are adding in this section a disqualification to those who may aspire after public office, and, in effect, amending the various provisions in this Constitution, which enumerate the qualifications and disqualifications of the law. (Constitutional Commission of 1986, 1986, p. 93)

The 1986 Constitutional Commission had a robust and meaningful debate about term limits and the need to regulate political dynasties. The end result of these debates has not been satisfactory, to say the least. The 1987 Constitution eventually featured a provision that clearly reflected the desire to provide equal access to public office for all Filipinos but left it to Congress to operationalize this prescription. Article II, Section 26 states, “The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law.”

Pertinently, lawmakers have failed to enact a law regulating political dynasties in the country despite the clear mandate to do so under the 1987 Constitution. Therefore, the proliferation of political dynasties should not be seen as an unexpected consequence. We note here as well that political dynasty is not a phenomenon unique to the Philippines. A cause for alarm, though, is the observation raised in a Sydney Morning Herald piece in 2012 describing some of the more “established” traditional political families in the country as “dynasty in steroids” (Dent, 2012).

It is clear from these excerpts that even before the ratification of the 1987 Constitution, political dynasties and monopoly of power, among other issues and reforms surrounding political reforms, were already a major concern for reformists. Worth noting that the burgeoning of political dynasties in the country happened under a regime with term limits. Hence, taking out term limits will make Commissioner Nollado’s fear about political dynasties reaching undemocratic and unconstitutional levels a dead certainty given that the appetite for power of traditional political families has not been tamed by the 1987 Constitution. The imposition of term limits was a vital mechanism to check the growth of what Commissioner Garcia called

a “special caste of professional politicians” (Garcia, 1986, p. 219). Clearly, it was not enough.

In sum, the entrenchment of political dynasties can be traced at least as far back as the American colonial regime in 1946 (Purdey et al., 2016). Moreover, the privatization of public resources brought about by capitalism led to the emergence of oligarchs who have accumulated significant wealth and power, whereas masses of people were left susceptible to clientelism to survive. Some of these oligarchs eventually rose as leaders of communities, and patronage politics became the key driver to the rise of powerful political clans (e.g., Manacsá & Tan, 2005; Rocamora, 1998; Simbulan, 1965, 2005; Teehankee, 2001).

Undoubtedly, term limits, among other reforms, were introduced to increase competition in the political system and help prevent the over-concentration of political power in the hands of a few. Nevertheless, although members of the Philippine Constitutional Commission of 1986 had varying and opposing views about the provision of term limits, the main intention of the clause was to be part of a bigger reform architecture that would level the political playing field and help to ensure a more competitive political system by limiting the tendencies of local politicians to over-concentrate political power.

Given that the Philippines has a very dynastic democracy, and in the absence of other political reforms, politicians found strategic means to circumvent the rule by running for another public office or by fielding their relatives to maintain political control after they have reached their term limit. Querubin (2012) emphasized that reforms that do not alter the underlying source and cause of political power might not be able to bring substantial changes in the political landscape effectively. Moreover, reforms that lack strong enabling supplementary laws will not be able to withstand the skillful strategies of entrenched politicians. We review some of the empirical evidence in the next section.

Results

Growth of Political Dynasties

Over the years, political dynasties appear to have grown not simply in number (more political clans) but also in heft (many clans have expanded by fielding more family members). An analysis of the growth of political dynasties shows that across various local

government positions, more and more politicians are members of prominent or rising political clans.

For instance, drawing on a comprehensive dataset spanning 1988 to 2019 of Philippine local elections, evidence shows how governors who have at least one relative in office (considered as fat dynasties) grew by around 39 percentage points from 41% in 1988 to 80% in 2019 (Figure 1). Vice-Governors' fat dynasty share had increased from 18% in 1988 to 68% in 2019. Municipal and city officials are not exempt from this phenomenon. Mayors' fat dynasty share had grown steadily from 26% in 1988 to 53% in 2019. Since 1987, only city and municipal councilors have maintained a fat dynasty share below 25%. For councilors, the fat dynasty share had only grown from 18% in 1988 to 23% in 2019.

In 2019, Maguindanao had the highest fat dynasty share with 51%. Fat dynasty share is highest in provinces in Ilocos Region, Central Luzon, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Although we concede that the dataset only covers the post-Marcos era, it is still clear from this prima facie evidence that dynastic expansion appears aggressive during this period. The following specific cases of political families further illustrate the micro-dynamics of this broader trend.

Clan Networks in Samar

We draw on concepts in network science and graph theory to illustrate how political clans were able to circumvent term limits strategically and fielded other members of the family to key local government positions. Particularly, we focus on the province of Samar.

Samar (formerly named Western Samar) is ranked 17th out of 81 provinces in terms of poverty incidence among families in 2015. Poverty in Samar (and the other provinces near it) is heavily defined by its vulnerability to typhoons and other natural disasters (Aldaba, 2009). The poverty trend of Samar reveals worsening conditions from 2006 to 2015 (Figure 5). In fact, the province is included among those that were tagged to have the poorest population in the country. As of 2019, they are 39th out of 81 provinces in terms of fat dynasty share, with around 22% of positions occupied by the fat dynastic politicians.

The Tan Family Dynasty of Samar started in 1998 with Milagrosa Tan, who won a seat as a Provincial Board Member. Starting 2001, she served 3 consecutive terms as governor. In her last gubernatorial term in 2007, she involved her daughter Sharee Ann in politics, who won the Congressional post in the second district of Samar. After Milagrosas' 3rd term as governor,

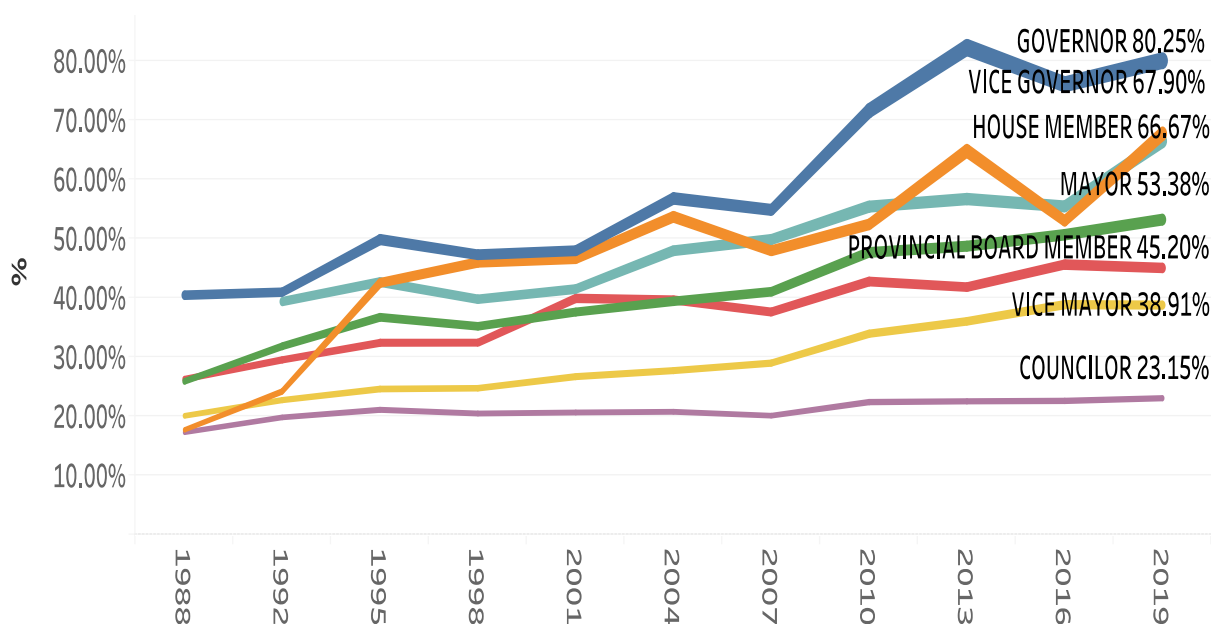


Figure 1. Growth of Fat Dynasties From 1988 to 2019 Across Elected Offices

she won 3 consecutive Congressional posts in the second district of Samar, while Sharee Ann served 3 consecutive terms as provincial governor from 2010 to 2018. The Tans also successfully recruited Stephen James, Son of Milagrosa and Sister of Sharee Ann, for the Vice-Gubernatorial position from 2010 to 2018, which secured them 3 key local executive and legislative positions (Figure 2).

For the 2019 election, the three won key offices again when Milagrosa won the Governorship, her son, neophyte politician Reynolds Michael won the Vice-Governorship, whereas Stephen James and Sharee Ann both won seats in the House as representatives of Districts I and II, respectively. In December 2019, Michael was sworn as Governor when his mother died from cardiac arrest (Gabieta, 2019).

The Uys have also had success in securing elected office, led by Reynaldo Uy, who served as Mayor of Calbayog City, Samar’s largest city in terms of population, for three terms, and as Congressman of its 1st district, for another three terms. In 2011, while serving again as mayor of Calbayog, he was assassinated (Bonifacio, 2016), and as of August 2018, the assailants are still unknown. Other Uy clans have also come into power. Coefredo Uy, his son Dexter, and daughter Stephany Uy-Tan have held the mayoral spot in Samar’s provincial capital, Catbalogan City, since 2010.

We now use network science to study the relationships across Western Samar politicians in

the last roughly three decades (from 1988 to 2016). Through this analysis, we assess if the theoretical central nodes played important roles in the actual political scene in the province. Similar to the method used in the nascent literature on political dynasties, the full name forms the basis of the relationship between nodes in our network representation. Each politician (or node) represents one unique full name. Two persons are connected to each other (an edge) if they share the same surname or middle name. Members of specific political families or clans with the same surname are expected to be fully connected to each other within that clan, but we expect to see links between two or more different political clans with similar middle names.

We use two common measures in network analysis: degree centrality and betweenness centrality. The degree centrality of a node is equal to the sum of family members from families that share their middle and surnames. Nodes with the highest degree centrality values are also known as hubs, as they have direct contact with a large number of nodes in the network, and is an indicator of intermarriages between clans. Betweenness centrality measures the number of times a node lies in the shortest path between two other nodes. Nodes with high betweenness centrality serve as a bridge between two nodes and have the most control in information flowing around the network (Borgatti et al., 2018). Our analysis aims to shed light on what role these central nodes played, and the motivation as

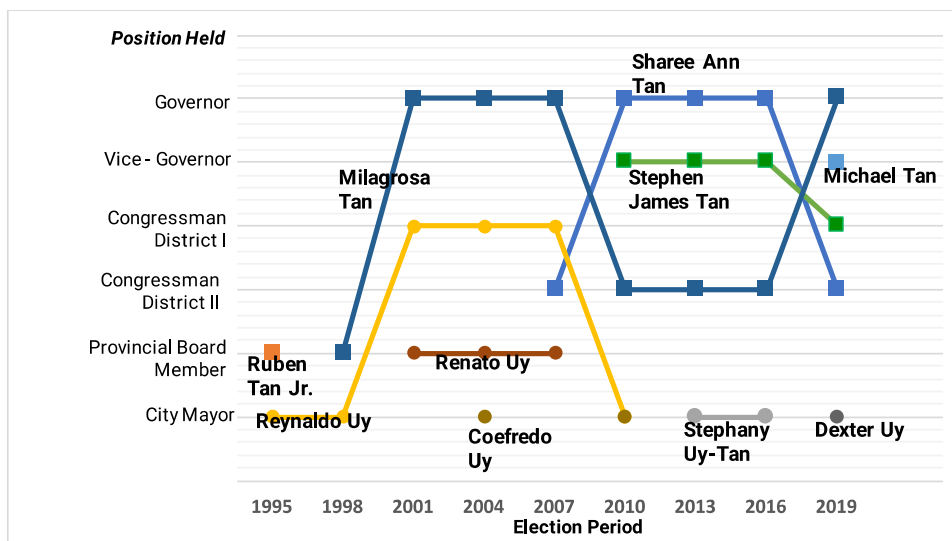


Figure 2. Full House for the Tan and Uy Political Clans of Western Samar

to why certain families are relatively better connected or not.

The connection between the Uys and Tans persists due to the presence of leaders like Coefredo and Stephany in the network. The marriage of Stephen James Tan and Stephany Uy in July 2006 allows the connection between the Tans and Uys to persist in the network. Through key informant interviews, we confirmed that after marriage, the Tans encouraged Stephany and her father, Coefredo Uy, to continue running for office in Catbalogan City for them to

control the city. Coefredo started his career as mayor of Catbalogan in 2004, whereas Stephany first became a city councilor in 2010 before she became the mayor of the same city in 2013. This marriage allowed the Tans to connect to the Uys through Stephany and Coefredo. Figure 3 shows how the Uy clan is connected to the Tan clan. The red nodes are the Tans (together with Stephany and Coefredo), whereas the white nodes are the Uys. They are connected to 25 other politicians through their familial links.



Figure 3. Network Representation of Western Samar (Focused on Tans and Uys) in 2010.

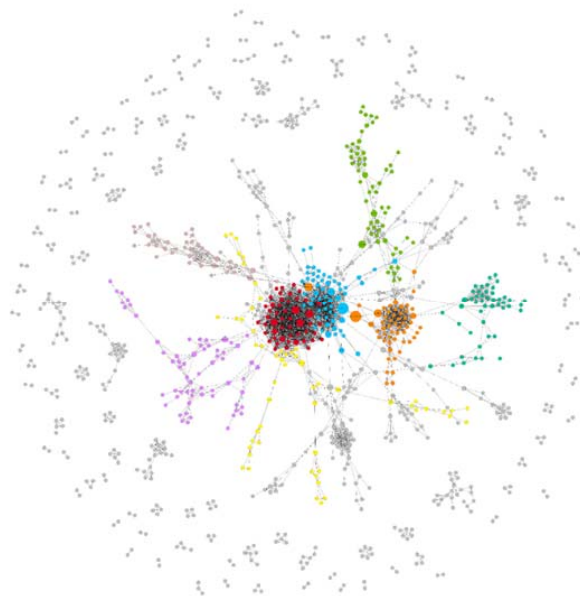


Figure 4. Family Network of Politicians in Samar Elected From 1988 to 2016.

Let us look at the network as a whole by connecting politicians elected from 1988 up to 2016 (Figure 4). The size of the node corresponds to its betweenness centrality value. A few nodes in the central cluster seem to have relatively higher betweenness centrality value than the rest of the nodes, meaning they lie in a place where most nodes should first pass them to connect to another node.

In our network, most nodes or politicians need to pass through them to connect with the other nodes. Theoretically, and drawing on network science literature, removing them from the network will affect how information flows and might even hinder some families from connecting with each other. We hypothesize that these clan members are among the better connected, given their connections with a much larger set of well-positioned clans and politicians. Perhaps in situations of potential conflict, they are in a position to play a special “bridging role” by being able to reach out to multiple clans, given their links to them.

This analysis offers preliminary but very rich insights into the growth of political networks in the Philippine province of Samar. Given the weak political party system in the Philippines, combined with the dominance of family-centric alliance-building, it is difficult to imagine strong policy reform agendas emerging from these types of alliances. Yet, alliances are being built in the Philippines, and it is critical to understand how these evolve over time. Their

relative stability also challenges the contemporary understanding of the Philippines and its nascent democratic political institutions.

Other Dominant Clans

Aside from the Uys and Tans of Samar, other political clans have also exhibited dynastic tendencies since the ratification of the 1987 constitution. We study some of them in this section.

The Dimaporo Clan of Lanao del Norte won the Gubernatorial post for 9 consecutive elections, which is almost equals to the entire period since the 1987 constitution. In fact, they have been in power for over 60 years. The Patriarch, Mohammad Ali, was a known ally of the Marcos clan. He served as a congressman of Lanao del Sur from 1966 to 1972 and of Lanao del Norte from 1987–1992. Abdullah, Imelda, and Khalid Dimaporo successfully circumvented term limits by each taking 3 terms as governor, while they continued to expand their political influence through other political offices. In 2019, the Dimaporos once again claimed the Governorship and two Congressional positions in Lanao del Norte. In 2013, Abdullah (was then elected as a congressman) faced lawsuits, one for graft and another for malversation, which are both linked with the P728 million fertilizer fund scam at the time. We see in Figure 5 that it is not totally surprising that poverty has remained virtually unchanged in this province (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019; Social Watch Philippines, 2007).

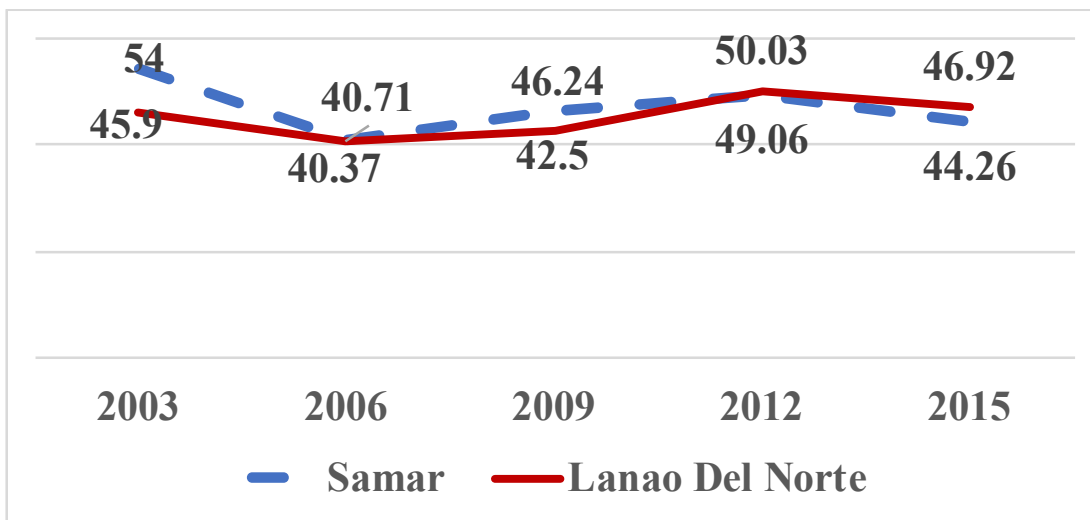


Figure 5. Poverty Trend in Lanao del Norte and Samar

Camarines Norte is a representative case where rivaling political families duel each other for power. The Villafuerte clan was unsuccessfully challenged by the Andaya Clan for the provinces' top executive positions in the recent 2019 elections. The father-son-grandson tandem of Luis Sr., Luis Jr., and Miguel have been congressmen in Camarines Norte's first district for almost three decades.

Meanwhile, the Marcos clan of Ilocos Norte is among the most controversial political dynasties in the country. After being exiled during the People Power Revolution in the late 1980s, the clan was able to return to politics in the 1990s. For the 2019 election, three generations (Imee, her son Matthew, and Cecilia, widower of former Provincial Board Member Mariano II) of the Marcoses secured key strategic positions locally (Governor, Vice Governor) in Ilocos Norte, as well as the national arena (Senator).

The Dimaporos, Tans, Andayas, Villafuertes, and Marcoses are only some examples of many fat dynasties that have adapted to the term limits and found ways to circumvent them by fielding more family members to compete for elective positions. It is tempting to conclude that term limits caused these adjustments and the subsequent rise of fat dynasties. This is what some politicians appear to readily acknowledge. According to them, this leads to the conclusion that removing term limits may undo this dynastic expansion. There are several ways to refute this weak argument, once we turn to the evidence and history.

Discussion

This paper reviews the empirical evidence linking political dynasties to the imposition of term limits under the 1987 Constitution. Evidence has shown that political families have circumvented term limits by strategically deploying more clanmates in elected positions, increasing the number of fat dynasties in the country over time. This was largely possible because other reforms that were meant to be implemented along with political term limits (e.g., anti-dynasty law, political party reforms, and so forth) were not successfully implemented since the 1987 Constitution was crafted. Plainly put, and contrary to the claim of some politicians, the introduction of term limits was not able to meet its avowed objective of promoting more democratic political competition because of the failure to introduce other ancillary reforms (notably an

anti-dynasty law) mandated by the charter. We argue in this paper that it is not term limits per se that created fat political dynasties. Furthermore, arguing that dynasties will be curbed by removing term limits is clearly not supported by both evidence and common sense.

First, our earlier review of the history behind term limits clearly emphasizes how this reform was meant to be part of a package of reforms that could level the playing field in the political sphere. An enabling law for the anti-dynasty clause in the Philippine Constitution would have complemented term limits, and arguably, the results would have been different. The absence of this enabling law left the door wide open for political dynasties to adapt to the term-limited political environment by gaming it. Their expansion—both over time and within jurisdictions—was not possible to stop with a regulation on term limits alone. Hence, we argue here that term limits per se did not cause the proliferation of political dynasties. Rather, the absence of other reforms that could have complemented term limits likely also played a role.

In the data and results section, we were able to show evidence on the scale of local elected positions that fat dynasties have more and more been entrenched in the political landscape since the 1987 constitution. We then used network analysis to gather rich insights on the major political families in Samar, which emphasized connectedness and “bridging roles” of certain family members in building strong political clans. We then showed other examples of fat dynasties (Dimaporos, Andayas, Villafuertes, and Marcoses) that have found ways to evade term limits.

Therefore, reformists should focus not on removing term limits, but on further strengthening those reforms that should have accompanied it—including enhancing competition in the political sphere and regulating political dynasties.

Supplying alternative leaders and strengthening political parties is also key in political reform towards reversing the dynastic nature of Philippine politics. Quimpo (2007) explained that political party reform would be a long, gradual process that requires new, reform-minded political parties to be built upon members that do not engage in patrimonialism. Perhaps victories of those so-called “giant-slayers” in 2019 (Esguerra, 2019), such as of Vico Sotto unseating the Eusebios as Mayor of Pasig City or Kaka Bag-ao defeating the Ecleos for the Gubernatorial seat in the Dinagat Islands for the first time since its founding,

can remind us that alternative politicians can emerge by engaging with sectors and communities, emphasizing government transparency, and prioritizing essential and achievable reforms (Sabillo, 2019).

Furthermore, developing and strengthening the alternative leadership pipeline could be possible by tapping into youth leadership, such as those who serve in the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK). Republic Act No. 10742 (2016) actually includes an anti-dynasty component, which prevents dynastic links among SK officials up to the 2nd degree of consanguinity. By building on this pool of youth leaders, it may be possible to encourage a supply of non-dynastic leaders starting with SK to start competing for higher office.

In addition, promoting a more inclusive economy that reduces poverty and vulnerability may also ultimately build a strong citizenry less susceptible to traditional politics (e.g., vote-buying), and begin to debilitate longstanding patron-client relationships that tend to reinforce dynastic leadership in the country. Perhaps only under such a comprehensive reform agenda will we be able to change the dynastic nature of politics in the Philippines—principally by reshaping the underlying power structures that support it.

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Declaration of ownership

This report is our original work.

Conflict of interest

None.

Ethical clearance

This study was approved by the Ateneo de Manila University.

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