

Philippines: Ahead of 2022 national elections, political dynasties seek to consolidate power

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The spectre of the nation's political dynasties is haunting the Philippines' May 2022 national elections. Three of the country's most powerful and authoritarian political dynasties - the Marcoses, Arroyos and Duterte - have entered into an unholy alliance with the hope of consolidating power in 2022 and beyond.

The "dynasty triad" has its sights set on key posts: Bongbong Marcos (BBM), the son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos and an ex-senator, for president; Sara Duterte, the daughter of current president Rodrigo Duterte and a sitting mayor, for vice-president; Rodrigo Duterte for senate president; and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the daughter of ex-president Diosdado Macapagal and a former president herself, for speaker of the House of Representatives.

While senator Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Tesoro Go, a Duterte ally, is still officially standing for president, the triad will undoubtedly find a way for him to stand down gracefully at some point.

The plot was hatched by representatives of the triad in a series of meetings held in exclusive enclaves prior to November 15, the last day aspirants could step in to substitute for candidates that had withdrawn from party or coalition tickets.

It was not even a product of consultation among members of their respective parties, as parties are only used for the clans' convenience. A *rigodon* (a type of dance) of parties pranced around the Commission on Elections (Comelec), stretching the limit of candidate substitution to ridiculous limits.

Sara Duterte, of Hugpong ng Pagbabago (Faction for Change), withdrew her candidacy for mayor of Davao City and registered to stand for vice-president on the Lakas-CMD (Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats) ticket, headed by Martin Romualdez, BBM's maternal cousin. Lakas-CMD's Macapagal Arroyo figured as a powerbroker for the BBM-Sara tandem.

Rodrigo Duterte stole some of the thunder from the BBM-Sara pronouncement by fanning the rumor that he was going to run for vice-president, before settling for a senatorial bid just minutes before the November 15 deadline.

Duterte is standing as a candidate for Pederalismo ng Dugong Dakilang Samahan (PDDS), which was founded by Presidential Anti-Corruption Chairman Greco Belgica.

Bong Go is the PDDS' presidential candidate, a position he accepted after standing down as the vice-presidential candidate for the Rodrigo Duterte/Alfonso Cusi wing of the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban).

Rodrigo Duterte has expressed his displeasure with the fact the Marcoses outmaneuvered him and forced him give up on his dream team of a Go-Sara tandem. But the Marcoses and Dutertes are already talking about “term sharing” the presidency, though they are yet to cook up a scenario for how this might work.

Unexpected things may still happen, with some likening the situation to *Game of Thrones*, where dynastic clans unite only to fracture and slay each other to death.

At this stage, the game plan is obvious: safeguard the spoils they have accumulated; position more of their cronies in power to gain control of major businesses in the country; and perpetuate their dynastic and autocratic rule over the Philippines.

The dynastic triad has yet, however, to present any kind of a platform to address problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis of corruption in government.

That the clans seem certain that they will win the elections is probably due to Comelec’s US\$10.6 million contract with F2 Logistics, a firm tied to Davao crony Dennis Uy, a close friend of Rodrigo Duterte. The contract allows F2 Logistics to handle the transport and storage of voting machines, opening up the risk that the machines could be tampered with by a Duterte supporter.

However, the triad’s consolidation has only been possible due to the involvement of all the trapo (traditional politician) parties, local clans and dynasties that have long been the foundation of ruling-class power in the country.

Political dynasties control almost the entire government.

A 2017 Ateneo School of Government [study](#) found the existence of what it termed “fat” and “thin” dynasties. Thin dynasties tend to pass on government posts from one relative to the next. Fat dynasties, on the other hand, seek to expand the number of relatives occupying government posts at any one time.

The Dutertes are an example of a fat dynasty, where the patriarch is president, a daughter is a mayor, and two sons are vice-mayor and congressperson.

[Rappler’s map of political families](#) found that 14 of 24 senators and 162 of 300 House of Representatives members belonged to a dynasty or local clans after the 2019 elections.

The difference between dynasties and local clans families, according to the report, is that the former encompasses families with members in positions of power in various localities, while the latter are concentrated in one locality. Even by this categorisation, the Marcoses, Arroyos and Dutertes are political dynasties.

The 1987 Constitution imposed a ban on political dynasties. Article II, State Policies, Section 26 reads: “The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law.” But the members of political dynasties and local clans elected to Congress since the ratification of the constitution have refused to make this a reality by passing an enabling law.

The closest that any law comes to defining and prohibiting political dynasties is RA 10742 or the *Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act of 2015*. Passed in 2016, it forbids individuals from running for a *Sangguniang Kabataan*, a kind of elected local youth council, if they have a parent, sibling, grandparent, spouse or in-law occupying an elected or appointed post in the same area.

Partido Lakas ng Masa (Party of the Labouring Masses, PLM), which has registered the Ka Leody de Guzman-Walden Bello ticket for president/vice-president in the 2022 elections, is pushing for a total ban on political dynasties.

PLM is running senators and party-list representatives for Congress who will seek to implement an enabling law that can finally dismantle the political dynasties that have contributed to extreme poverty and injustices in the country.

Congress will only pass an enabling law banning political dynasties if these dynasties do not control the two chambers and executive posts.

This will not be an easy task, as they are well-entrenched in the majority of electoral districts, municipalities, cities, provinces and regions. Only an electoral insurgency can unseat them from the thrones.

Yet, the Philippines will not be a democracy until an end is put to the rule of these dynasties.

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