



# A Family Affair:

## Dynasties Plague 2025 Philippine Elections



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The 2025 Philippine elections are dominated by political dynasties - an oligarchy of elite families rooted in the feudal land and political structures that pervade Philippine society. These groups have historically relied heavily on patronage politics to maintain their influence. The domination of specific families at the local, provincial and national level resembles a caste system, where only the feudal 'princes and princesses' born into privilege can find a door to enter the political system. Powerful and wealthy Filipino families who hold positions at the national and regional level have tremendous economic power. People depend on them for their livelihood - jobs, land, and careers.

In the past, there has been some effort to diminish the power of the Philippine oligarchy, but the implementation of this legislation depends on Congress, which is dominated by the very same political dynasties. Despite a 1987 constitutional ban on dynasties, their power has only continued to grow.

Three of the country's 10 wealthiest multi-billionaire tycoons are behind three of the country's five biggest political parties - Manny Villar (Nacionalista), Ramon Ang (Nationalist People's Coalition), and Enrique Razon (National Unity Party). Their political parties accounted for one-third of the 18th Philippine Congress and are an ever-present fixture in presidential

candidacies and governance. A fourth political faction is currently led by President Marcos, who presides over the Marcos-Romualdez dynasty.

Four decades after the flight in disgrace of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., the Marcos family has rehabilitated its legacy and strengthened its hold on Philippine politics. Marcos's son and namesake, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., is president, and his sister Imee is a first term Senator alongside their cousins in Leyte, who represent the political clan of his mother, former First Lady Imelda Marcos. This year, at least five Marcoses are running for seats in the Senate, House, and the local government in Ilocos Norte. Based on the count of the Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ)'s, at least five Romualdezes are also running for various positions in Leyte.

The May 2025 elections are unlikely to bring significant change. In the current 19th Congress, over half (142) of the District representatives seeking re-election belong to political dynasties. At least 71 of the country's 82 provincial governments (87%) are led by members of political dynasties [1]. Forty-seven of the 71 incumbent governors belonging to political dynasties are seeking re-election. At the same time, 19 sitting governors who are not running for re-election have family members seeking to replace them [2].

This dominance underscores a system where power is frequently passed down within families, raising concerns about its impact on democratic representation and political diversity. In addition to the Marcos-Romauldez clans of Ilocos Norte and Leyte there are about two dozen political dynasties seeking to occupy at least five seats each after the May 2025 elections.

Among them are the; Singsons of Ilocos Sur; Hataman-Sallimans of Basilan; Ortigas of La Union, Dys of Isabela; Tulfos, Pacquiao of South Cotabato and Sarangani; Dutertes of Davao City; Villar family of Las Piñas; Abalos of Mandaluyong; Revillas and Tolentino of Cavite; Ejercitos of Laguna and San Juan City; Khos of Masbate; Ynares of Rizal; Khonghuns of Zambales; Duranos of Cebu; Dimaporos of Lanao Del Norte; Alonto-Adiong of Lanao Del Sur; Ampatuans and Masturas of Maguindanao; and Tans of Sulu [3].

To bypass legislative restrictions on terms in office, members of the same clan often substitute a relative or advance to a higher position. At least 67 outgoing district representatives have opted to switch positions with family members, ensuring their political influence remains intact [4]. In Las Piñas City, Sen. Cynthia Villar and her daughter, Rep. Camille Villar, are swapping places, with the former sliding back to run as a congresswoman and the latter gunning for a Senate seat [5]. The

current Sen. Villar is reaching her term limit in the Senate this year [6].

In the Senate, Cynthia Villar and her son, Mark A Villar, are one of three family tandems in the Senate. The others are the siblings Alan Peter Cayetano and Pia Cayetano, half-brothers Jinggoy Ejercito and Joseph Victor G. Ejercito. Both brothers of Senator Raffy Tulfo are running to join him in the Senate in 2025 so it could result in 4 family sets that when combined would control almost 40% of the Senate seats.

### **Party-list System Hijacked by Political Dynasties**

The Party list system, originally conceived in 1987 after the EDSA People Power uprising, was embedded in the Philippine constitution as a means of giving voice to marginalized and disadvantaged groups. This system has been increasingly corrupted by political dynasties. Research by the PCIJ showed that 36 of the 54 party-list groups (66%) in the current 19th Congress have at least one nominee belonging to a political family [7].

In the May 2025 elections, at least 78 out of the 156 party-list organizations certified by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) belong to political families [8]. Speaker Romualdez (of the Marcos-Romualdez clan), who is seeking re-election as Leyte's 1st District representative for the sixth time, is introducing his son Andrew to

politics through the party-list system. The younger Romualdez is set to replace his mother Yedda as first nominee for the Tingog party-list group [9]. The flawed party-list system has been criticized as a “backdoor” to the House for political dynasties and big businesses [10].

There has been a proliferation of regional party list groups that are led by members of political dynasties. In the Visayas, Abag-Promdi is represented by Mariano Mimo Osmeña, son of the late Cebu Gov. Lito Osmeña [11]. Barkadahan Para Sa Bansa party-list group is fielding a member of the notorious Durano political clan, also of Cebu province. Danao City Mayor Thomas Durano is the nephew of former Danao Mayor Ramon Durano Jr [12].

When it comes to local governments, at least 113 out of 149 city mayors (75%) belong to political dynasties. Out of 149 city mayors, 56 have relatives as either their vice-mayors or councilors. In the 2025 elections, a total of 80, or about 53% of all city mayors, are from dynasties seeking re-election. Meanwhile, 27 sitting city mayors are considering relatives to replace them as most of them run for other positions [13].

Political dynasties are inherent in a society marked by high inequality and poverty, which stem from the historical concentration of land and wealth ownership in the hands of a few. It is almost impossible to compete

for political office without significant wealth, limiting successful candidates to those born in families of economic and political elites. This is true even in the local elections. According to data from IBON Foundation, the average spending per candidate for the elective positions in 2022 are as follows: President (P3 billion), Vice President (P1 billion), Senator (P350 million), Congress (P15 million), Governor (P15 million), Vice Governor (P7.5 million), Board Member (P1 million), Mayor (P3 million), Vice Mayor (P1.5 million), and Councilor (P100,000). Compare this to the average across-the-country minimum wage of P470, and it is clear that running for public office is an affair of the ruling elite.

The dynastic concentration of political power has become more pronounced over the past 20 years. By 2025, approximately 80% of provincial governors belong to “fat dynasties” [14], up from 57% in 2004. Similarly, dynastic representation in the House of Representatives has risen to 67% from 48% in 2004, and mayoral posts held by dynasties increased to 53% from 40%. In the 2022 Senate elections, at least 12.5% (3) leading candidates had relatives already in the 24 -seat chamber. Notably, 4.5% (800 out of 18,000) positions contested had single candidates from warlord political clans against whom no one dared to contest [15].

There is a correlation between dynastic concentration and poverty.

A 2015 study released by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) noted “Dynasties are pervasive in the 10 poorest provinces that are afflicted by low levels of human development, bad governance, violence and poor business climates,”[16] Apart from a direct link to poverty incidence, political dynasties also tend to undermine democratic processes by weakening the checks and balances in the government and the political system. Essentially, the historic feudal and social and economic system have created a trajectory whereby the political system becomes less and less democratic with each electoral cycle.

[1] <https://pcij.org/2024/12/08/governors-political-dynasties-philippines-provinces-elections/>

[2] <https://pcij.org/2024/12/08/governors-political-dynasties-philippines-provinces-elections/>

[3] <https://pcij.org/2024/10/25/fat-political-dynasties-philippines-elections/>

[4] <https://pcij.org/2024/10/26/lower-house-district-representatives-political-dynasties-reelection/>

[5] <https://pcij.org/2024/10/26/lower-house-district-representatives-political-dynasties-reelection/>

[6] <https://kodao.org/5-ways-philippine-dynasties-are-able-to-stay-in-power/>

[7] <https://pcij.org/2024/12/04/political-dynasties-also-swarm-the-party-list-elections/>

[8] In the May 2025 elections, at least 78 out of the 156 party-list organizations certified by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) also belong to political families.

[9] <https://kodao.org/5-ways-philippine-dynasties-are-able-to-stay-in-power/>

[10] <https://kodao.org/5-ways-philippine-dynasties-are-able-to-stay-in-power/>

[11] <https://pcij.org/2024/12/04/political-dynasties-also-swarm-the-party-list-elections/>

[12] <https://pcij.org/2024/12/04/political-dynasties-also-swarm-the-party-list-elections/>

[13] <https://pcij.org/2025/01/26/113-out-of-149-philippine-cities-also-ruled-by-political-dynasties/>

[14] There are two types of political dynasties, thin and fat, according to the [Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism](#). A thin dynasty is one in which a political clan is able to manipulate one elected position over time. A fat dynasty is one in which a political clan holds multiple government positions simultaneously. According to Prof. Ronald Mendoza, "The more fat dynasties you have, the more poverty there's likely to be."

[15] [After Duterte: clan politics and US influence in the Philippines](#), morningstaronline.co.uk, 19 March 2025.

[16] <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2015/08/20/pervasive-political-dynasty-worsened-poverty-in-phl/>