

# BusinessWorld

## Again, the political dynasties issue

Corporate Watch by Amelia H. C. Ylagan – February 19, 2018

<http://bworldonline.com/political-dynasties-issue/>

At the Senate hearing last week on the proposed anti-political dynasty law called by Sen. Francis Pangilinan, chair of the Senate committee on constitutional amendments and revision of codes and laws, the three resource-persons were from academe: Amado “Bong” M. Mendoza, Ph.D., and Professor Political Science and International Studies, University of the Philippines; Ronald U. Mendoza, Ph.D. in Economics and Dean, Ateneo de Manila School of Government; and Jose Ramon Albert, Ph.D. (Statistics) and Senior Research Fellow, Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).

Dr. Ronald Mendoza co-authored with Edsel L. Beja, Jr., Victor S. Venida, and David B. Yap, a paper titled “Political Dynasties and Poverty: Evidence from the Philippines.” Yes, Dean Mendoza affirmed at the Senate hearing: “studies show that fat political dynasties are behind the worsening poverty in the poorest areas of the country (*Philippine Daily Inquirer (PDI)*, Feb 16, 2018).”

“Fat political dynasties have more than two family members occupying government offices (*‘sabay-sabay,’*)” according to Dean Mendoza. “On the other hand, thin political dynasties are content with having members succeed each other in office (*‘sunod-sunod,’*)” he said (Ibid.).

Based on the study from 2007 to 2016, Mendoza said the dynastic share or the number of powerful clans per position rose from 75% to 78% among district representatives; from 70% to 81% among governors; from 58% to 70% among mayors (ABS-CBN News, Feb 15, 2018). He also noted a correlation between the poorest areas in the country and the concentration of dynasties there, with Maguindanao, the Ampatuan clan hometown (more than 20 relatives in local government, Mendoza said at the Senate hearing) and 2<sup>nd</sup> poorest province in the country, having the highest concentration of fat dynasties (Ibid.).

Senator Pangilinan asked: “Is there poverty because of the political dynasties, or are there political dynasties because of poverty?”

Dean Mendoza and his AIM-Ateneo group studied the “chicken or egg” question, or in technical research lingo, the dominant direction of causation. The empirical findings suggest that poverty entrenches political dynasties, while there is less evidence that political dynasties exacerbate poverty (Mendoza, et. al, 2015). Correlation, not causation was established by the study.

In response to a request by the senators for the Ph.D.-resource speakers not to use technical language but more understandable language, Prof. Amado Mendoza (UP) described the more down-to-earth situation: “the Poor need a *‘padron’* (patron).” That is why dynasties thrive. When the poor farmers need land to till, who do they run to? When they need funding, who doles out the money to them? In times of calamities, who do the poor look to? Who are the reliable choices for godparents for weddings, baptisms — those dynastic, traditional politicians who will surely still be around term after term, listening to the needs of the less-privileged, mourning with them at wakes and funerals. That is the never-paid debt of gratitude (*utang na loob*), Prof. Mendoza expounded at the Senate hearing.

It is a vicious cycle, he said. The political dynasties “collect” on this “*utang na loob*” come election time. “If you are the poor, will you not think of anything else but to protect your position? Without your tried and tested padron saying it, you will think — without him/her you will not have water, no small personal

“funding,” no support. This cultivated dependency of the poor is what entrenches the political dynasties, according to Prof. Mendoza. Poverty and political dynasties feed upon each other and grow.

Dean (Ronald) Mendoza said: “We are slowly becoming less democratic over time, particularly in the poorest areas of the country and if we don’t stop this, democracy will slowly die” (*gmanewsonline*, Feb. 15, 2018). Many of our people do not really have the power to choose our leaders and vote freely because of the entrenched political dynasties.

Furthermore, he said: “checks-and-balances does not work in fat dynasties. How will the checks and balances work if the governor is related to two to three provincial members? How will the checks and balances work if the children of the governor is mayor in two to three towns?” (Ibid.) The result is impunity and corruption in governance.

“According to our data, the worst features are those with [fat dynasties]. It’s there that you can find the Ampatuan massacre, the kickbacks in road projects, black holes in terms of missing [internal revenue allotments], poverty,” Dean Mendoza said (*PDI*, op. cit.). He said violence, intimidation, and corruption happen in areas where fat dynasties are present because the officials tend to collude with each other. End result is that there is impunity and no accountability (Ibid.).

Dean Mendoza pointed out that the five poorest provinces in the land have the highest percentage of local government positions held by the fattest political dynasties. Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and Sulu are in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). How is this going to affect the pending Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), Senator Franklin Drilon asked him? Should an anti-dynasty provision be in the BBL?

Senator Miguel Zubiri, chair of the Senate subcommittee on the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), said the provision may be perceived as discriminatory because the proposal in the Constitution prohibiting political dynasties has not yet been passed (ABS-CBN News, Feb 12, 2018). Dean Mendoza said the fear of some people in Mindanao that they will no longer have any leaders once the anti-political dynasty provision is included in the BBL has no basis. “The resistance is not really coming from the people but the leaders. The people cannot speak because of their leaders. So let us help them (GMA News op. cit.).”

The (current) 1987 Constitution bans political dynasties but Congress, which is dominated by political dynasties, has failed to pass an enabling law defining a political dynasty. Dean Mendoza said: “more than 50%” of the members of Congress were made up of ‘thin dynasty’ members (*PDI*, op. cit.).” The practical compromise would be to “allow dynasties to have their members succeed each other in political office but bar them from running for and securing different government posts all at the same time (Ibid.).” In other words, ban fat political dynasties but allow thin political dynasties.

Pangilinan said the Senate will first tightly define what is a political dynasty, and go by the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) law, which states that SK officials should not be related “within the second civil degree of consanguinity or affinity to any incumbent elected national official or any elected regional, provincial, city, municipal or barangay official in the locality where he or she is seeking election (Ibid.).”

“I think two degrees is OK. That would include spouses, siblings, parents, children, grandparents and grandchildren in the prohibition. That seems like a reasonable definition,” Sen. Juan Edgardo Angara said (Ibid.).

Now let’s see something happen.

*Amelia H. C. Ylagan is a Doctor of Business Administration from the University of the Philippines.*