

Philippine Politics: A Nation Caught in a Vicious Loop. The Role of the Electorate in the Democratic Process

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*Philippine politics has long been a subject of intense scrutiny, debate, and despair among its citizens. The recent political landscape, characterized by the resurgence of the Marcos family with **Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr.** as President and the alliance with **Sara Duterte**, daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte, epitomizes the entrenched dynamics of power and influence in the country. This alliance, branded as the “Unity Party,” represents a coalition between two of the most notorious political families in the nation’s history—one accused of massive corruption and the other of gross human rights violations.*

The “Unity Party”: A Troubling Alliance

The Marcos-Duterte tandem in the 2022 elections was, to many, a glaring manifestation of how deeply rooted political dynasties remain in the Philippines. Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s victory is symbolic, bringing full circle the historical narrative that began with his father’s dictatorial regime, marked by martial law, economic plunder, and widespread human rights abuses. On the other hand, Sara Duterte’s position as Vice President reinforces the legacy of her father, Rodrigo Duterte, whose administration is infamous for its brutal war on drugs, leading to thousands of extrajudicial killings.

Critics argue that this alliance represents not just a partnership of convenience but a coalition of impunity—two powerful families leveraging their influence to maintain and expand their hold on political power. The “Unity Party” slogan, which implies national harmony and progress, is seen by many as a cynical attempt to whitewash the crimes of the past and continue a tradition of governance that prioritizes the interests of a few over the many.

However, this alliance proved to be as fragile as it was formidable. Recently, the “Unity Party” has crumbled due to disagreements between the two camps, revealing the true nature of their partnership—a coalition driven by individual interests rather than the welfare of the Filipino people. The breakdown of this alliance is a stark reminder that in Philippine politics, personal ambition often trumps the common good.

The Role of the Electorate: Political Immaturity or Systemic Failure?

While it is easy to place the blame solely on these political figures, a deeper analysis reveals a more complex picture. The electorate plays a significant role in the perpetuation of these political dynamics. Many argue that the Filipino electorate has not matured politically, as

evidenced by the repeated election of celebrities and personalities with questionable qualifications to high office. The preference for showbiz qualities over substantive policy-making capabilities has turned the political arena into an extension of the entertainment industry.

This trend highlights a deep-seated problem: the disconnect between the electorate's expectations and the actual demands of governance. The popularity of candidates with a strong media presence, regardless of their political or administrative acumen, suggests that many voters prioritize charisma over competence. This phenomenon is not unique to the Philippines but is particularly pronounced in a country where media and entertainment play a significant role in shaping public opinion.

A Legislature of Celebrities: The Showbiz-Government Nexus

The composition of the Philippine legislature reflects this predilection for celebrity over substance. Congress and the Senate are populated with actors, television personalities, and other media figures who, while popular, often lack the experience and expertise necessary for effective lawmaking. This preference for celebrity candidates creates a legislature that is more focused on popularity than policy, more concerned with image than governance.

This showbiz-government nexus undermines the very foundations of democratic governance. Laws are often crafted not with the public good in mind but with an eye toward maintaining popularity or securing re-election. The result is a legislative body that is more reactive than proactive, more concerned with optics than outcomes.

A Government Doomed to Repeat the Past?

Given these circumstances, many Filipinos have grown increasingly cynical about the prospects for meaningful political reform. The return of the Marcoses to power, coupled with the Duterte family's continued influence, suggests that the Philippines is trapped in a vicious cycle of corruption, abuse of power, and political immaturity. For thinking Filipinos, this state of affairs reinforces the belief that government in the Philippines will never improve, that graft and corruption will persist, and that the victims of this political circus will continue to be the people themselves.

The situation is indeed dire, but it is not without hope. History has shown that even in the most entrenched systems, change is possible. However, this change requires a fundamental shift in the electorate's mindset, a reawakening of civic consciousness, and a collective commitment to prioritizing competence over charisma, integrity over impunity.

Conclusion: Breaking the Cycle

The challenge for the Philippines is not just to elect better leaders but to create a political culture that values good governance, transparency, and accountability. This requires a transformation in how Filipinos perceive their role in the democratic process. Voters must be educated to look beyond the surface, to critically assess the qualifications and platforms of candidates, and to hold their leaders accountable once in office.

Until this shift occurs, the Philippines will likely remain caught in a cycle where political dynasties dominate, celebrity culture overrides competence, and the government serves the interests of the few at the expense of the many. The responsibility for breaking this cycle lies not just with the leaders who perpetuate it but with the electorate that enables it. Only

through collective action and a renewed commitment to democratic principles can the Philippines hope to overcome its political immaturity and build a government that truly serves the people.

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