

# Elite Invasion

## Reclaiming the Party-list System from Elite Capture



### Interrupting the elitist Philippine political parties

Political scientists and scholars often characterize the Philippine political party-system as a system of temporary political alliances between and among cliques of the same political and economic elites in the country (Aceron 5). Although some of the Philippine political parties have a long history that can be traced as far as the beginning of Philippine democracy, it is fair to say that party affiliation is among the least of the considerations of the Filipino voters in choosing their leaders. Philippine political parties mostly failed to facilitate meaningful representation of the people, and have even been used as systems of patronage between the national and local elites. One can easily observe, for example, how local politicians change their party affiliation every election depending on which party dominates the national scene. This phenomenon has been referred to as political turncoatism—something that is often described as unique to Philippine experience (Casiple 2). In other words, Philippine politics, despite being a product of the American tutelage, developed to become patronage and personality-based.

The instrumentalization of the deeply-flawed party politics in the Philippines was at its worst during the time of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, with the creation of the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan or KBL. This was the party that Marcos put up in the place of the extant political parties that he banned upon the declaration of Martial Law in 1972. Instead of functioning as an instrument of interest articulation and aggregation as political parties should, KBL served to be a gargantuan political machine that operated from barangay to national politics.

The EDSA People Power that ousted the dictator and the 1987 Constitution that it birthed was a chance to radically change the way that things are done among the Philippine political parties. However, the major political parties formed after EDSA remained to consist of traditional politicians both old and new. Nevertheless, the drafters of the new constitution seemed to be well aware of the flawed Philippine political parties. Article VI, Section V of the constitution states:

“(1) The House of Representatives shall be composed of not more than two hundred and fifty members, unless fixed by law, who shall be elected from legislative districts... and those who, as provided by law, shall be elected through a party-list system of registered national, regional, and sectoral parties or organizations.

(2) The party-list representatives shall constitute twenty *per centum* of the total number of representatives including those under the party list. For three consecutive terms after the ratification of this Constitution, one-half of the seats allocated to party-list representatives shall be filled, as provided by law, by

selection or election from the labor, peasant, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, women, youth, and such other sectors as may be provided by law, except the religious sector.” (Republic of the Philippines)

For the past few decades, party-list elections have often been equated to the representation of sectors that are considered marginalized. However, the original concept of party-list in the Constitution as manifested in the 1986 debates indicate that the representation of the marginalized is neither the primary nor the objective in the party-list provision in the Constitution.

In the 1986 debates, Commissioner Christian Monsod insisted that party-lists are there to promote proportional representation whereas voters, apart from electing district representatives, would have the chance to elect political parties and/or sectoral organizations that they feel would best represent them. In the party-list election, voters are not voting for individuals but for parties and organizations that meet COMELEC requirements. Each of these parties would have a list of nominees that would take on the allocated seat should they reach the threshold necessary to acquire a seat. Proportional representation through the party-list system is envisioned to serve as an alternative to the “first-past-the-post” system in Philippine elections. The party-list system was to facilitate the strengthening of parties and groups with dispersed constituencies by providing them incentives to participate in elections (Gutierrez 608-612).

However, other members of the constitutional commission proposed to make the party-list system a closed system for the representation of marginalized sectors. Commissioner Wilfrido Villacorta, for example, contended that since both the Senate and the House of Representatives would most likely be filled by officials who would win on the basis of political and economic advantage, then it is only fitting to allocate 20% of the lower house to sectors and groups who are not traditional politicians. Villacorta argued that Monsod’s proposal would pit the marginalized sectors against mainstream parties and that this would entail the political massacre of the former (Gutierrez 613). This contention led to the compromise of an “open” party-list system that would allow for COMELEC-accredited political parties and organizations to join as proposed by Monsod, but with a “transition” period that would reserve seats for sectoral representatives for three terms. From 1987 to 1995 or from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, the President appointed sectoral representatives to take the allocated seats for party-lists in the House of Representatives. Each of these congresses had fourteen, sixteen, and twenty-two sectoral representatives, respectively. The sectors represented were labor, peasants, cultural communities, women, youth, fisher folks, urban poor, OFWs, the differently abled, and the elderly.

In 1995, Republic Act 7941 or the Party-List Law was signed into law by President Fidel V. Ramos and was implemented in the 1998 presidential election. Section 11 of RA 7941 states that

“...The parties, organizations, and coalitions receiving at least two percent (2%) of the total votes cast for the party-list system shall be entitled to one seat each: provided, that those garnering more than two percent (2%) of the votes shall be

entitled to additional seats in proportion to their total number of votes: provided, finally, that each party, organization, or coalition shall be entitled to not more than three (3) seats.”

In the first party-list election in 1998, only fourteen party-list representatives were allowed seats in Congress because only thirteen groups reached the 2% threshold. Of these thirteen groups, only the Association of Philippine Electric Cooperatives (APECO) was able to garner 4% of the total party-list votes and was thus given two seats.

In the second party-list election of 2001, various petitions were filed against the COMELEC's approval of 154 parties as participants in the party-list elections that included mainstream political parties. The petitions sought for the disqualification of mainstream parties asserting that the party-list system was intended for the marginalized sectors. The Supreme Court ruled that the spirit of the Party-List Law of 1995 was to allow only marginalized sectors to run as party-lists. For the SC in 2001, the Party-List Law was intended “to benefit those who have less in life” and to give “the great masses of our people genuine hope and genuine power.” This ruling allowed the COMELEC to retroactively disqualify party-lists who garnered high votes but failed to prove to be representatives of the marginalized (Bueza).

However, the High Court changed tune in 2013 when it ruled that “[n]ational parties or organizations do not need to organize along sectoral lines and do not need to represent ‘any marginalized and underrepresented’ sector.” Justice Antonio Carpio who penned this landmark ruling argued that the Constitution and the Party-List Law never intended this provision to exclusively provide representation to the marginalized but to simply put in place a system of proportional representation (Rappler and Gloria). Limiting the party-list system to the representation of the marginalized sectors would be a disincentive for small groups to expand. If being marginalized is the main basis of party-list representation, it would mean that party-lists who eventually expand and empower themselves through increased memberships and electoral machinery would eventually be disqualified after liberating themselves from the margins (Gutierrez 627).

Under the new guidelines of parties and organizations qualified to join the party-list elections, the High Court differentiated between political parties or organizations and sectoral parties or organizations. National and/or regional parties and groups vying for party-list seats need not represent any marginalized sectors. Meanwhile, political parties can run as party-lists as long as they register as party-lists and not field candidates in legislative district elections. Nevertheless, political parties may also opt to run for party-lists and for legislative district representatives as long as their party-list runs through the political party's sectoral wings. Finally, sectoral parties or organizations need to either represent an underrepresented sector or to not have well-defined political constituencies (e.g. professional, youth, women) in order to be eligible to run as party lists. These sectoral parties or organizations should have the majority of its members come from the sector it claims to represent. Additionally, the nominees of these sectoral groups should either come from the sector or have a record of strong advocacy for the said sector (Rappler and Gloria).

Another important development in the party-list system was the removal of the 2% threshold on the votes received by party-lists as a prerequisite for a congressional seat. In the past, the threshold limited the number of party-lists eligible for congress thus failing to comply with the constitutional mandate of filling 20% of congressional seats with party-list representatives. Hence the Supreme Court in 2009, ruled that the party-list seats that remained vacant after the party-lists that gained at least 2% of total party-list votes were given their respective slots, would be given to the party-lists with the highest number of votes, albeit not reaching the 2% threshold (Bueza).

These developments in the party-list system embody the debate regarding the spirit of the party-list system. For the Supreme Court in 2001 headed by Chief Justice Artemio Panganiban, the party-list system is a tool for the marginalized to gain genuine power. But for the Supreme Court justices in 2013, the party-list system was not exclusively and necessarily for the marginalized. Its only goal was to realize a proportional representation in congress. For other pundits and scholars however, the party-list system was supposed to lay the groundwork for stronger party politics in the country, where small parties representing various sectors are empowered to wage national campaigns and eventually build strong national political parties that can contend with the elitist political parties mainly manned by political dynasties.

However the current trend paints a picture of a dynastic and elite hijack in the party-list race. Far from the vision of either proportional or sectoral representation, party-lists are turned into political backdoors by the elite consisting of political dynasts, businessmen, and government appointees. More than two decades since the first party-list elections, neither Monsod/Carpio nor Villacorta/Panganiban were vindicated. On the one hand, party-lists failed to integrate themselves in the mainstream political arena and develop into political parties that can give the ones formed by the elite a run for their money (Aceron 15). On the other hand, party-lists who are supposed to represent marginalized sectors are sidelined by other party-lists who claim to represent a sector only to be manned by dynasts, businessmen, and ex-politicians who are seeking to penetrate the legislature.

#### **Four Indicators of Elite Hijacking of the Party-list Race**

In recent years, it has become apparent that party-lists contending for congressional seats had nominees coming from political dynasties. Others are largely affiliated with big names in politics and business. There are also personalities that, at some point, got entangled with corruption cases and controversies. In other words, party-lists served as a political backdoors for the elite that the party-list system intended to offset in the first place.

Based on the initial study and data gathering done by Party-List Watch, of the 177 partylists in the 2022 elections: 92 are new partylists, while 85 have participated in past races, almost half of partylists are led by political dynasties, at least 36 are linked with ex-politicians and government officials, and at least 26 are associated with big business. There are also eight new partylists

that are led by former appointees of President Rodrigo Duterte who do not have any previous partylist engagement.

Deriving from this picture, we can argue that the party-list system, originally placed in the constitution to ensure proportional representation and people's empowerment, is being used by various sectors of the elite to further widen the power that they hold in Philippine politics. What prospers now in the party-list system is the phenomenon of pseudo-representation where members of political dynasties, business owners, former politicians and government officials who had no previous party-list engagement contend for legislature seats thereby depriving party-lists that represent legitimate sectors and interests from the seats that have been allotted for them.

PL-Watch has identified four key indicators observed that provide doubt on the legitimacy of the partylists running this 2022, patterns that voters should be on the look out for in determining whether or not party-lists adhere to both proportional and sectoral representations.

### **First Indicator: Run by Political Dynasties and Traditional Politicians**

The ultimate sign of elite capture is the formation of partylists that essentially serve to expand dynastic rule. Not content with district representation in congress, political families leverage their local bailiwicks to contest the partylist votes. The partylist election effectively becomes more and more like local and district elections, instead of elections that facilitate election of political parties with dispersed constituencies or sectoral representation.

Dynastic rule can take various forms. On the one hand, it becomes the next step for local politicians that run out of term in their local units. These politicians opt to run for partylist as an alternative post to retain power in the local albeit through a national seat, while their relatives occupy the local elective position they vacate for the next term/s. Some examples of former local politicians include Bagong Henerasyon and Pilipinas Para Sa Pinoy Partylist, whose nominees served as local councilors in Quezon City and Taguig City respectively. Another example is Anakalusugan Partylist nominee Atty. Gina Mandanas, who is the former representative of Marinduque. Her mother is the former Governor of Marinduque and her husband is the incumbent Batangas Governor Hermilando Mandanas. Buklod Filipino nominee is former Mayor of Imus City. GP Party representative Jose Gay G. Padiernos. served as Vice Governor of Nueva Ecija for three terms prior to running in the partylist.

Another prime example from Quezon Province is Anna Villaraza Suarez, the wife of re-electionist representative from the 2<sup>nd</sup> district of Quezon David Suarez, who is running for re-election as ALONA partylist representative. ALONA second nominee Monica Arcillas Nazareno is also the daughter of Arlene Arcillas who is the current mayor of Sta. Rosa City Laguna.

Dumper PDTA is also clearly controlled by one political family. Rep. Claudine Bautista's father is currently the incumbent governor of Davao Occidental. Her aunt is the congressman of the lone district of the same province.

Partylists can also be a dynastic sandbox where party-list seats are used as a training ground for children and/or relatives of well-established dynasties. They establish new partylists that go together with local campaigns to introduce their children in politics. If their children/relatives win in the newly established partylists, their dynasty automatically has a local and national franchise.

CIBAC is a key example. While Jesus is Lord Evangelist Rep. Eddie Villanueva currently serves as representative in congress, incumbent senator Joel Villanueva previously served as CIBAC representative where he was able to gain a national audience. Sherwin Tugna, Senator Villanueva's brother-in-law, also served as CIBAC's representative. New partylist United Filipino Consumers and Commuters (UFCC) has as its first nominee, the daughter of Senatorial Aspirant Larry Gadon. Another case is Bryan Revilla, son of Senator Bong Revilla and Bacoor Mayor Lani Mercado is running as first nominee of Agimat Partylist. Ako Bisaya is another one - the first nominee Sonny Lagon's wife will be running as a representative for Cebu's first district. The second nominee is the incumbent mayor of Consolacion city, Joannes Alegado. PDP Cares 1st nominee, Kathryn Yu-Pimentel is also the wife of Senator Koko Pimentel.

### **Second Indicator: No Track Record of representing and championing sectors**

Most sectoral partylists would also claim to represent marginalized sectors from farmers, urban poor, women, to regional representation (i.e. bisaya, bicolano, etc.). Nominees of these partylists however appear to have not "come from the sector" or have no "record of strong advocacy for the said sector" as mandated by the Supreme Court 2013 ruling.

Prime example of this is Mothers for Change (MOCHA) Partylist with Mocha Uson, government propagandist, former PCOO assistant secretary and Duterte ally. She and her running mate, Michele Gumabao has been roundly criticized given that neither nominees are mothers themselves. Duterte Youth has also been widely criticized for having nominees not coming from the youth sector, with Ronald Cardema disqualified in his bid for representative in the 2019 elections. His wife Ducielle took his place and is running for a second term.

Ako IP Partylist claims to be representing indigenous peoples but chairperson Gil Valera was a former Customs exec and was found guilty of lying on his SALN. Claiming to be 25% of IP heritage, he came under fire for calling indigenous peoples "mangmang". His son serves as 1st nominee of the partylist.

### **Third Indicator: Run by Big Money**

Another pattern is corporate expansionism where millionaires and business owners themselves buy franchises of an existing or a new partylist to self-preserve and/or expand corporate interests thru policy-making especially in local jurisdictions.

Philippine Society for Industrial Security Partylist is linked to an industrial security agency. Giant partylist, Ako Bicol's representative also served as Chief Executive Officer, Sunwest Group of

Companies and Chairman of the Board, Misibis Bay Resort. Akma PTM Partylist nominee Michael Kida is member of the board of trustees of Agri Business firm AMAVI which received a PHP 950 million investment to develop BARMM plantations. BPO Partylist nominee is entrepreneur Michael Cubos is the founder of homegrown Performance 360 Call Center and BPO Services. Agri Partylist representative in the 17th Congress has been reported to have 250M net worth, 400% higher than when she entered congress.<sup>1</sup> Behemoth LPGMA Partylist nominee also owns several businesses related to petroleum, renewable energy, trading, banking and real estate. 1Pacman is another example, with the partylist's first nominee Mr. Mikee Romero one of the 50 wealthiest individuals in the Philippines with a net worth of over 135 million USD.

#### **Fourth Indicator: Implicated/Convicted in corruption and human rights violations**

Many partylists also field nominees who have been seen to abuse power. Their run in power may be seen as an attempt to escape accountability and access government resources for private gain. These involve partylists who have voted against freedom of speech and blocked the franchise of ABS CBN. New partylists also appear to threaten political dissent, with Sambayan Partylist Ka Eric Celiz and Frontliners and Bida Partylist Celine Pialago widely criticized for red-tagging critics of the government. Celine Pialago, who was originally a disqualified Malasakit Movement Partylist also shows how nominees can jump from one partylist to another.

Some glaring examples include: 4Ps.<sup>2</sup> Partylist where the 1st nominee has been implicated in allegedly anomalous purchase of fertilizer in 2004. Current representative of Construction Workers Solidarity Partylist was charged with plunder in 2014 before the Office of the Ombudsman over alleged irregularities on the rehabilitation of a national road in southern Masbate. He is a former Department of Public Works and Highways undersecretary for regional operations. Current Nominee Tirso Edwin Gardiola also has a tax evasion case filed against him after discovery of his purchase of luxury car rides<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, Uma Ilonggo Partylist nominee Hansel Didulo chaired the bids and awards committee of the Bureau of Fisheries and faced a 2 billion draft case with the ombudsman.<sup>4</sup>

Other critical examples include Turismo Partylist with Wanda Teo of the Tulfo family running as nominee. Ms. Teo, who was then secretary of the Department of Tourism, secured a 60 Million Peso ad deal to release a tourism promotion commercial with the BITAG network that was owned by her brother Ben Tulfo.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rappler.com/nation/232942-names-lawmakers-net-worth-more-than-doubled-2018/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2020/08/25/2037579/ex-lawmakers-bid-dismiss-graft-case-junked>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dof.gov.ph/purchaser-of-luxury-cars-rides-tax-evasion-net/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2022/03/08/2165656/bfar-chief-2-others-face-p2-billion-graft-case>

## The Notorious Nine: Cases of Elite Capture of the Partylist System

PL Watch highlights below some glaring examples of elite capture of the partylist system to surface how various traditional interests have use the partylist as a backdoor to expand dynastic as well as business power agenda.

**Duterte Youth.** Duterte Youth or Duty to Energize the Republic through the Enlightenment of the Youth was originally formed in 2016 in support of Rodrigo Duterte's presidential bid. Its founder Ronald Cardema was eventually appointed as chairman of the National Youth Commission. In 2019, Duterte Youth ran in the party-list election and won one seat.

The Duterte Youth party-list filed its candidacy with five official nominees. However, all of these nominees withdrew and Ronald Cardema filed for a substitution. However, the COMELEC ruled for Cardema's disqualification as the party-list's nominee because he already exceeded the age limit set for nominees of a youth party-list. Cardema tried to argue that his party-list also represents professionals but the COMELEC rejected this, saying that they only made this claim after being questioned on the age limit. Cardema was eventually substituted by his wife Ducielle Cardema. She was the first among the five nominees who withdrew upon Ronald Cardema's bid for substitution.

**Mocha.** Mothers for Change is a new partylist formed by former PCOO assistant secretary and Duterte ally Mocha Uson. She is running as its first nominee, together with Michele Gumabao – a former beauty pageant and Ms. Globe contestant – as the second nominee. The group has been roundly criticized given that neither nominees are mothers themselves. Ms. Gumabao tried to [skirt the issue](#) by saying that motherhood has several definitions and does not only refer to a biological mother. Despite efforts to disqualify the group, the Comelec has still accredited it on the basis of a 2013 ruling that only groups applying to be sectoral parties have to prove that a majority of their members come from marginalized groups.

Mothers for Change was formed as a platform for individuals who were government appointees of Duterte to consolidate their power. Mocha Uson has benefited from [several government appointments](#) in various agencies including as a member of the MTRCB (2017), Assistant Secretary in the PCOO (2018), and finally as a Deputy Executive Director in the OWWA (2019). In July of 2021 both Gumabao and Uson were tapped as women ambassadors to promote the work of NTF-ELCAC. The controversial council has been linked with various acts of red-tagging, including their accusations that organizers of community pantries [belonged to communist fronts](#).

**Turismo Partylist.** Turismo is a partylist formed by Wanda Teo – brother of Senatorial candidate Raffy Tulfo and Secretary of Tourism from 2016 – 2018. The Tulfo family was subject to a [Senate Blue Ribbon committee probe](#) in 2016 for conflict of interest in the procurement of government contracts. Ms. Teo, who was then secretary of tourism,

secured a 60 million peso ad deal to release a tourism promotion commercial with the BITAG network that was owned by her brother Ben Tulfo.

If both Wanda Teo, through the Turismo partylist and Raffy Tulfo win their respective races, that would be two members of the Tulfo family in political office. Raffy Tulfo's son Ralph is also running as representative of Quezon city district 2. As was shown in the controversy surrounding the 60 M DOT contracts, the Tulfos have shown their willingness to leverage government connections to benefit their private businesses.

**Frontliners ang Bida.** Frontliners ang Bida is a partylist that broadly aims to support and provide livelihood to frontliners during the pandemic. One of its officials and nominee Jayke Joson was a businessman and ex aide to Senator Manny Pacquiao. The two had a falling out over a failed deal involving a planned fight between Pacquiao and McGregor. Each side claimed that funds were malversed and suits were filed in court. In February of 2022, the partylist adopted Celine Pialago as a substitute after COMELEC canceled the application of her original partylist Malasakit on insufficiency of requirements.

Mr. Joson, who is a businessman in the sports industry, has no direct ties or track record working or being part of the frontline workers he is seeking to represent. Ms. Pialago on the other hand has an extensive record of appointive positions in the Duterte administration. She was appointed as MMDA spokesperson and before that, as spokesperson of the NTF-ELCAC. She came under fire especially for controversial statements accusing faculty administrators of requiring students to join anti-government rallies. Ms. Pialago is banking on her previous government positions to garner legitimacy to serve in Congress even after the COMELEC had already disqualified her first group for lack of credibility as a legitimate sectoral partylist.

**Dumper PDTA.** The Drivers United for Mass Progress Philippines and Equal Rights – Philippines Taxi Driver Association (Dumper PDTA) is a party list that purports to represent public utility drivers and commuters. Its representative is incumbent representative Claudine Bautista, currently the Vice-Chairperson on the committee on transportation.

In August of 2021, news surfaced that Representative Bautista celebrated a lavish island wedding in Balesin. Her wedding dress, according to reports, was designed by internationally renowned designer Michael Cinco whose designs are estimated to cost at least 1.25 million pesos. The event was also attended by high profile VIPS and was roundly condemned given the context of the pandemic, where the drivers she purportedly represented were suffering from the loss of income due to lockdown measures

Dumper PDTA has features of both a dynastic and a pseudo-representative partylist. Prior to running in 2019, Rep. Bautista had no known track record of ever representing or belonging to the public transport sector. During her stint as Dumper PDTA representative since 2019, she has failed to pass any law directly addressed towards the public transport sector. All her transport bills languished in the committee on transportation.

The partylist is also clearly controlled by one political family. Rep. Bautista comes from Davao, and her father is currently the incumbent governor of Davao Occidental. She is also the niece of Rep. Lorna Bautista-Bandigan of the lone district of the same province.

**1-PACMAN.** 1-PACMAN is a partylist that claims to broadly support the marginalized sector. Along its other platforms include sports development, education, and jobs creation. The group has gotten the endorsement of top personalities including Manny Pacquiao who is the party's namesake. The party has ran successfully in 2016 and 2019 both winning two seats.

The partylist's first nominee Mr. Mikee Romero is the team owner of Global Port Batang pier in the PBA. Mikee Romero's business portfolio has made him part of the 50 wealthiest individuals in the Philippines with a net worth of over 135 million USD. Aside from being a ports tycoon, Mr. Romero is also a majority shareholder of Philippines Air Asia. In an interview given to CEO magazine, Mr. Romero said that he has a trio of police motorcades at his disposal but prefers to ride his private helicopter to avoid the traffic. The second nominee, Mr. Erik Pineda is the business manager of Manny Pacquiao. Given these nominees background, it is clear that the partylist is used as a vehicle to promote their business interests through politics.

**LPGMA.** The LPGMA partylist promotes two main platforms: 1) advocating for safety in the production and distribution of LPG products 2) promoting safety in general whether in the workplace, school, family, or community relationships. More broadly, LPGMA represents the liquified petroleum gas and energy industry that seeks to increase sales of related products to consumers.

Mr. Allan Ty, the partylists first nominee has an extensive business background. He was former director of the Cagayan Export Zone Authority. He also owns several businesses related to petroleum, renewable energy, trading, banking and real estate. [Several commentators](#) have also raised the risk of conflicts of interest if groups like LPGMA are given a seat in congress. Under our laws, the LPG industry is regulated by both the DTI and DOE. Having politicians represent the industry enables them to push for laws which lessen the regulatory powers of these agencies, increase budgets for supporting the growth of their sector, and influence hearings on oversight and investigation.

**Alona.** ALONA or the Alliance of Networks and Associations purports to be a partylist which fights for general poverty alleviation. Aside from their own social media releases showing members involved in feeding programs during election season, there is little public information available regarding any concrete platforms or advocacies.

Its incumbent representative Anna Villaraza Suarez is seeking reelection as the first nominee. She is the wife of re-electionist representative from the 2<sup>nd</sup> district of Quezon David Suarez. The second nominee is Monica Arcillas Nazareno. Her mother – Arlene Arcillas - is the current mayor of Sta. Rosa City Laguna since 2019. She served three terms as mayor from 2007 – 2016. From 2016 – 2019, she served as representative of the

first district of Laguna before becoming mayor again in 2019. Her uncle, Arnold Arcillas, was Vice Mayor of Sta. Rosa from 2016 – 2019.

Both the first and second nominees therefore belong to entrenched political families. In the case of Anna Suarez, her husband has had an entrenched political career serving as governor of Quezon province from 2010 – 2019, before running as representative after being term-limited. The second nominee, Monica Nazareno's mother, has been the perpetual mayor of Sta Rosa, except for 2016-2019, when she had to run as representative first after being term-limited. Arlene Arcillas is the daughter of ex-Santa Rosa mayor, Leon Arcillas.

**Sambayanan.** Abante Sentrong Alyansa ng mga Mamamayan para sa Bayan (SAMBAYANAN) partylist is formed by former CPP-NPA-NDF Cadres. Led by Ka Eric Celiz who is a notorious member of the NTF-LCAC is known for red tagging critics of government. The partylist's primary role is to have an "Insurgency-Free Philippines".

### **Closing the backdoor and reclaiming the party-list system**

The current picture of our party-lists in congress and in the 2022 election ballot represents the dismal state of our representative democracy. In the 2019 election, we saw a low voter turn-out among party-lists indicating that half of the Filipino voters failed to choose a party-list that would represent them in congress. This may be an indication of a low level of awareness of the function and importance of party-lists. A plethora of solutions ranging from awareness campaigns to legislative reforms may be put in place.

Fortunately, despite the blatant dynastic hijack of the party-list system, a number of party-lists that remain true to its mandate of proportional representation and empowerment of the underrepresented persist. The challenge for the Filipino electorate is to determine which party-list would truly represent the interest of the broader masses and basic sectors in chambers otherwise filled by the elite.

Nevertheless, to reduce the problem of party-list system bastardization to the lack of voters' awareness is to miss out on the bigger, more entrenched and systematic problem of elite capture in Philippine politics. The elite and business domination in our party-lists should thus be addressed with a more institutional intervention that would arrest the dynastic penetration of the system aimed to empower the basic sectors and broader interests. Amendment to the Party-List Law of 1995 should be forwarded in order to prevent dynastic expansion. A reform to aid people-centered partylists could be through establishing a people's council that elects nominees for a partylist as a requirement for party-list registration. Banning non-consanguinity of elected public officials is another route to regulate dynastic extension in the partylist race. This has been done in the SK Reform Act, and can also be a reform agenda in the partylist law.

### **Party-List Watch also calls on the Filipino voters to reject the party-lists that are:**

1. Run by political dynasties
2. Run by millionaires and business interest

3. No track record of championing the sectors
4. Implicated in corruption and human rights violations

**Finally, PL-Watch encourages citizens to join a citizens' initiative to reclaim the partylist system from political families and elite interests. We encourage Filipinos to report to PL Watch dubious partylists seeking to represent them.**

**PL Watch also sees the need for long-term solutions and campaign for broader political reforms that include:**

1. Political party and party-list reform laws that ensure state support to legitimate political parties and makes parties more accountable and transparent.
2. Anti-political dynasty laws that limit the expansion of political families in Philippines politics.
3. Regulation of election campaign financing that ensures ordinary citizens are not at the mercy of big-moneyed politicians.

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