



COLONIAL PATH DEPENDENCIES, ELITE PERSISTENCE AND (UN) DEMOCRATIC OUTCOMES IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT: The article analyses how democracy in the Philippines developed in a way deeply moulded by authoritarian structures inherited from colonialism. Political elites, clientelism, and extreme social inequality are presented as contemporary expressions of a past that remains alive within institutions. Contesting linear narratives that associate capitalism with the automatic consolidation of democracy, the authors show that democratic development must be understood in light of historical power relations and the ongoing adaptation and capture of institutions by elites to serve their own interests. In the case of the Philippines, the colonial past not only moulded its political institutions but continues to perpetuate authoritarian dynamics to this day.

KEY-WORDS: Philippines, Democracy, Authoritarianism, Colonialism.

RESUMO: O artigo analisa como a democracia nas Filipinas se desenvolveu de maneira profundamente marcada por estruturas autoritárias herdadas do colonialismo. As elites políticas, o clientelismo e a desigualdade social extrema são apresentados como expressões contemporâneas de um passado que permanece vivo nas instituições. Contestando as narrativas lineares que associam o capitalismo à consolidação automática da democracia, os autores mostram que o desenvolvimento democrático deve ser compreendido à luz das relações históricas de poder e da persistência de mecanismos institucionais de captura e adaptação das elites. No caso das Filipinas, o passado colonial não apenas moldou suas instituições políticas como ainda hoje perpetua dinâmicas autoritárias.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Filipinas, democracia, autoritarismo e colonialismo.

1.0- Introduction

Modernisation and political democratisation development as a process is inherently non-linear, complex, and ambiguous. Consequently, the teleological perspective on modernity

and democracy suggests that democratisation follows a predictable linear path driven by neoliberal modernisation, ultimately culminating in liberal democratic capitalism. However, most nations exist in a grey area where political systems blend elements of democracy and authoritarianism (CAROTHERS, 2002). Subsequently, the non-teleological nature of political development highlights the complexities of governance where historical, economic, and cultural factors shape outcomes. The volatility of democratisation is nation-state specific largely due to historical legacies, socioeconomic conditions, hegemony, and leadership, thus producing varied outcomes that are not uniform with every nation-state (HERRSHEL, 2006). Likewise, Huntington (1968, p.392) cautioned that the fragility of democratic institutions is closely linked to the *'decay of the administrative organisation inherited from the colonial era and weakening and disruption of political organisations developed during the struggle for independence'*. And yet, colonial legacies are often overlooked, despite their lasting impact on political and institutional structures. Therefore, this paper evaluates the claim of neoliberal path dependencies wherein modernisation, democratic processes, and transitions by challenging the modernist notion of a one-size-fits-all trajectory towards democracy. Thus, our argument is that nation-states are not *tabula rasa* or “empty canvases” upon which history can be (re)written but rather inherent complex historical and cultural legacies that shape their institutional and nation-state development.

This paper examines colonial legacies and post-independence path dependencies that focuses on the Philippines' transition and development trajectory through an analytical framework with references that include post-Cold War influences and neoliberal policies. Undoubtedly, the current challenges faced by the Philippines could be traced from its colonial experience under Spain (1521-1898) and the United States (1898-1946) when institutions, authority, economic and state apparatus were established and subsequently centralised within a small elite class meanwhile governance primarily functioned through patronage and clientelism than principles of democratic accountability. These colonial regimes established not just extractive economic systems but also political frameworks that normalised elite capture of state resources (ABINALES, AMOROSO, 2017). Such colonial legacy established a particularly pernicious form of colonial path dependency where formal democratic procedures were masked and in turn legitimise substantive elite dominance.

Filipino economist Rene Ofreneo notes that, in order to support the expansion of the colonial Spanish economy, the Spanish administration proceeded to ‘reform’ the feudalistic *encomienda* system by appointing the native chieftains of the *Baranganic* societies into a native intermediary class called the ‘Principalias’. The eventual introduction of ‘hacienda capitalism’ through private land ownership saw notorious land expansion by all levels of the members of the social hierarchy consisting of Spanish administrators from the central colonial government, friars, *encomenderos* and *principalias*. The transition into ‘hacienda capitalism’ concentrated power, authority, and wealth of the emerging rentist elites while at the same time destroyed the livelihoods of the natives who were dependent on subsistence farming and also subjected to coerced abuse and rentists practices. The prevalence of this colonial legacy transcends colonial and post-colonial transitions and continues to reinforce itself throughout the subsequent events in Philippine history. Resistance to land reform had become fundamental to the self-preservation of the political, economical and hereditary elite’s status quo even if it was at odds with national interest. The prevailing outcome of the Philippine-American War and the subsequent Commonwealth administration under American rule illustrate that the collaboration between Filipino elites and American authorities was instrumental in establishing and maintaining U.S. colonial rule in the Philippines. By aligning with American interests, these elites preserved their economic and political dominance, significantly influencing the trajectory of Philippine governance in the early 20th century onwards.

The continued colonial path-dependency under American colonialism shaped Philippine development through mechanisms of economic and security dependency. Filipino political economist CAMBA (2018) documents how American aid and military spending created what he terms "dependent development," where economic structures were oriented toward external interests rather than domestic needs. The military bases agreement, preferential trade access, and foreign policy alignment all carried (in)significant developmental implications as a vassal state. Furthermore, Cold War alignments helped determine which countries received political and developmental support meanwhile others faced constraints. The Philippines' status as an American colony, and later ally, brought certain advantages but also constrained policy autonomy in critical ways. The introduction of free trade policies under U.S. colonial rule created economic dependence, hindered industrialization, and reinforced elite dominance, ultimately stifling the

country's economy. Even after independence, these structural limitations continued to influence the nation's economic trajectory, restricting opportunities for broad-based industrialization and long-term economic growth.

A transitional post-independence period ushered in the era of Marcos dictatorship (1972-1986) that represents not merely a historical period but a critical juncture that reshaped modern Philippine institutions. The Marcos period exemplifies what Filipino political scientist QUIMPO (2015) terms "predatory democracy," which combines authoritarian practices with formal democratic institutions to facilitate state capture and create political dynasties, where dominant families have consistently evolved their strategies to maintain power across changing political and economic systems. As a consequence, MENDOZA et al. (2016) demonstrate through quantitative analysis that political dynasties systematically correlate with worse development outcomes, higher poverty incidence, and lower human development indicators - an unfortunate position where the Philippines is currently found at.

2.0- Democratic Subversion of Third-Wave Democracies

The Cold War entrenched an ideological and economic divide between the communist Eastern bloc and the capitalist Western bloc in the aftermath of World War Two. The West embraced a liberal market economy supported by a system of democratic governance, while the East adopted a centrally planned economy under Marxist-Leninist authoritarian rule of governance (RUDRA, 2005). Nation-states leaned towards either liberal democratic or Marxist-Leninist ideologies, with each striving for modernity and progress while seeking to address poverty and social unrest. However, the very concepts of modernity and development were consciously framed as Western, with the United States serving as the principal model for all nations to emulate, positioned as a direct alternative to the Soviet Union's Marxist framings of modernisation and development (WEBER, 2010, p.162). Consequently, Edward Said (2001 [1978]) emphasises the irony that, despite its roots in Western intellectual traditions, Marxism evolved into an ideological challenge to the West. Thus, the American-led Western approach to modernisation was implicitly positioned as a superior alternative to the Soviet Union's approaches to modernity and development (WEBER, 2010).

Nevertheless, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the collapse of authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe like Portugal, the downfall of military dictatorships in Southeast Asia like President Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, and the decline of one-party rules in sub-Saharan Africa signalled a transitional trend towards democracy and its free market economic system. Samuel Huntington (1991) refers to the global surge of democratisation which began in the 1970's until the 1990's as 'third wave democratisation'. Moreover, FUKUYAMA (1989, p. 271) contends that the rise of neoliberal democracy and free-market capitalism as the dominant and political economic system after the fall of the Berlin Wall signified the 'end of history'. This concept represents the final stage of humanity's ideological evolution, where neoliberal democracy triumphs over all competing ideologies, establishing itself as the sole legitimate global system. It also reinforces the Hegelian end-of-history rhetoric in the fields of political science and international relations, where dominant narratives connect transitions to modernity, development, and democratisation together. The 'end of history' and 'third wave democratisation' concepts further entrenched the argument of the linear causality between modernity and transitional democracy. However, FUKUYAMA (1992, p.280) does not assert that every nation-state will successfully adopt neoliberal democracy. Instead, he suggests that alternative ideological models will no longer be perceived as feasible models for development. Though the reasons and pace of the transition process differ, the third wave of democratic nation-states is supposed to all share a concurring flow of moving away from an authoritarian to a more liberal and democratic rule of governance. Thus, the West saw this as a global trend of democratisation symbolised by the Washington Consensus as represented by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, which promote and reflects policies that often refer to the belief that development in the global majority should adopt market-led strategies that will result in economic growth that will 'trickle down' to the benefit of all (HUNTINGTON, 1991; FUKUYAMA, 1992).

Democratisation is viewed as a process that the establishment of democratic institutions, economic liberalisation, development of a civil society, and broader modernisation efforts as vital factors in attaining full democracy (LOVELL, 2002). In mature democratic nation-states, comprehensive welfare programs are a defining feature, ensuring that citizens enjoy high living standards through access to universal healthcare and education. Additionally, progressive taxation

systems ensure that income levels are sufficient to support a sustainable and adequate standard of living (PRZEWORSKI et al., 2000). Similarly, the third-wave democratisation process posits that nation-states undergo distinct phases on their path to democracy, though not always smoothly or seamlessly. This transition typically follows a structured sequence of stages, namely opening, breakthrough, and consolidation, with elections playing a crucial role in legitimising the process. The democratic transition process starts with the opening phase, marked by political liberalisation, followed by a breakthrough which leads to establishing a procedural democracy that guarantees, at a minimum, fair, competitive, and inclusive elections. As the process continues, civil society becomes institutionalised, ensuring that all individuals, irrespective of gender or socioeconomic status, have the right to vote. The final phase, democratic consolidation, is achieved when key political actors, including the military, acknowledge electoral competition as the sole legitimate method for acquiring and transferring state authority (BALCEROWICZ, 1994; CAROTHERS, 2002). A defining characteristic of democratic electoral competition is its ‘organised uncertainty’, where democratic institutions such as checks and balances and the rule of law establish a stable framework for political competition. In contrast, the outcome of the electoral process remains not pre-determined, ensuring a fair and competitive process (PRZEWORSKI et al., 2000). Democratic consolidation goes beyond mere strategic or instrumental acceptance of democratic principles, it also requires normative compliance and the institutional internalisation of democratic values by both the state and society. At this stage, democracies reach a level of deepening, where the systemic protection of civil liberties and political rights is firmly embedded within both state institutions and civil society (HEYDRIAN, 2018).

Third-wave democracies display key elements of democratic governance such as political space for opposition parties, independent civil society, regular elections, and democratic constitutions. However, these nation-states continue to experience significant democratic shortcomings (CAROTHERS, 2002, p.9-10). The authors agree with Thomas Carothers (2002, p. 9) that most third-wave nation-states have struggled to develop mature or well-functioning democracies and show limited signs of deepening or advancing their democratic progress. Consequently, while many nation-states adopted democratic elections, a growing disconnect emerged between electoral democracy and the embrace of liberal values. The lack of strong

democratic institutions contributed to the rise of ‘illiberal democracies’, where populist strongmen consolidated power by blending electoral processes with autocratic governance, often undermining liberal constitutional principles (ZAKARIA, 2004). Rather than serving as a temporary or transitional phase, this hybrid form of governance has become a lasting reality in many nation-states, where elements of electoral democracy coexist with autocratic governance, restricting civil liberties and weakening institutional checks and balances (ZAKARIA, 2004). Contrary to the belief in a linear progression toward democracy, only a few nation-states have successfully consolidated democracy while many others have experienced a ‘democratic backsliding’ as seen in the resurgence of populist authoritarian leaders (KURLANTZICK, 2013).

The dominant narratives on the democratic transition and development paradigm are based on the assumption that any nation-state shifting away from authoritarian regimes is inevitably destined to become a democracy. Thus, the concept of transition, which presupposes the application of the Washington Consensus through economic liberalisation, market-oriented reforms, and democratisation, reflects a Western-centric perspective that is highly problematic. Democratisation did not follow a linear trajectory as most nation-states are unconsolidated democracies or even protracted democracies with forms of feckless pluralism and dominant power politics (CAROTHERS, 2002). A key factor behind democratic decay is the absence of strong state institutions which are essential for maintaining the rule of law, accountability, and governance. Without these institutions, there is little capacity to discipline corrupt elites, enforce laws effectively, and shield the bureaucracy from external influence by powerful interest groups (FUKUYAMA, 1992). In the Philippine context, these democratic deficiencies include weak representation of citizen’s interests, minimal political engagement beyond voting, widespread abuse of legal frameworks by government elites, and elections with uncertain credibility. Additionally, public confidence in state institutions remains low, and government performance is often inefficient (HEYDRIAN, 2018).

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3.0- The Complexities of Colonial Path Dependencies in the Philippines

The idea of a decolonised world order emerging after the end of World War II has often been referred to as the ‘age of decolonisation’, also suggests a shift toward sovereign nation-states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. While this period marks the formal independence of formerly colonised nation-states and the onset of a post-colonial world, it does not imply that colonialism has ended or imply a clean break from history (SHOHAT, 1992; SAURIN, 2006). Instead, colonialism persists as an ongoing process which we describe as colonial path dependency, wherein historical colonial legacies continue to shape institutions, economic development, and democratic transitions. This paper is grounded in a historical analysis that highlights the colonial nature of democratic transitional regimes with a specific focus on the Philippines. Despite being democratically elected, the Philippine government elite and leaders are increasingly transformed into autocrats by systematically undermining institutions which enabled authoritarian leaders to undermine democratic norms through corrupt practices to strengthen their influence and remain in power. The persistence of these colonial structures is not merely historical inertia but represents what SIMBULAN (2023) characterizes as "adaptive elite

capture," where dominant families have consistently evolved their strategies to maintain power across changing political and economic systems. This elite adaptability helps explain why successive reform efforts have failed to fundamentally alter power distributions.

The neoliberal turn in Philippine economic policy after 1986 represented not merely technical and economic adjustments but fundamental political movements that deposed the Marcos regime. What distinguishes the Philippine experience with neoliberalism is not the policies themselves but their implementation within existing power structures and the subsequent distributional consequences. Filipino economist BELLO (2017) provides empirical evidence showing how particular forms of market liberalisation disproportionately benefited established conglomerates while exposing vulnerable sectors to competition without adequate support. The privatization of utilities and banking reforms, while improving efficiency metrics, created new opportunities for elite capture that MANASAN (2021) documents through her analysis of regulatory frameworks. ROBINSON (2020) notes in his comparative study of Southeast Asian political economy, similar liberalisation policies produced dramatically different outcomes based on existing state capacity and power distributions. In the case of the Philippines' experience, NGUYEN (2019) demonstrates "uneven liberalization" , where formal market reforms coexist with persistent informal power networks.

The Philippines has been described by Benedict Anderson (1988) as a 'cacique democracy', a political system that combines popular electoral participation with feudal and dynastic control over governance. This structure emerged during American colonial rule, when the administration sought to develop a native elite leadership that would collaborate with American colonial authorities. These native elites emerged as a dominant political class in Manila by acquiring expropriated land that previously belonged to the Catholic Church. To secure loyal allies, the United States facilitated the sale of these lands, further consolidating the economic and political dominance of indigenous elites. During the American occupation, these native elites expanded their wealth and influence which shape the Philippine's democratic and developmental trajectory after independence. These indigenous elites or 'caciques' became the modern ruling class, maintaining control over political and economic structures.

During the Spanish, Japanese, and United States colonial periods, authority was centralised within a small elite class and governance primarily functioned through patronage and clientelism rather than principles of democratic accountability. Colonial administration depended on local elites to manage governance, establishing a pattern of elite dominance that continued beyond formal independence. Instead of dismantling these entrenched structures, post-colonial leaders maintained and modified the system where state resources are allocated through personal networks rather than transparent processes. This historical continuity or colonial path dependency helps explain why democratic institutions remain fragile and corruption is still deeply ingrained in the Philippines' political system, which closely resembles the power dynamics of the colonial era. The failure of these pervasive development strategies stemmed not from the policies themselves but from their implementation within existing power structures. As TADEM (2019) demonstrates in her analysis of economic policymaking, potentially productive development initiatives were consistently subverted by elite interests, creating a pattern where promising reforms became mechanisms for reinforcing existing inequalities. This analysis challenges simplistic narratives that blame either "bad policies" or "culture" for developmental failures, instead focusing on the political economy of policy implementation hereditary from colonial legacy.

Even throughout the periods of post-independence reforms through successive administrations mainly Quezon's land reform, Quirino's import substitution industrialization (ISI) and Macapagal's export-oriented industrialization (EOI); colonial legacies and elite capture persisted on a pattern of colonial path dependency that perpetuated economic inequality and undermined inclusive development. Existing research on these reform policies have repeatedly pointed out that the implementation of these reforms was prone to have been compromised by both design limitations and elite interference of these Quezon's land reform preserved colonial agrarian structures by allocating marginal lands to peasants while protecting core estates held by political elites (BORRAS, 2007). Anderson notes that Quezon's land reform program maintained the fundamental landholding patterns established during Spanish and American colonial rule. Under Quirino, import substitution industrialization became a vehicle for landed elites to diversify into protected industrial sectors, with import licenses, foreign exchange permits, and subsidized credit concentrated among politically connected families. Rather than fostering

competitive industrialization, these policies created a class of industrialists dependent on state protection and subsidies. The works of Emmanuel de Dios, Paul Hatchcroft and James Broyce have repeatedly found out that the monopolisation of import licenses has been allocated to firms connected to just 40 families, reinforcing oligarchic dominance over the Philippine economy. The export-oriented industrialization championed by Macapagal had merely reconfigured elite privileges rather than dismantling them, shifting advantages from import-dependent industrialists to agricultural exporters while maintaining their privileged position (RIVERA, 1994). Undoubtedly, these historical patterns have constrained future institutional development and developed a system of elite impunity which eventually led to the rise of the Marcos regime.

The Marcos dynasty began with Ferdinand Marcos Sr., who became president in 1965. Initially regional landowners from Ilocos Norte in Northern Luzon, the family's political influence continued with his son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., winning the 2022 presidential election. Ferdinand Marcos Sr. consolidated power during his first term through infrastructure projects, but rising inflation and mounting international debt fueled unrest, leading to his declaration of Martial Law in 1972 (CORONEL, 2022). Justifying it as a response to community insurgency, political instability and economic crisis, Marcos Sr. shut down Congress, detained student activists and journalists, and introduced a new constitution in 1972, extending his rule. Despite his increasingly authoritarian actions, the United States supported Marcos Sr., due to the narrative that the Martial Law was anti-communist. Meanwhile, crony capitalism under the mask of economic development flourished under his government, reinforcing a patronage system that enriched economic elites while further entrenching his authoritarian rule (DURDIN, 1975). Another dynastic elite family, the Aquinos, were landowners from Central Luzon. Benigno Aquino Jr., a senator and vocal critic of Marcos Sr., was assassinated in 1983. His wife, Corazon Aquino, later became president after the 1986 People Power Revolution, and their son, Benigno Aquino III, became president in 2010.

Michael Johnston (2005) examines corruption in Southeast Asian nation-states by categorising corruption into four syndromes based on political and economic structures which influence markets, elite cartels, oligarchs and clans, and official moguls. However, he argues that corruption in Southeast Asian nation-states is often multifaceted and overlaps between multiple syndromes rather than fitting into a single category. In the case of the Philippines, JOHNSTON

(2005) classifies corruption under oligarchs and clans, and official moguls. The oligarchs and clans category applies due to the dominance of political dynasties such as the Marcos, Aquino, and Duterte families, who often than not utilise state resources for personal gains. Meanwhile, the official moguls category is reflected in how elite leaders and high-ranking officials exploit public resources and government institutions to consolidate power. This is facilitated by weak institutional check and balances, fragile rule of law as well as widespread patronage politics which reinforce clientelism and elite dominance (JOHNSTON, 2005; HEYDRIAN, 2018). The entrenched corruption syndromes in the Philippines can be understood through the lens of colonial path dependency, where historical colonial legacies embedded in institutions and structures continue to shape modern socioeconomic and political dynamics. Johan Galtung (1971) argues that structural relationships between a dominant (metropolitan) nation and a dependent (colonised) nation creates a system of centre-periphery dynamics. A mutual harmony of interests exists between the elite centres of the dominant nation and the elite centre within the peripheral nation, as local elites benefit from their alignment with colonial powers. However, a conflict of interest arises between the elite centre of both the dominant nation and the peripheral population in the colonised state, as the broader public experiences exploitation and marginalisation. Additionally, conflict can also emerge within the dominant or metropolitan nation itself, where the lower classes suffer due to the concentration of resources and power among elites (GALTUNG, 1971).

KATAOKA and DARANGINA (2023) examines the Philippines spatial poverty imbalances since its independence and concluded that the provinces with higher poverty incidences are in the Mindanao Island while lower poverty incidences are found in the Luzon Island especially in Manila and its neighbouring cities and provinces being referred to as the ‘Imperial Manila Syndrome’ to reflect the core-periphery structure or capital city bias. The post-independence economic policies discussed earlier—from Quezon to Marcos—reinforced centralisation which has only created a self-reinforcing cycle where political power generated economic advantage, which in turn consolidated political influence in the capital region. This persistent colonial legacy created not only economic disparities but profound regional inequalities that would eventually fuel populist backlash against the traditional power structure.

Rodrigo Duterte's ascent to presidency in 2016 signified a transition from Benigno Aquino III, a well-regarded leader but a member of the native elite political dynasty that have historically dominated Philippine politics. As the first president from Mindanao, Duterte positioned himself as an outsider to Manila's political establishment, presenting his rise from the periphery to the centre the entrenched power of Manileño elites and push back against foreign influence namely the United States (CORONEL, 2019). His nationalist rhetoric blended anti-elite messages with a foreign policy shift towards China and Russia which appealed to the Filipino masses. Overall, Rodrigo Duterte capitalised on public discontent over domestic uneven development and over the failures of elite democratic governance to address economic inequality and corruption. His nationalism is deeply tied to his experience in governing Davao as Mayor which was authoritarian yet resonated with the masses, shaping anti-establishment discourse that contemned 'Imperial Manila', corrupt oligarchs, and United States imperialism through foreign intervention which viewed American influence as a continuation of colonial domination (TEEHANKEE, 2016). Duterte's presidency, while partially challenging the "Imperial Manila" dynamic, nonetheless operated within constraints established by colonial legacies. As a result, the Duterte political dynasty continues through his daughter, Sara Duterte, who became Mayor of Davao in 2016 and later Vice President in 2022, serving alongside Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

4.0- Discussion

The Philippines' post-independence development strategies represented not simply policy choices but contested political terrain. The Philippines' contemporary development challenges represent not isolated problems but systematic outcomes of institutional configurations. MENDOZA and BEJA (2013) establishes clear causal links between political dynasty prevalence and development indicators, showing how concentrated political power translates into specific economic outcomes. Their research demonstrates that areas dominated by political dynasties show systematically lower human development indicators, higher inequality, and more limited economic diversification. Filipino economist HABITO (2019) calls "growth without transformation" to illustrate the fundamental development challenge which is economic growth that fails to alter underlying productive structures or power relations. This pattern distinguishes the Philippines from more successful developmental nation-states in the region and explains why periods of growth have yielded limited poverty reduction and structural change. The persistence

of structural constraints demonstrates the difficulty of overcoming deeply embedded colonial legacies even through reforms, which rather than dismantling historical inequalities, can be captured and reconfigured to serve existing power structures, with political elites adapting to changing economic paradigms while maintaining their privileged position.

As the Philippines continues to navigate questions of regional autonomy, economic development, and political representation, understanding the historical roots of these challenges remains essential. While neoliberal frameworks suggest that market liberalisation and global integration should dissolve traditional power structures and create meritocratic economic opportunities, the Philippine case demonstrates how deeply embedded colonial patterns can persist through successive policy regimes. The Philippines' developmental trajectory illustrates not just historical contingency but systematic patterns where initial conditions continuously reproduce themselves through institutional mechanisms. This analysis suggests three critical insights:

First, the persistence of colonial legacies operates through specific mechanisms of elite adaptation and institutional capture that transform formal reforms into tools for preserving substantive power distributions. Second, the Philippines' experience demonstrates that development is fundamentally political rather than technical. Even well-designed policies fail when implemented within power structures that distort their intended effects. This insight challenges purely technocratic approaches to development planning. Third, breaking path-dependent trajectories requires addressing power relations directly rather than hoping that economic growth alone will transform social structures. CANLAS (2020) argues that genuine structural transformation depends on expanding the political voice of marginalized groups and challenging elite dominance of economic policymaking. The Philippines thus stands at a critical juncture where historical patterns remain powerful but not deterministic. Its future development trajectory will depend not on policies alone but on the political coalitions that implement them and their ability to challenge historically entrenched power structures.

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