

LUTONG MACOY

Philippine Elections under the Marcos Regime, Comparisons and Lessons for Today¹

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A. Introduction: “The most democratic time in Philippine history.”

In many interviews, Former First Lady Imelda Marcos used to boast, “Martial law is the most democratic time in Philippine History.” She claimed that during her husband’s administration, there were a number of elections held for 3 Million elected positions throughout the archipelago³ (Chua 2010, 112-113), so it was not really a time of dictatorship. How can there be a dictatorship if there were elections and consultative assemblies? This presentation is about key events that happened in relation to elections held under the regime of Ferdinand Marcos as President of the Philippines. These stories will show us how a democratic process such as the elections can be appropriated by a dictatorship to show that it has legitimacy.

Also we would look at what changes happened after People Power and the ouster of Marcos, and how these changes affect today’s elections. We would see that People Power improved the electoral situation as compared to elections held under Marcos. It democratized participation, but not as much as we desire it to be, “Lutong Macoy,” under new and improved ways, seems to still exist. But hope is seen in the continued participation and commitment of the Filipino people to clean, honest and orderly elections.

B. Power of the People Suppressed (1969-1986)

I. Campaign Overspending with the Use of Government Funds: The 1969 Presidential Elections

Before him, no Philippine President ever won re-election since the time of Manuel Quezon. Ferdinand Marcos, still being too young to retire at fifty-two, ran against the son of a former Philippine President, Sergio Osmeña, Jr. Some accounts say this is one of the dirtiest and bloodiest elections in Philippine History. According to Sandra Burton, TIME magazine reporter, Marcos spent an estimated US\$ 50 Million in public and private funds, even borrowed money to appeal to special interest groups and to meet his targets for the “rice and roads” program: 239 irrigational projects and 3,400 kilometers or roads. President Marcos ordered all this completed

¹ Part of the discussion papers that became the basis for the exhibit *For Democracy and Human Rights* by the Center for Youth Networking and Advocacy and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the official exhibit of the 40th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Martial Law (Never Again, Remembering Martial Law @ 40 Committee). It was re-exhibited in time for the upcoming elections at the Taytay Municipal Hall, Taytay, Rizal from 29 April to 3 May 2013.

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³ That included a president, a vice president, a prime minister, 30 cabinet members, 200 members of parliament, 75 governors, 1,700 mayors, 42,000 barangay captains, 900,000 barangay brigades, and 27 Million barangay brigades in fifteen elections. All this figures can be debated since the barangay brigades are not necessarily elected.

by election day. Using his “equity of the incumbent” and the use of government projects as a means to campaign was too much for the economy. A few days after the elections, the peso weakened and to pay for the costs of the projects, the government was forced to seek an emergency International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan to be able to pay the balance of payments. IMF ordered President Marcos to float the peso. Peso destabilized from US\$ 1.00 is to Php 2.00 when President Marcos became president, to US\$ 1.00 is to Php 6.00. It affected the average Filipino so much that there was a shortage of pandesal because the price of imported flour rose so high. According to Burton, “Over the years voters had become inured to a high level of electoral fraud and corruption, but never before had the aftershock of a campaign played such havoc with their pocketbooks (Burton 1989, 75). So much for an early version of “EPAL.”

In that election, President Marcos won 5,017,343 votes (61.5 %) over Osmeña’s 3,143,122 (61.5) (Malaya and Malaya 2004, 344)

II. Token Elections: Citizen’s Assemblies as Referenda

According to many accounts, the upcoming 1973 elections was the reason why President Marcos declared Martial Law on 21 September 1986. The constitution at that time barred him from having a third term and it was projected that the elections would be an overwhelming victory for the opposition. But even so, President Marcos wanted to show that he was a different kind of dictator. He was a constitutional autocrat, he wanted to still show that his leadership was legal and legitimate, at least to the ruling class. And so he held elections, but according to Rigoberto Tiglao, “Rigged referenda and elections were the main props of the dictatorship in its attempt to give itself a legal basis” (Tiglao 1988, 28). As Etta Rosales said, “Well, he held elections very frequently but they were elections that made a mockery of democracy and the electoral processes they were elections that were used to legitimize his rule” (Lacaba 2000)

Upon the imprisonment of oppositionist members of the constitutional convention, the provisions that would maintain President Marcos into power were conveniently included in the draft constitution which would be submitted to a people in a plebiscite. Marcos, as the new form of “datu,” wanted to go back to the ancient Filipino form of government, the barangay, and he wanted to fulfil this by consulting directly to the people as the ancients had done, only, there were already over forty million Filipinos in the 1970’s. To call what can be considered as the first Martial Law elections, which was justified as “grassroots style of democracy,” as “unconventional” would be an understatement. Some people joked that in a real plebiscite, “Yes” will be defeated by “No” because people will vote the jailed lawmakers Aqui-“no” and Diok-“no.” And so the plebiscite was suspended and was replaced via Presidential Decree 86 by barangay citizens’ assemblies. In these meetings held on 10-15 January 1973, the members of the barangay were asked to raise their hands to vote if they wanted to ratify the constitution. According to Haydee Yorac, there were reports that even those who are too young to vote were included, they reduced the voting age to from 18 to 15. The barangay chiefs reported an overwhelming approval by the people of the constitution—14,976,561 (90.67%) voted yes and 743,869 (9.33%) voted no.⁴ They even published photographs of people raising hands in such

⁴ Except when otherwise stated, election figures came from the official website of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC).

meetings, but many accounts say they were just asked whoever wanted to have free rice (Tiongson 1997).

Ridiculous and dubious referenda continued. In 27-28 July 1973, people were asked if they wanted to ratify the 1973 constitution, suspend the convening of the interim Batasang Pambansa and “to continue the reforms started under Martial Law.” Again, 90.77% voted yes against 9.23 who voted no. On 27-28 February 1975, 87% the people supposedly decided to allow the president to use his power to restructure Greater Manila into and integrate it into a manager-commission; approved the “the manner the President has been exercising his powers under Martial Law and the Constitution and that the President should continue exercising the same powers;” and allowed Martial Law to continue including the suspension of the interim Batasang Pambansa and the extension of terms of local officials among others. Again, on 16-17 October 1976, President Marcos asked the people if they wanted Martial Law to continue and if they would allow to ratify proposed amendments to the 1973 constitution substituting the Interim Batasang Pambansa for the Regular Batasang Pambansa. As expected, 86.7 % said yes. In December 1977, the people were asked if they want President Marcos to continue as President and Prime Minister of the Philippines. In one of these elections, Marcos got the statistically mind-boggling 99% “yes” votes. Three more referenda will be held. According to Tiglao, Marcos failed to realize that his elections were held during a period of economic prosperity “which made the upper and middle class apathetic to the attack on democratic rights.” (Tiglao 1988, 28-29)

III. Election Fraud and COMELEC as tool of the regime: Batasang Pambansa Elections on 1978 and 1984

During the post-war years, the Commission of Elections was relatively independent and maintained credible elections (Lacaba 2000). But the time of Marcos saw the COMELEC as a tool of the government to legitimize its rule. It was evident during the elections for the Interim Batasang Pambansa in 1978, the first real elections that was held after Martial Law was proclaimed. The parliament would be composed of a certain number of representatives for each region that would serve as a legislative body. The administration party, the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan, fielded the first lady, Imelda Romualdez Marcos as 20 other candidates for the elections in Metro Manila. Marcos wished that it would be a two-party contest (Marcos 1978, 38) but Ninoy Aquino led the Liberal Party in saying that their participation would only legitimize the elections that they expected to turn against them anyway by hook or by crook. The other parties who participated were Pusyong Bisaya, the Young Philippines, Mindanao Alliance and the League of Liberated Scientists. Suddenly, Ninoy felt that if he runs, it might be a great opportunity to reach out to the people after so long and speak against the dictatorship even if he would not win. And so, Ninoy decided to run. But he was not allowed by the Liberal Party leaders to run under the party’s name so they formed a new alliance called Lakas ng Bayan or LABAN. This is where the “Laban” (L) sign came from. Despite his requests, Ninoy wasn’t allowed to campaign outside his prison cell. To justify this, the government, through Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, charged Ninoy of not just being a sympathizer of the New People’s Army but also a man who worked for the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States. And so it was his fellow Laban candidates like Jerry Barican, Alex Boncayao, Neptali Gonzales, Tito Guingona, Ernie Maceda, Ramon Mitra, Nene Pimentel, Charito Planas, Anding Roces, Soc

Rodrigo and others campaigned for him. Also campaigning for him was his wife Cory and their children, especially seven-year old Kris, who at that time already possessed star quality with their ability to talk and campaign. The regime granted though his request for a press conference and a live TV interview which was shown on March 10 from Fort Bonifacio through GTV-4. Ninoy answered the issues hurled against him. It was reported that only a few people and vehicles were on the streets during that day night. Many wanted to watch Ninoy Aquino. Then, LABAN called for a noise barrage one night before the election, April 6. Starting at seven that night, there was widespread noise-making and protests that happened around Metro Manila, Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog. It was a fiesta of sorts, the first manifestation of People Power. For Ninoy Aquino perhaps, that was enough (Policarpio 1986, 146-152).

For as expected, five TV channels announced a 21-0 win in Metro Manila for Kilusang Bagong Lipunan. Before 11 % of votes could be counted, COMELEC held a “midnight canvass” and proclaimed Imelda and 20 other KBL candidates as winners. LABAN expected at least their more famous candidates to make it to the top—Ninoy, Maceda, Mitra, Soc, Neptali and Roces. Apparently, in the COMELEC count, Ninoy was defeated by the last candidate of KBL, Waldo S. Perfecto, a guy who never had the national recognition that Aquino had, defeated him by 234,000 votes (Policarpio 1986, 152). Many called it “Lutong Macoy” or literally, “Cooked by Marcos” in reference to “lutong macao” which is a colloquial word for victory already made up, and “Macoy,” a monicker for President Marcos (Lacaba 2002).

The next day, Marcos declared “*Before, I restrained the law-enforcement agencies. But today I have ordered them to go after these people (who defy the government) in order to calm the fears of the people.*” Demonstrations were banned. But LABAN protested the results of the elections by marching from Welcome Rotonda to Manila on April 8 carrying a coffin—symbolizing the death of democracy. They were stopped by policemen near the España railroad tracks. Their leaders such as Joker Arroyo, Pimentel, Guingona, Rodrigo and even the old Lorenzo Tañada, the grand old man of Philippine politics were arrested and detained (Policarpio 1986, 152). The frustration caused by this use of democracy to trample democracy made some moderate activists to bomb installations under the name “April 6 Liberation Movement,” the date of the noise barrage.

The fraud and the arrests didn’t go unnoticed by the international media, the most notable of these comments was reflected by a Washington Post editorial cartoon showing a group of people being led away by a truck with Marcos saying, “*Ingrates! You let them vote and the next thing, they want their ballots counted.*” (Policarpio 1986, 152)

In the next elections for the regular Batasang Pambansa held on 14 May 1984, Ninoy was already dead after being assassinated upon returning from exile in the United States, 21 August 1983. There was much debate in the opposition if they would participate or not. Her widow Cory Aquino, after much thought, opted to campaign for the opposition candidates.

Even if it was only a Batasan election, this was a very important for the president. The United States was closely watching this election to see if President Marcos still had mandate. Many believe that elections for him was more a message that he has mandate for the United States and the international banking and lending institutions than getting the voice of his own people.

Again, COMELEC was tainted by a credibility problem. COMELEC had to certify “dominant opposition party” in each region. The DOP were the only ones in the oppositions entitled to have poll watchers. But the National Citizens Movement for Free Election (NAMFREL), an election watch dog founded in 1983⁵, reported that COMELEC certified a “very weak, pro-KBL” party The Roy Wing of the Nacionalista Party to become the DOP in 27 provinces. According to Kaa Byington, KBL created fake opposition parties which were certified by the COMELEC which guaranteed KBL wins in the said area. COMELEC also ordered seven million watermarked excess ballots, not only from the Bureau of Printing, but to five other printers which scrambled the serial numbers on the ballots. New Year’s Eve of 1984, barangay officials were invited to Malacañang and received gift baskets, each with a kilo of rice, milk and fruit juice, salt and 100 pesos. The election code wanted to prevent a boom in infrastructure projects during campaign period but the president had roads and bridges constructed to assist his KBL partymates. Imelda Marcos publicly said that any barangay who would give 0 votes to the opposition will be given cash awards. This was known as “Operation Zero.” According to reports, the KBL spent Php 142 Million for their campaign! (Byington 1988, 51-54). Also, billboards announcing projects delivered by KBL candidates through their pork barrel funds proliferated during the 45-day campaign. Again, public funds were used for projects rushed to completion before the day of the polls totalling about US\$ 28.5 Million so they could convince people to vote for them (Burton 1989, 205).

Masked armed men were seen in some villages and military personnel which should be confined to barracks on election day were seen in places where the opposition was strong. In Tarlac, Ninoy Aquino’s home province, NAMFREL received reports that 7,000 armalites were delivered there. Hooded armed men then roamed in the barrios, knocking on doors at midnight. Seven followers of Evelio Javier, who was running against KBL’s Pacificador, were killed going to the polling place at Sibalom. NAMFREL partially counted Javier’s vote as 6,968 to Pacificador’s 2,279. COMELEC received requests to let the police take-over the province because armed men were blocking all roads and preventing the returns to be taken to the provincial canvassers. Then COMELEC, proclaimed Arturo Pacificador as the winner of the race. There were 348 reported election-related deaths during the 1984 elections, mostly from military and NPA clashes. Yet, 10 opposition supporters, one opposition candidate, a KBL member, 6 town mayors, 5 school teachers and 2 NAMFREL volunteers were included (Byington 1988, 55-59). A mayor even admitted “cheerfully” to TIME’s Sandra Burton that open voting was common practice in her town. People show who they voted for upon submission of ballot to the presiding poll watchers stating that no law was against it (Burton 1988, 218)

NAMFREL announced that it is projecting 91-seat victory for the opposition, the incoming returns to the NAMFREL headquarters dropped. Tarlac reported no returns at all. Within five days, COMELEC proclaimed 89 winners which included 16 Metro Manila oppositionist, even if the canvass was still incomplete, “COMELECted” as they said at that time. Although the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan won 114 of 183 seats, the opposition headed by Doy Laurel’s The United Nationalist Democratic Organization (UNIDO) and Nene Pimentel’s Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-LABAN (PDP-LABAN) managed to win 61 seats. The 18 PDP-Laban representatives who won seats especially critiqued the Marcos regime squarely in the face, and

⁵ Different from the NAMFREL of the 1950s.

championed the interests of the poor and the oppressed, demanding respect for human rights, compensation for victims of military operations, monitoring budget deliberations, advocating improvement of health services (Montiel 2011, 197).

US President Ronald Reagan's spokesperson Larry Speakes spoke, "Democracy is alive and working in the Philippines." President Marcos seemed to have gotten what he wanted. For now.

IV. Election-related violence (ERV): The 1986 Snap Presidential Elections

The last time Marcos stood up for a presidential election was on 16 June 1981, when he defeated former Defense Secretary, Bulacan governor and guerrilla leader, Alejo Santos to have his third term of six more years. The traditional opposition refused to participate in the elections and so there was an opinion that Santos was just a pawn of Marcos so as to say there was a semblance of opposition. Santos was appointed previously as the director of the Philippine Veteran's Bank and was running under the Nationalista Party wing of Jose Roy, the party that brought Marcos to the presidency in two elections (Celoza 1997, 73-76). Marcos won 91% of the count with 18,309,360 votes (91.4 %) to Alejo Santos's 1,716,449 (8.6 %)

But there was increasing pressure from some of President Reagan's advisers to take a second look at President Marcos's mandate. Once again, to impress America, he announced on November 3, 1985 that he would be holding a snap election in three months in an American Sunday morning news talk show *This Week With David Brinkley* while the whole country was sleeping.

By that time, Ninoy's widow Cory Aquino was being urged to run against President Marcos, since she was different in many aspects to him. She said she would run only if her supporters can collect a million signatures. Chino Roces accomplished that, even exceeding the target number of signatures. She also said she would only run if Marcos would call for snap elections, believing it was impossible, even unthinkable. Be careful what you wish for.

In her campaign sorties, there would be violent threats against her written on the walls "Isang bala ka lang Cory." Her humble retort was "Isang balota ka lang, Marcos."

In its study, IPER (2007) noted that election violence is "a systematic and premeditated act aimed at monopolizing electoral victories through various coercive means". According to Patino and Velasco, it can range from intimidation, threat, kidnapping, murder, as well as arson and bombings of strategic locations by candidates, their campaign staff, or goons and private armies, armed rebel groups, as well as the police and the military (Co et al. 2005, 25). People refer to it as the three Gs—guns, goons and gold or "ang magkapatid na panda—pandarahas at pandaraya" (Lacaba 2000).

On election day, 7 February 1986, Newsweek reported that in a Manila slum, "armed men raided a precinct, dumped the ballots into a storm sewer and stuffed the boxes with replacement. In Muntinlupa, thugs fired into the air to drive away poll watchers, one of whom was a nun. In another precinct, a goon held a knife to the throat of a poll watcher until she surrendered the box." The report continued that government officials, even if banned from the precincts, went

there to distribute money. In known opposition areas, people were disenfranchised because they couldn't find their names in the voters list (Byington 1988, 19-20). NAMFREL volunteers and poll watchers documented the fraud. Ariel Quioge, a Bureau of Internal Revenue employee, reported that in their precinct, they were not allowed inside during the counting and that only Marcos votes were being counted. When they protested, they were reported as troublemakers. Desideria Narciso, a housewife, reported how Cory was winning in the precincts as she was in charge of the papers and how in the city canvass, Marcos was way ahead. There were also numerous reports of flying voters in different parts of the country. Even the foreign media noticed, as noted by *Seattle Times* reporter Dick Cleaver when he saw buses bringing flying voters in precincts, "If 500 guys get even a part of this on film, then the world will know what's happening here today." (Byington 1988, 20-33)

Poll watchers were conscious that this election might be a repeat of the violence and intimidation of the 1984 Batasan election famous for "ballot snatchings," and it did. In Muntinlupa, Vic Olaguera reported that goons fired automatic rifles that made the counting be disrupted and that they threatened with knives the poll watchers to give them the ballots, the tally sheets and the voters list. In that school, only half of the precincts finished counting. Tess Cruz, a bank employee, reported on how only a few minutes after the polls closed at 3:00 pm, M16s were fired outside the polling places, and that when everyone was on the floor, the goons scattered the ballots on the floor, this happened despite the presence of some foreign media. In Makati, Tony Esteban asked a barangay captain to leave a polling place thrice. By the third time, the official was cursing him and he came back with some men. Tony's son, Tony Jr. had a camera with him and so he snapped a shot of him as he was being hit with a chair. When his sisters came to help him, they too were manhandled. Then Tony Jr. aimed his camera as he grabbed a table leg and swung it to the goons. The goons retreated. Budoy Sanchez, a bank employee, was manning the NAMFREL hotline and received numerous reports of harassed NAMFREL women, kidnapped nuns and stolen ballot boxes. In a written complaint to the Chairman of COMELEC, Antonio M. de Inchausti said that he received at the NAMFREL headquarters at La Salle Greenhills an emergency call to go to Julo Elementary School in Mandaluyong. Goons there scared the voters and pollwatchers. They switched the contents of three ballot boxes and had thrown the real ballots in the sewer. Benjamin Rieza reported in Makati that as Cory Aquino was leading in all the precincts by 3:30 pm gunfire was heard all around and NAMFREL volunteers were ordered out in gunpoint. Someone had a grenade and threatened to throw it which made people run. The wife of the goon pleaded not to cause trouble and the goon told her that he was doing it because they needed the money. The goons also kicked the media and destroyed their equipment. Lily Ylagan, an employee of the Ministry of Labor and Employment, said that she caught flying voters in Palanan Elementary School in Makati City by asking them about streets in the area. With her insistence they finally admitted coming from Batangas. When she went outside the classrooms, she saw armed uniformed men. In a few moments, a battle ensued inside the classroom. Chairs were flown, the people, including women teachers and nuns defended the ballots as goons were trying to get them. Orlando Sentinel's Randy Harrison reported, "Worse than South Africa, Central America, and South America—and I've been to all in the past year." (Byington 1988, 20-33) An enduring photo of a goon pointing a gun at a group of volunteers protecting ballot boxes was taken despite the risk by Gerry Baldo, and an image of a group of masked armed men taking ballot boxes taken by Al Podgorski (Moyer, et al., 1986, 104). In just a few days, February 11, 1986, former Antique governor Evelio Javier, who

was monitoring votes in his province for Cory Aquino, was gunned down by goons believed to be taking orders from KBL member Assemblyman Arturo Pacificador.

TIME's Sandra Burton noted:

Vote fraud, as carried out in the Philippines, was not a subtle art. The closer the election result was expected to be, the more brutal the attempts to fix it. The grossness of the fraud that was carried out in this election would reflect the further breakdown of the regime. Pretense, pride, secrecy were gone—behavior which desperate men could not afford. Orders were still being obeyed, but they were being executed crudely by gangs of mercenaries, who were without accountability or concern for the consequences to the president who issued them (Burton 1988, 348).

In a post-election television forum at Channel 4, famously referred to as the “Saturday Night Massacre” telecasted live starting 11:15 PM of 9 February, when confronted by these reports of violence, panellists from Kilusang Bagong Lipunan side by side with COMELEC officials seemed to be in chorus bullying the NAMFREL officials (Byington 1988, 193-196). If NAMFREL's partiality is under question because of its ties with the opposition, Commission on Elections showed itself in the forum, in my opinion, as an arm of the administration.

During the first hours of the counting, President Marcos was leading in the COMELEC counting while Cory Aquino was leading the NAMFREL quick count. But during the official canvassing of the COMELEC, an hour before the Channel 4 interview started, their own computer tabulators walked out because they saw that whatever data it was they submit, in the large screens they would appear differently. Cory Aquino felt she was being cheated and that she actually won the election. The *Batasang Pambansa* took over the canvassing of votes and in their final official count President Marcos won 10,807,197 votes (53.62 %) over Cory's 9,291, 761 (46.1%). In fairness, it is interesting to note that the partial unofficial NAMFREL count, when it ended, also reflected President Marcos the winner with 7,835,070 votes to Cory's 7,053,068. It was either Marcos really won the election or the pre-vote cheating such as vote buying and ballot switching was so widespread as to make Marcos the winner (Malaya and Malaya 2004, 344-345).

President Marcos's old friend President Reagan remarked in a press conference of his concern about the violence in the Philippines and on the fraud occurring “on both sides.” Many international observers were not amused by this statement. Cory Aquino then called for a rally dubbed “Tagumpay ng Bayan” at the Rizal Park on 16 February 1986 attended by a million people. She called for boycott of businesses and industries supporting the regime. According to author Angela Stuart Santiago, if EDSA didn't happen, the boycott would have been so effective in bringing down the economy and the regime anyway (Stuart Santiago 2000). But Cory prepared the hearts of the people to participate in the unexpected turn of events from 22-25 February known to the world today as the first peaceful “People Power” revolt that ousted a dictator ever in world history. As according to Randy David in a 2001 ABS-CBN documentary, “The votes that were not counted during the snap elections suddenly had feet and strolled to EDSA.”

C. POST SCRIPT: Making People Power Work through the Ballot (1987 to present)

I. The Post-EDSA years

The reported massive cheating and electoral violence marred the 1986 snap presidential elections and triggered a failed military coup that led to the people's uprising at Epifanio De Los Santos Avenue (Teehankee 2002, 161). Culminated in the oath taking of Corazon Aquino and Salvador Laurel as president and vice president, respectively, on February 25, and the flight of Marcos on evening of that day (Salonga 2006, 17), the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution marked the restoration of democratic rule in the country and dismantling of Marcos's authoritarian regime.

The administration of President Aquino "de-Marcosified" the government and the state instrumentalities and manifested the re-establishment of pre-Martial Law democratic institutions through the enactment of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. In a widely hailed free and open plebiscite, the constitution was ratified by almost 85 per cent of the people (Salonga 2006, 18). Among the institutions restored are the presidential form of government and bicameral legislature (Senate and House of Representatives), replacing the parliamentary form and the unicameral Batasang Pambansa.

Elections for congressional and senatorial posts are subsequently held conformably to the new constitution. The 1987 congressional elections was the first free election in the country since 1971 (Teehankee 2002, 163). However, this has been criticized as the reinstatement of the old elite rule or the oligarchy "dismantled" by Marcos as those who were elected, especially in the lower house, belong to the long standing political families in their respective localities.

If during the old regime, local officials who remained seated were either pro-Marcos or effectively playing their cards on the regime, or as political scientist Dr. Carolina Hernandez said that since "1972, in increasing numbers, military officers assumed important and strategic positions in the civilian bureaucracy," with Marcos placing his Ilocano friends on top posts (Tiongson 1997), Sheila Coronel observed that 61 per cent of the representatives elected in for the 8th Congress in 1987 (122 of the 198) were from political clans (Co et al. 2005, 52). In the Senate, of the 24 Senators, five (5) came from established political families whose members had been in public office before martial law—Agapito Aquino, Teofisto Guingona, Sotero Laurel, Wigberto Tañada, and Victor Ziga—while six (6) came from the pre-Marcos legislature—Jovito Salonga, John Osmeña, Raul Manglapus, Ernesto Maceda, Neptali Gonzales and Mamintal Tamano (Coronel et al. 2007, 31).

Another step towards strengthening democratic rule is the holding of the 1988 local elections after President Aquino appointed officers-in-charge of local government. Teehankee (2002, 165), however, noted that the exercise reinforced the traditional nature of politics in the Philippines. The election also saw the resurgence of candidates with familiar names and the emergence of candidates from the show business (de Jesus 1988b, 1, 9 quoted in Teehankee 2002, 165).

It seems the percentage has not changed over the years despite the entry of the party-list representatives. During the 12th Congress elected in 2001, 61% (140 of 228) came from political clans, the congress before that, the 11th, it was 62% (Coronel et al. 2007, 31).

II. Synchronization of Elections

The 1992 elections were the first synchronized elections in the country under the 1987 constitution and the 1991 local government code. It saw the election of a president, a vice president, half of the Senate, representatives, and local government officials. Since then, the country holds synchronized national and local elections every six years and midterm elections during the third year. The midterm elections elect half of the Senate, the representatives, and local government officials.

The election for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was first held in 1990 and was instituted every three years thereafter, but was postponed twice by Congress (1999 and 2011). Elections for barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials were also scheduled by law passed by Congress.

The synchronized elections can be blamed for the lack of a strong political party system in the country. Because elections are held every three (3) years, political party building cannot be considered a career in the country. Unlike in the United States and other countries which elections are not synchronized, political officers have a career and have something to do every now and then. It is also apparent that voter education takes place only a year before an election and stops after the election. Because of this there's a gap in electoral activities and stuns political maturity in the country.

III. Party system under the 1987 Constitution

The ratification of the 1987 Constitution instituted democratic elections through "a free and open party system... to evolve according to the free choice of the people..." as stated in Article IX-C, Section 6. This is a major pitch towards a multi-party system in the country. Prior to this, election laws and the electoral system seemed to have given preference to two major political parties and have ensured the perpetuation of the party in power (Bernas 2007, 200). In the succeeding elections after the ratification of the new Constitution, the country have seen that it is no longer a showdown between Nacionalista and Liberal Parties, nor a domination of the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL), but a contest among accredited political parties by the Commission on Elections.

Another "innovation" of the 1987 Constitution, which is still an "experiment" up to this writing, is the Party-List System. According to constitutionalist Fr. Joaquin Bernas, SJ, "the party-list system is a means to promote the multi-party system. (2007, 201)" The party-list is a method of proportional representation wherein parties are represented in the House of Representatives based on direct proportion to their votes. Article VI, Section 5 of the 1987 Constitution provided that, "...seats allocated to the 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." With these provision, it is interpreted that the party-list system if for representation of the marginalized sector of the society.

In the absence of an enabling law until 1995, when Republic Act No. (R.A. No.) 7491 or the “Party List System Act” was passed, the President appointed sectoral representatives as was the practice during the martial law years (Co et al. 2005, 7). In 1998 elections, it was all-systems go for the party-list elections, with R.A. No. 7491 providing the formula of proportional representation: parties who won 2% of the national vote given one seat, with additional seats determined by additional votes garnered, and with no party to exceed three seats. The formula was revised by the Supreme Court in various decisions, until they ruled that only the topnotcher shall get three seats in the House of Representatives.

Weak party system characterizes the Philippine political arena. Candidates easily change parties like jumping from one pond to another, compromising principles of one party. Political parties are for the candidates’ convenience. Candidates jump-ship to the party of the president after elections and transfer to the opposition if it does not meet their means anymore or to the trending “presidentiable.”

Unlike the European and American counterparts, parties do not have distinct ideologies from one another. Platforms are not crafted by the party organization but depend on the will of the principal candidate/s. Therefore, voters choose not according to parties but personalities. Parties no longer define the political agenda of voters during elections (Co et al. 2005, 84). Personality-based voting defeats the purpose of the party system.

In concept, the party list system encourages voters to vote for an agenda rather than personality. The agenda are honed and passed through the party-list leadership and sustained whoever the party nominates to the Congress. It is clear to the voters that they elect party-list that represents their aspirations and not the personalities behind it. That is in principle; but recently, old politics seem to have captured the party-list system when politicians who cannot win in the district elections formed their party-lists. These politicians eventually won the congressional seats that should have been for the marginalized sectors.

IV. Guns, goons and gold in the new democracy

“Peaceful” elections, in the truest sense of the word, seem only a dream in the Philippines. Since then, Philippine elections have been commonly marred by violence. Nothing seemed to have changed even after the restoration of democracy.

According to a 2004 study by Patino and Velasco, every election season since 1986, hundreds of violent incidents happen including around a hundred deaths every season form part of the statistics of ERVs (Co et al. 2005, 25). The areas where there are many instances of these ERVs are declared election hotspots and are placed under COMELEC control and are watched closely by the police.

In hotly-contested local elections, political clans arm themselves in order to gain control of a bailiwick or preserve their dominance (Coronel 2007, 80). Coronel (2007, 80) noted that in Isabela, for instance, the language of politics was force and political families put up private armies both to protect their logging empires and political power; Cavite politicians behaved like Mafia bosses to provide protection for illegal activities and eliminating rivals by gunning them

down; and in Muslim Mindanao, intermittent war meant an armed citizenry over whom dominant clans maintained their rule.

Prelude to the violence in 2010 elections, the country was shocked by the news of the worst ERV in history. The November 2009 Maguindanao massacre of more than 50 journalists and supporters of a gubernatorial candidate showed what a politician can do to take hold of political power and eliminate electoral competition. To this day, verdict to the perpetrators of this crime has yet to be served and this always happens in the quest for justice of victims of election-related violence.

Vote-buying is still alleged to be widespread and can take many forms (IFES 2004, 32). Votes can be “purchased” individually, per household, or community and “payment” takes different forms – it can be cash or other incentives – in order to vote or not vote certain candidates. This is ERV’s twin issue because in the end, those engaged in vote-buying resort to violence especially when their “investment” does not materialize. More often than not, it is the poor and the underprivileged that are vulnerable to these kinds of electoral fraud especially in the local level.

V. Modernizing Philippine Elections

Since the Marcos dictatorship put the electoral process in doubt because of the fraud committed which persisted even until the restoration of the democracy, with allegations of *dagdag-bawas* during the 1992 Presidential Elections, and with the availability of new technologies trending in electoral systems worldwide, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and electoral watchdogs sought to modernize the elections hoping that reducing human intervention increases the credibility of the electoral process. The Asian Development Bank in 2005 echoed that the Philippine electoral processes suffer from credibility problem (Carlos et al. 2007, 77). People do not trust COMELEC, which is why citizens groups have to watch it perform its duties.

The COMELEC, in its attempt to modernize, initially designed an Automated Election System after the 1992 polls, and was supposed to be implemented in three phases: 1) voter’s validation system; 2) automated count and canvass (as per R.A. No. 8436); and 3) electronic transmission, consolidation and dissemination of results.

The road to election modernization was not easy. In the Phase 1, election watchdogs cried foul over a lot of voters that were disenfranchised in the setting up of the Voters Registration and Identification System. In the procurement, a case was filed against the COMELEC because of scrapping of a deal with the service provider over lack of appropriations for the project. There has been shortage of equipment and other issues and problems arising from the distribution of computerized list of voters. Voters also complained of late delivery of their identification cards.

Procurement issues flawed the second phase of the election modernization which led to the Supreme Court’s nullification of the contract for the automated count and canvass of votes. By then, Phase II of the project had already put in almost a year’s worth of effort towards establishing the country’s first truly modern electoral system (Carlos 2007, 49). To date, the counting machines from this contract are still in a storage being rented out by the COMELEC.

Inevitably, Phase 3 did not materialize, and the supposed first-ever automated elections slated for 2004 did not happen.

Finally, a step forward for the automation of Philippine elections was made through a pilot run during the August 2008 Elections for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The COMELEC chose between direct record electronic (DRE) or optical mark reader (OMR) systems. This was conducted to plan for the next presidential elections in 2010. The COMELEC then decided to use OMR and adopted the precinct count optical scan (PCOS) technology of Smartmatic for the 2010 polls.

The 2010 Presidential Elections made a mark in the history of elections in the country as the first fully-automated elections which results commanded respect and credibility. For the first time in history, the nation knew by the end of the evening of the Election Day who is the duly-elected president of the country.

VI. Towards an issue-based electoral exercise

The 2010 elections saw the rise of reform-oriented civil society organizations participate in the polls. For them, a stake has to be made in order to effect change in the country's political system that has been rocked by scandals due to the incumbent president's cling to power. The "Hello Garci" scandal of 2004, the highest form of electoral fraud which took place in the Post-EDSA Philippine politics, served as a point of reckoning but various interest groups, however, failed to bring down the Arroyo administration. The 2010 poll was the perfect opportunity then to make a change in the country's politics by electing a leader who can represent best the aspirations of the people.

Since the election of another Aquino in the presidency in 2010, these citizen's groups seem to have renewed the vibrant civil society movement in the Philippines. Groups that campaigned for the president continued its engagement by taking on advocacies and issues to help governance work.

Even groups abroad campaigned for electoral participation of Filipinos in the diaspora. Their goal is to broaden the base of Filipino electorate who have concern for the country's progress and who can share the practices of other the governments in the country of their residence in delivering services to their people. Overseas Absentee Voting is an area of engagement of these concerned Global Filipinos to help their country politically.

The 2013 elections saw a more engaged citizenry taking stand on electoral issues like "epal" and political dynasty. Tackling issues like those enable voters to actively participate in campaigns to counter the mentality of political dynasty and epalism. The Anti-epal campaign has reached mainstream consciousness despite its humble beginnings. The said campaign gives the Filipinos a chance to be heard without fearing for their lives. The power of number has greatly influenced the outcome to foster positive effects. From the awareness to the activation of the campaign, the nation has been vigilant. In effect, the politicians have become conscious of their errors. Some have eventually changed their mentality while some remain obstinate.

The people have renewed their optimism for a clean political battle. Open discussion has been started in hopes of clarifying and remedying the controversial issue of political dynasty. People seek to define a political dynasty and eradicate politicians who have used their clan's credentials regardless of their inadequateness to serve the country. Not only do the Filipino people want to get rid of these politicians, but also to transform the Philippines for a better future.

D. Conclusion: A People So Committed to the Ways of Democracy

When the ballots were not heard, People Power in the streets was the last resort of a people so yearning of democracy after more than a decade of "Lutong Macoy" elections. But we also saw the dangerous implications of a People Power being used to unconstitutionally remove a popularly elected president (EDSA 2) which led to chaos and backlash of yet another People Power (EDSA 3) and ten years of a confused mandate of a presidency. We saw a repeat of some sectors of the COMELEC acting as a tool of the administration as evident to the leaked "Hello Garci" conversation made by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and COMELEC commissioner Virgilio Garcillano during the canvassing of votes in 2004 when she was up for re-election. The whole COMELEC had since been trying to regain its reputation showing more rigour in the implementation of campaign rules and abiding by the true spirit of the party-list law. Although there are more chances of cleaner elections today, "election operators" still operate and more so in the local scene, polls are marred by election related violence.

It used to be that voters were used as pawns to legitimize a dictatorship, today despite the flaws in the electoral system, voters had become agents of change, empowered more to monitor election conduct because of a free media and cyberspace. Even Filipinos outside the Philippines wanted to participate and with their votes counted and their voices heard are given renewed identification with our Inang Bayan. The young people's participation in the process is highlighted now more than ever. As the NAMFREL motto say, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

So hope is not lost for a better future for Philippine Elections. Which is not surprising. As President Cory Aquino said in her dramatic speech during the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress of 18 September 1986:

You saw a nation, armed with courage and integrity, stand fast by democracy against threats and corruption. You saw women poll watchers break out in tears as armed goons crashed the polling places to steal the ballots but, just the same, they tied themselves to the ballot boxes. You saw a people so committed to the ways of democracy that they were prepared to give their lives for its pale imitation (Aquino 1986).

When the US congressmen stood up and cheered Cory, they were not only cheering her, they were cheering the Filipino people.

To end, we also remember Rodrigo Ponce, a simple farmer from Mambusao, Capiz, who signed up to become a volunteer of NAMFREL and was watching the canvassing at the Bating

Elementary School during the 1986 Snap Elections. As the official Bantayog ng mga Bayani files related:

...a young woman and three armed men arrived and took possession of the ballots and other election paraphernalia. They wrapped them in a Philippine flag they had taken earlier from another school where they had also taken away the ballots. Shocked, the people in the room were not able to react at once. But Rodrigo recovered immediately and recognizing one of the four, pleaded with the man to leave them alone. "Anyway we know each other," he added. At this, the men told him to step out of the room, and at the school's porch, he was again commanded to lie prostrate, face down. A series of shots followed and stilled the protests of Ponce. An autopsy revealed six bullet holes fired from two different guns (Bantayog ng mga Bayani 1995, 13-14).⁶

We remember around fifteen NAMFREL volunteers who died in 1986 protecting the ballot (Lacaba 2000).

And we remember Filomena Tatlonghari, a 48-year old teacher and guidance counsellor of Talaga East Elementary School in Mabini, Batangas who, during the 1995 elections, she protected the ballots from armed men. She was shot and was killed.

They and many others did not sacrifice in vain, for in every election day in the Philippines the Filipinos still continue to queue to participate and watch the polls despite the inconveniences and imperfections of the system. Centuries of Filipino heroism and valor still runs in the veins of every voter.⁷

14 April 2013, Fairlane Subidivision, Tarlac City

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⁶ A romanticized version related by NAMFREL Chairman Jose Concepcion, who went to the funeral of Ponce said that when "There were counting the votes... suddenly three men went in with their guns and immediately he got the Philippine flags, wrapped the ballots and embraced it and he went to the door, and as he was there, he was shot four times." (Lacaba 2000)

⁷ For Mari Clare...

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