



WHAT (ELSE) CAN WE EXPECT IN THE 2022 ELECTIONS?

Just like how Christmas carols would start playing in the Philippines as soon as the “ber”-months begin, signs also abound everywhere when the national elections is coming.

Among others:



Electioneering gets more blatant, for example, multiple ads for “Run, _A_A, Run”; mushrooming “troll farms” in business to hoodwink public opinion;



The national budget gets bigger (Php 5 trillion proposed for 2022) and loaded with more pork and hotly disputed insertions;



Rivalries of politicians get louder and sharper, threatening and/or causing realignments and/or shattered “alliances” among and between factions of the ruling elite; and



The current president cooking up ways to save himself by holding on to power, including a possible run for vice-presidency;

Anyone can see that as the scheduled national elections approaches, the lame duck president Rodrigo Duterte has consistently shown his intention to maintain or grab power. Among others, “His overriding concern is to prevent the election of a new president that would allow his arrest and trial by the International Trial Court (ICC) for the grave human rights violations that he has committed,” said Jose Maria Sison, chief political consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NFP) peace panel.

Duterte is aping his idol, the deposed dictator Ferdinand Marcos, who executed a power grab through martial law and charter change. The latter mode is now blatantly being pushed by Duterte’s minions in Congress. Toward declaring martial law, Duterte plans to carry out false-flag operations to scapegoat the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and New People’s Army (NPA) and order mass arrest and mass murder of critics, oppositionists, and activists, said Sison, based on information shared by sources close to the national security cluster of the Duterte cabinet. He added that under Martial Law conditions or not, “Duterte also keeps in reserve the option of holding and rigging the 2022 elections to install a stooge as president and himself as vice-president.”

<https://cpp.ph/statements/crucial-months-of-decision-for-duterte/>

THE CARNIVAL OF PH ELECTIONS

Like a parody of Christmas, the Philippine elections also feature lots of jingles, posters, and messianic promises from candidates. For the festive atmosphere and hopeful promises the elections generate, it is highly anticipated. As such it is historically in campaigns for elections that reactionary candidates outdo each other promising populist oaths, singing and dancing, and engaging in dazzling gimmicks, and taking advantage of the culture of feudal patronage.

But in a neocolonial and semifeudal Philippine society, it has historically functioned more as a contest dishing out illusions of democracy by misrepresenting people’s interests. Here the contestants exclusively come from different factions of the ruling elite.

Elections in the Philippines is a venue for the ruling elite to settle peacefully their rivalries for political dominance and their share of spoils from a bankrupt economy.

To win, they must come out as the most “popular” enough to get the votes. Or, they must at least make it seem credible that they supposedly got the votes.

The coming 2022 elections is a continuation of that thread. But because the semifeudal, semicolonial crisis has gotten worse over time, even the illusions of democracy the election is supposed to generate are being torn and exposed by the contestants themselves. Engaged in a fierce conflict for the topmost posts, they make mistakes and fail to cover up their epic failures in meeting the demands and needs of the masses. Unable to placate the masses, they resort to deception (e.g., disinformation) and terror to quell people’s protests and opposition. Meanwhile, the fierce rivalry between competing factions hastens to expose each others’ corruption and wrongdoings.

The few candidates, who genuinely had programs for the people, certainly cut into the interests of landlords, compradors, and their imperialist masters and had to put up with being maneuvered out of their positions and popularity.

It had been so since the time six representatives of the Left-led Democratic Alliance in 1949 blocked the Bell Trade Act (a law granting parity rights to US capitalists to exploit and plunder Philippine resources). The said reps were charged with “electoral terrorism” and ousted from their posts.

Fast forward to present, the progressive partylist groups, other patriotic candidates, and even local politicians exhibiting sincere attitude toward the masses were targeted by each reactionary regime, especially during the Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and the Duterte regimes. Party list groups have also been used by the reactionaries as another venue to perpetuate their dynasties and misrepresent the poor majority.





ELECTIONS AND DYNASTIES

Every election, political dynasties come out in full force to fight for government positions. The same families exchange seats in government every election and bring up more members to higher posts. Despite the many times the voters expressed disgust at these dynasties and voted for those who promised to eradicate them, the political dynasties remain untouched.

Political dynasties were the logical offshoots of bureaucrat capitalism. Dynastic bureaucrat capitalists served as agents of local oligarchs and big bourgeois compradors. They aggrandized themselves by using their positions to corner the biggest loot and bribes and cuts from government contracts. They used their political capital to promote their family businesses or those of their relatives, friends, and allies as well as to gain favors from contractors, loan agencies, and foreign capitalists and banks.

The dominance of political dynasties in the electoral landscape showed how rotten the ruling political and economic system in the Philippines is. “It clearly reflects how those in power, big landlords, big bourgeois compradors and bureaucrat capitalists, perpetuate their dynasties through corruption, nepotism, and patronage,” said the CPP in a statement after Duterte’s SONA in 2020. Duterte continued to evade the calls to pass an Anti-Dynasty Bill. For years, the bill languished at the committee level in Congress.

Indeed, Duterte will not outlaw the political dynasties as he is the leader of his family’s dynasty. Although Duterte has allied with the Marcoses and the Arroyos, he has definitely advanced his dynasty. Duterte’s major streams of bureaucrat capitalist accumulation included his bogus war on drugs (which he used to eliminate or subdue rival drug syndicates); the emergency powers invoked for the Covid-19 pandemic which allowed him nearly P3 trillion of public funds spent without transparency and accounting; and, the billions of pesos in “intelligence” and “confidential” funds at his behest. These are on top of the usual bureaucrat capitalist loot from his position as president. He has accumulated wealth from bribes (secretly stashed in accounts of his cronies and reportedly in Chinese banks) using the national budget to consolidate his supermajority control of Congress.

<https://cpp.ph/2020/07/29/dutertes-most-favored-political-dynasties/>

FROM 3Gs TO 5Gs?

Guns, goons, and gold or the 3Gs have always been decisive factors in the outcome of reactionary elections in the Philippines. Politicians were known to maintain private armed groups who, aside from keeping their bosses safe from rival private armies, were also used to terrorize rivals and voters.

In his *Philstar* column dated July 2, 2021, Jarius Bondoc wrote that there are almost 4,000 private armies and more than a million loose firearms scattered all over the country. “The number of loose firearms could have risen to 2.1 million in 2020, International Alert-Philippines monitored,” he noted. These included assault rifles, machine pistols, and high-caliber handguns.

For his part, Duterte used “the military and police to intimidate, silence, and undermine support for his rivals and critics. Before and during the campaign, his clique has successively perpetrated the killing of numerous rival politicians. He openly used the courts, agencies, and local governments to brand progressive candidates and parties as “terrorists” in line with the “whole-of-nation” approach against “insurgency.” He spent billions of pesos of people’s money to flood the media with pro-administration lies and drown the voices of the opposition,” the CPP said after the results of the 2019 elections came out.

<https://cpp.ph/2019/05/21/shatter-the-illusion-of-democracy-under-dutertes-tyranny/>



Money talks in the Philippines elections. Thus, the political dynasties with the deepest war chest from present and previous loots win.

Duterte's 2016 presidential bid was backed by his now favoured oligarchs—the Floirendos and the Alcantaras of Davao, and Dennis Uy, among others. Based on his statement of contributions and expenditures (SOCE) submitted to the Commission on Elections (Comelec), Duterte spent more than Php 371 million.

Based on the record of expenditures, the 12 senatorial winners in the 2016 elections spent an average of Php 107 million.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/789763/duterte-spent-over-p371m-for-successful-campaign-binay-poured-p463m>

The expenses reported through the SOCE do not include money spent for campaigning earlier than the prescribed period by the COMELEC. The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) bared then senatorial candidate Bong Go spent more than Php 422 million for TV airtime alone from January 2018 to January 2019. During the same period, Imee Marcos spent a total of P413 million on ads.

Now, with advances in technology, one can say the 3Gs have “upgraded” to add vicious (troll) “games” and (electronic) “glitches” too. The explosion of “new media” and internet usage provided additional platforms for political dynasties to unleash their gimmickry and manufacture an image that voters ideally want to support.

In the past, it was buying out the media and using guns and goons to silence the rivals and the masses. Now, there are troll farms, artificial intelligence, and big data analysis that cater to people's wishes. The current regime can now paralyze and attack websites and vilify and red-tag those who belie their claims.



Nowadays, they turn the same problems of the Filipino masses into something like computer games with predictable heroes and anti-heroes. They present the candidates as the “heroes” spouting what the masses want to hear while cussing out or abusing their rivals and enemies. Rodrigo Duterte enjoyed such treatment from his troll farms that in the 2016 campaign, his image was severely dusted and made up. According to news reports, Duterte spent U\$200,000 or around Php 10 million for his troll farms in the 2016 presidential elections.

“Can you imagine a president elected by trolls?” Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate asked. Bayan Muna filed a resolution in June 2021 to investigate some ranking government officials who use public funds to establish internet troll farms all over the country for the 2022 elections. He warned that the next president could get elected through these troll farms by spreading misinformation, fake news, and outright lies on social media.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/07/24/1721044/duterte-camp-spent-200000-troll-army-oxford-study-finds>

<https://cpp.ph/statements/dutertes-weakening-regime-intensifies-social-media-psywar-kabataang-makabayan/>

<https://cpp.ph/2021/07/21/soldiers-and-employees-as-trolls/>

Starting in 2010, the Philippine elections’ vote-reading and vote-counting began to be automated.

The country’s “automated” poll system was every IT experts’ frustration as nearly every safeguard they tried to propose and incorporate into the system was removed, sabotaged, or hidden and kept out of their observation. The process of vote reading and counting has lost whatever transparency remained.

In the days of manual counting, the candidates and the voters could at least check if the names read out corresponded to what’s written on the ballots and if the votes were accurately counted and tallied. Under the automated polls, it has become a big “mystery.” The control is in the hands of a private and foreign-controlled firm, the officials of the Comelec, and the candidates with most 5Gs. Hence, the illusions of democracy the elections are supposed to distribute to the populace are torn asunder by the participating candidates themselves.

Duterte used the Comelec in the 2019 elections to “carry out massive cheating by hacking the results of the automated vote counting and tallying system. On Election Day, around 1,000 vote-counting machines malfunctioned and counting was delayed for seven hours. Voting for overseas Filipinos was also problematic. According to experts, the recent elections was the most unsuccessful so far, and the most dangerous in history.”

<https://cpp.ph/2019/05/21/shatter-the-illusion-of-democracy-under-dutertes-tyranny/>

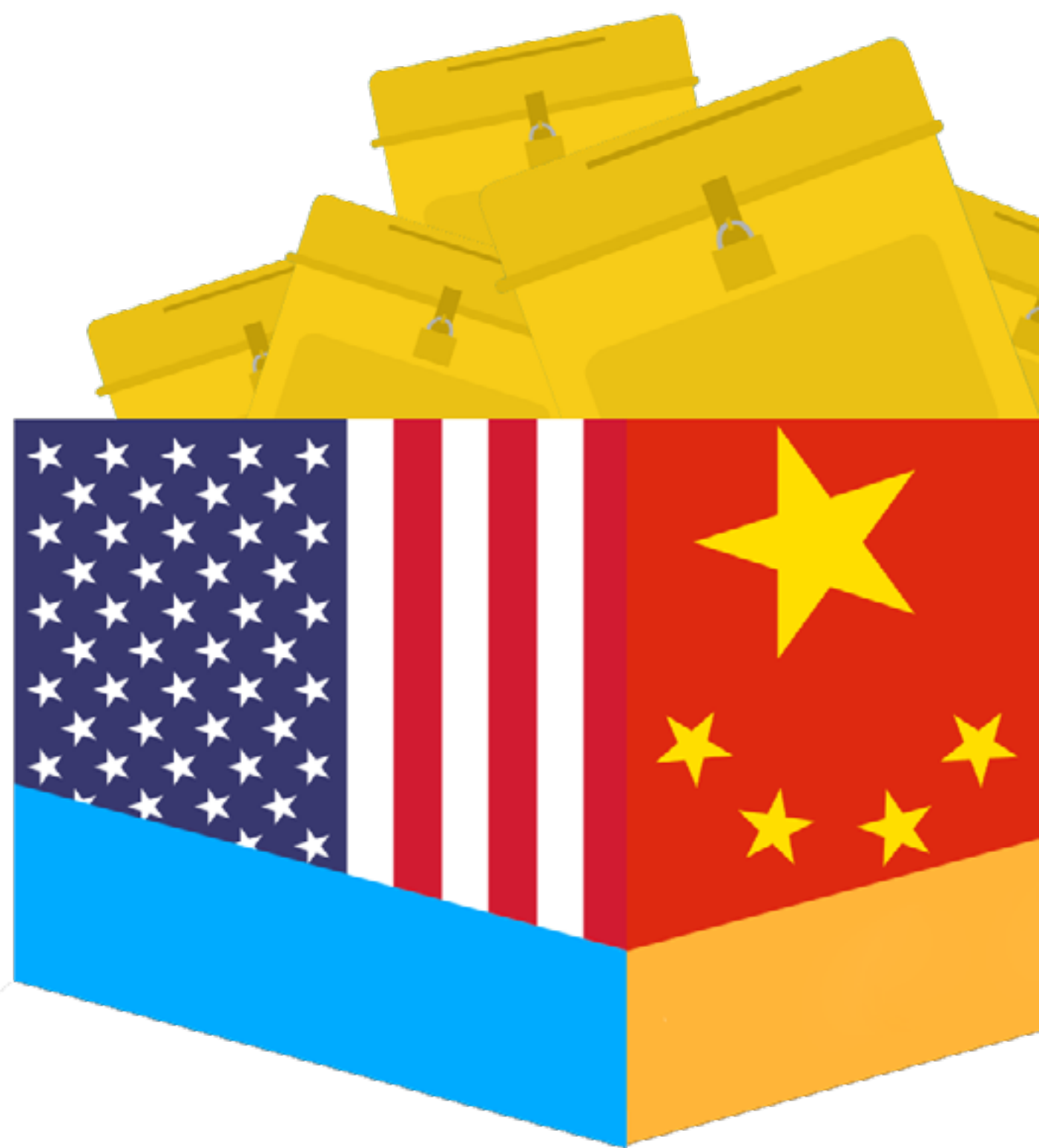
FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

US imperialism instituted reactionary elections in the Philippines to legitimize its continued dominance over the political, economic, and socio-cultural affairs of the country. Through the years, elections ensured the joint class dictatorship of its most avid allies—the landlords and the comprador bourgeoisie. For the US, it is historically not so much as simply interfering. The Philippine electoral process is itself a by-product of American occupation. The US “tutelage in the democratic way of life” entrenched leaders loyal to US imperialism.

It is expected that the US will, as usual, take an active stance “interfering” in the national elections. The Philippines remains the most loyal ally of the US in Asia. And the US will not slack off in lending support to its most favored puppets, in the name of “upholding the rule of law,” various paeans to “democracy” and long-time alliance, and countering “terrorism.”

Recently, the US approved the sale and dispatch of war materiel to the Philippines despite protests from human rights advocates.

But US hegemony is threatened. The Philippines as the US’ neocolony is also being encroached upon by China, its biggest rival. Duterte has served both the US imperialist and China, with the US still the most decisive given the military aid and economic treaties the US has with the Philippines. But until now, Duterte could not parry accusations that China helped him win the 2016 presidential elections.



MEANINGFUL AND SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE

Historically, reactionary elections proved to be mere exercises where the masses got the chance to choose among the factions of the ruling class will oppress and exploit them. And even this chance has, through the years, been trampled upon by the most blatant of competing factions. There used to be ballot switching; now there is automated cheating and electronic “glitches.”

The revolutionary forces firmly believe the masses can only achieve genuine change through the national democratic revolution.

All over the country, revolutionary mass organizations and organs of political power have been established. They are the masses’ expression of unity and their real source of power and strength to achieve a just and progressive society, truly representative of their interests.

As a matter of principle, the revolutionary movement does not participate in the reactionary elections. It remains active however during this time as it acquires gains for the masses and the revolution. As contradictions between the different factions of the ruling classes exacerbate, the revolutionary movement is able to broaden the reach of the national democratic revolution.

In an interview, Jose Maria Sison explained, “It is a given fact that the revolutionary forces (CPP, NPA and NDFP) are prohibited from participating in the elections staged by the ruling system. But they can clarify and disseminate to the people why it is wrong to vote for the parties and candidates that support the tyrannical, treasonous, mass murdering, plundering and swindling crimes of the Duterte regime.”

<https://cpp.ph/statements/in-anticipation-of-the-may-13-elections/>

For the 2022 elections, Prof. Sison reiterated the need for all patriotic and progressive forces to unite to fight and frustrate “whatever scheme Duterte chooses to implement in order to prolong himself in power” and to end his “traitorous, tyrannical, terrorist, genocidal, plundering and mendacious” regime. **LIB**

