

Brief Description of the Current Philippine Situation - III - Three Days Before the Elections

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The Context

The most bitterly contested presidential and vice presidential elections in the country's recent history is approaching its endgame. The campaign period (60 days for national and 45 days for local candidates) will come to a close in two days time but there seems to be no stopping for opposing camps in the presidential and vice presidential candidates on hitting each other harder by an hour.

The vicious attacks have been concentrated on Mayor Rodrigo Duterte by all presidential candidates after the latest and the final pre-election survey came out which showed Duterte having a two digit lead from all the rest of the presidential candidates. Duterte's opponents, especially the camp of the administration's endorsed candidate seems to be in a panic mode. The latter has been building up its political propaganda advertising to create a picture of Mar Roxas (administration's candidate) rising up in the surveys. It could be recalled that since he was formally endorsed by President Noy Aquino as administration candidate for the presidency, he had ranked consistently on the fourth (out of five candidates). Since last week, he got the second highest rating in the poll surveys. He has overtaken Vice President Jojo Binay and became statistically tied with Senator Grace Poe. Mar Roxas' camp has tried to present a situation where those undecided voters (around 20% of the registered voters) have opted to choose for Mar Roxas.

But with three days more before elections it is almost impossible for Roxas to overtake Duterte at least if one base it on survey results.

The President himself has called on other candidates, especially Senator Grace Poe to join rank with Roxas to ensure the defeat of Duterte. The administration through the President has insinuated to the Senator to give way to Roxas, which the former has politely rejected. Meanwhile, all issues thrown by Senator Trillanes- an independent vice presidential candidate-against Duterte seem not to affect the mayor but instead it has promoted him all the more-as shown in the surveys. The issues raised by Trillanes and his principals on Duterte's various undeclared bank accounts and unreported properties have not seriously affected the Mayor. Trillanes thought that Duterte's connection with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA) would bring down the survey ratings of Duterte but the opposite result happened. Trillanes last resort is to bring his accusations to the Ombudsman to stop the candidacy of Mayor Duterte but time has run out on his favor. His (Trillanes) demolition job seemed to be effective only on Vice President Binay and his family because he did have the luxury of time.

The other day, Trillanes has paid a political advertisement using children to strike down Duterte on killings in Davao City by the Davao Death Squad and the non-declaration in his bank accounts and 40 properties by the mayor. People have reacted on these negative advertisements using children. Senator Allan Cayetano-Duterte's vice presidential candidate has filed a temporary restraining order (TRO) in the court to stop the airing of the said advertisement.

Duterte has a unique situation because his rise seems to be dependent on the continuous failure of the administration to solve the day-to-day issues and problems of the country. The peoples' desperation over the inaction of the administration has pushed up Duterte's popularity with his promised of swift action and alternative program.

So, the Roxas rising endgame strategy of the administration cannot be applied to Duterte because base on the people's perception that if election is held today it will be Duterte who will easily be the President of the country. Such situation has created a massive bandwagon effect. For the first time one can see that in the province and the municipal levels, the opposition and administration candidates are united to support and vote for Duterte. For those areas run by political dynasties they family members have to divide among themselves to vote for the administration because the campaign funds of the ruling party but other members of the dynasty are supporting Duterte.

Even in the administration senatorial candidates, one can notice that some of them have overtly expressed support to Duterte as shown in their posters.

Again as mentioned in the earlier series, the popularity in people's perception cannot be automatically translated into votes. In a very close race to the Presidency, machineries and logistical resources are indispensable.

Meanwhile, this period of the electoral campaign is called as the dangerously decisive hour. It is during this time that candidates and their supporters can be seen having house to house visits. This is one of those few times when the politicians will be generous to the voters with their money and material resources like food and medicines. In return those who received this generous gifts will give assurance that they (voters) will give their votes for these politicians, This will also be the time when the local lenders (the actual power behind the economic and political lives) of the local and rural areas will have their heydays. Politicians with fewer resources or those who have ensured their victory through vote-buying methods have to borrow money from the local lenders with exuberant interests. These lenders/usurers will be the ones to practically control albeit informally the political and economic affairs of the city or of the municipalities. The Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) of the province or municipality have already been used as collateral by the governor or the mayor to get their urgent loans in a decisive hours like this time. These lenders will surely have influenced over these politicians and the whole electoral process.

Possible Scenario

As the endgame of the campaign is fast approaching, several sectors of the society have raised situations, which the concerned voters have to consider.

Aside from vote buying, there are signs that the poll fraud will be done especially by those who are desperate to win and those who have resources.

As the country will again use the automatic election system in which the votes will be counted by the votes counting machines (VCMs), there are two possibilities where fraud can happen. The first is during the voting using the secured digital (SD) cards and human intervention can manipulate the

votes and the second is during transmission, which can be delayed to give way for human intervention to happen.

The first type of fraud is putting data to the SD cards of the voter's personal data. These data most likely may have come from the COMELEC database, which was hacked several weeks ago. The politicians can buy these cards with voters' data and pictures to get votes during Election Day. There are already news that the buying of SD cards is happening in the province of Pangasinan. The best way to counter this kind of fraud is to check the voters receipt if it indeed reflect the candidates one has voted upon. The total votes receipts in local precincts can also be used to counter check the votes in the said precinct levels.

In the second type of fraud, there will be delays in the transmission of the results of the canvassing. It will be during the delays that identical VCMs will transmit another or different sets of results of the canvassing. The COMELEC Resolution 10103 which says that the Board of Canvassers (BOC) cannot transmit the results of the canvassing until those from the main SD cards have been imported. This means delays of the proclamation of the winning candidates from the local to the national levels. This also means that parallel transmission of fake or doctored canvassing results can be possible to replace the authentic and genuine canvassing results. In this case, one should be vigilant and watch the printed election returns to compare the latter to the results received in the different precinct levels.

This scenario has been boasted by the sudden change of VCM technicians few days ago. Accordingly, the technicians' contracts have ended and therefore they are replaced by a new set of technicians. Still earlier on, some executives in the national printing office (NPO) were eased out from the said office because there were overprinting of the number of ballots needed for the May 9, 2016 elections. Up to this day, these extra copies could not be located.

With a very tight Presidential race and where the front runner is Duterte who has promised to use iron hand to solve the problems of criminalities, drugs and lawlessness in the country when he is elected as president, the other candidates led by the administration standard bearer have advocated to use all means to stop a Duterte's presidency. This election crusade does not exclude the use of fraud and terrorism.

The President himself in the last campaign sorties of the administration and its candidates had been heard giving warning that the dictatorial government and the dark days similar to martial law period will be back in the country if Mayor Duterte and Senator Bongbong Marcos are elected to the presidency and vice-presidency respectively. President Noy Aquino and the standard bearer Mar Roxas have defined the election race as the battle between light and darkness, between decency and barbarism and between good and evil forces. And they are calling all the other candidates and the voters in general to rally behind them against the victory of the forces of darkness and evil. This means that Grace Poe will give up in favor of Mar Roxas for the presidency. The former has already rejected this offer.

Some are thinking that this kind of last campaign call is part of built up activities to prepare the people for a scenario of cheating the elections. It is as if this undemocratic action is justified to save the country's democracy. It is a desperate manifestation of Mar Roxas to attain victory win through cheating.

But a few concerned citizens are worried as the unfolding of events towards the attainment of victory by the administration's standard-bearer. Duterte's followers and sympathizers have expressed their willingness to launch people's uprising to thwart this administration's efforts. For these citizens (Duterte's followers) the only way that Duterte will be defeated is through fraud and

terrorism. And they are more than willing to stop such actions.

Pastor Apollo Quiboloy, a Davao-based religious sect and a close friend and supporter of Mayor Duterte has already expressed his willingness to lead a revolution in support and for the defense of Duterte's victory. Jose Maria Sison, the Utrecht Netherland-based founding chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has similarly expressed their party's support to stop the cheating on Duterte. This is a very unique phenomenon where the extreme right like Quiboloy and the extreme left led by Sison will join forces to defend a presidential candidate.

If this expression for support for Duterte will serve as deterrent to the programmed massive cheating in the coming elections no body cannot be so sure. But one thing is so sure though that the administration of President Aquino will not easily give up their power and their seemingly one sided determination to win by all means.

By such scenario, instability in the country is just the least that one can expect. People should prepare and struggle that the worst will not happen. After all, six years had been too long for the majority of the people in the country to suffer and to add another six years will already be too much. A change in leadership is a necessary demand.

Electing a Minority President

If indeed voters can cast their votes on Election Day, then all signs are pointing to having a minority president in the country. This conclusion is mainly based on the series of pre-election surveys where the winning presidential candidate can get between 25 to 35percent. If the turn out of the registered voters will be at the maximum 80 percent of 54 million voters then the winning candidates will be getting less than 20 million votes.

The elections have seriously divided the country and its people and it will be additional uphill battles for the newly elected president to unite the country once again. The politics of vindictiveness will surely not a good start for the six years governance of the new administration. And it will not be healthy either to have a continuation of the current regime.

On the other hand, one should not exclude the threats thrown in by Senator Antonio Trillanes to lead the impeachment process when a president he feared most will win. He (Trillanes) gave a warning of coup d' tat if the forces of evil and darkness will triumph.

But one should not only focus on the possibility of Duterte's presidency. As mentioned earlier, this kind of neck-to-neck presidential contest the one with effective and reliable machineries will have a big comparative advantage over the others. Resources both materials and financial will definitely tilt the balance in favor with the one with more of them.

Currently, these descriptions can be applied to the administration's camp with their "Daang Matuwid" (Straight Path Coalition) whose machineries are found in all levels notwithstanding the jumping of ships of some leaders in several areas.

The other camp with almost similar machineries is the Binay's camp- United Nationalist Alliance (UNA), which has party organizations from the municipal to the national levels. The other camps like Duterte, Poe and Santiago have set up skeletal machineries and organizations and have thousands of volunteers but they have less capacities in ensuring that their millions of votes should really be counted on the actual voting day. UNA is considered as the principal opposition and therefore has the right to have watchers and can receive the extra copy of the election returns at precinct level.

Duterte and Poe can be very popular but such popularity cannot automatically be translated into actual votes. And this is a big gap between people's perception in pre-election surveys and the actual election votes of the next leaders of the country

Raymund de Silva, May 6, 2016

(Third of the Four Series - The last one will be written after the elections)
