

Philippines midterm election: 'one of the dirtiest in decades'

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The May 13 Philippines midterm election has been marred by accusations ranging from a lack of transparency, to electoral fraud, vote rigging and vote buying.

Lengthy delays in results being released were blamed on "technical glitches" by authorities. Opposition candidates and parties have refused to accept the results and are calling for the Philippines electoral commission (COMELEC) to be replaced by an independent body.

Nationwide protests have been called for May 17.

Responding to the results, Partido Lakas Ng Masa (Party of the Labouring Masses, PLM) Senate candidate, Jose Pedrosa, wrote: "Consider these: [there were] 1000 defective secure digital (SD) cards; 1333 defective vote counting machines (VCM); a seven-hour delay in the transmission [of results] to the transparency servers; massive vote-buying; [and] organised PNP (Philippines National Police)/Military-conducted black propaganda. The word for all these is FRAUD."

PLM activists are shocked at their results. PLM ran a major unity campaign on a ticket including labour activists, with support from the Laban Ng Masa coalition, made up of trade unionists, community activists, urban poor organisations, feminists and socialists opposing the authoritarian and violent policies of President Rodrigo Duterte.

"If they are moving Heaven and Earth to disenfranchise us and block us from the seats of power, let us reclaim power from the streets, from our communities, from our schools, from our factories," wrote Pedrosa, "They can cheat us but they can never defeat us."

Edwin Gariguez, the Executive Secretary of NASSA/Caritas Philippines said: "We are calling to suspend the proclamation of winning senatorial candidates until the issue of fraud is resolved. We demand an independent and impartial investigation of the alleged fraud and manipulation of automated canvassing by COMELEC and Smartmatic! There should be no proclamation until the fraud tainted results are validated."

The PLM is calling for the dissolution of the COMELEC, and its replacement with a commission "that is genuinely independent, transparent, and accountable to the people, not to the President" and which has "representatives from the grassroots people's organisations, and not from the elite".

University of the Philippines (UP) students, led by UP Rises against Tyranny, held a protest action on May 14 to condemn the election anomalies and fraud.

Youth Act Now Against Tyranny released this statement: "All mock elections in universities saw the opposition win ... the COMELEC has a lot of explaining to do. From pre-election to the conduct of the election to the counting, COMELEC performance had been [found] wanting, to say the least."

Police attempted to prevent youth organisations protesting the irregularities in the election on May 14 from marching on the COMELEC office in Manila.

PLM Chair, Sonny Melencio said on May 14, "I am reminded of the cheating in the 1978 Batasan [House of Representative] elections, during the time of the [Ferdinand] Marcos dictatorship. It was also a zero vote for the Laban [Lakas ng Bayan — People's Power] opposition against the KBL [New Society Movement — the party founded by Marcos] slate, led by the dictator's wife Imelda Marcos.

"The Laban opposition called for a protest rally against the cheating but it was dispersed after a few of its personalities were arrested by the police while still gathering in a Manila park.

"We will explore ways to build a broad opposition to the election results."

The PLM said the election outcome "reveals the systematic obstacle that has long been laid against the poor and against all progressive candidates".

The PLM condemned COMELEC for its involvement in electoral fraud, including the "Hello, Garci" scandal in 2004, when wiretapped conversations apparently revealed discussions about vote rigging between a woman presumed to be former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and a man presumed to be former COMELEC commissioner, Virgilio Garcillano.

According to Melencio, Duterte has admitted that vote-buying in Philippines elections is "normal". If so, Melencio said the PLM holds the government and the COMELEC responsible for not executing fair and honest elections.

"In many places," according to Melencio, "we witnessed the long queue of people waiting for gifts and payments from the trapo (traditional politicians)," because many people are economically desperate.

"They are the easy victims of trapo vote-buying during an election.

"We also do not understand reports that PLM only received 28,000 votes. Benjo Basas, our number one candidate, has won at least 200,000 votes in the past two elections.

"We ran an amazing campaign for three months in the midst of difficult circumstances. Now they want to demobilise our base, but we will not allow it.

"We have learnt a lot of lessons during the campaign.

"We need to bring on many more fights to enable the marginalised sectors to fight back. We must abolish the system of contractualisation of workers. We cannot rely on the government and elites to do this for us. A strike movement is needed and actions to stop production and force the bosses to make workers permanent.

"For the urban poor, there needs to be a fight for the right to occupy land on which they have lived for many years and to decent housing with electricity and water.

"In the countryside, there must be implementation of agrarian reform.

"We ran in the elections for the simple reason that the people participate in them, and we want to get a hearing from them, to present our views and platform on many issues. We want to understand the situation faced by people and to struggle with them around their demands."

Mainstream opposition figures, despite having been wiped out of the senate in this fraudulent election landslide, are saying that the people have spoken, but the PLM will not accept the results and is calling on people to mobilise on May 17.

Susan Price

The Movement against Tyranny released the following statement:

Hold Duterte regime accountable for dirtiest elections in decades

The Duterte regime cannot claim the May 2019 election has given it “a mandate” to push through with a program that seeks to cement the growing tyranny of the last three years.

What it really means is, that after marshaling, often illegally, the full force of state resources and might to place its robots into the Senate, it will now ram its unjust, deadly goals down the maw of the nation.

The May 2019 polls will go down in history as one of the dirtiest in several decades.

Duterte gave his minions free rein to use state funds and bureaucracies, to claim credit for programs already in place. Bong Go, in particular, was allowed to falsely “own” various health, housing and disaster programs.

State agencies, including state security forces, were harnessed to attack the opposition, whether progressives or more traditional political parties. These happened on the government communications platforms, on social media and on-ground, where candidates and supporters were killed to cast a landscape of fear.

In Negros, there were massacres and targeted killings of progressives, like Escalante councilor Toto Patigas. From northern Luzon to Mindanao, the Armed Forces and the Philippine National Police illegally engaged in partisan politics, right up to the day of elections, using taxpayers’ monies.

Malacanang and Duterte himself intervened to tar the opposition and critical media in a series of totally baseless matrices. Duterte also displayed his total contempt for the law by publicly providing justification for vote buying even while cops pretended to crack down on the practice.

All these culminated in a series of “problems” during elections:

The malfunctioning of almost a thousand vote counting machines meant delays; many were disenfranchised or forced to hand-in votes with no guarantee that these would be properly counted;

The defective SD cards also cast doubt on the integrity of the precinct vote counts transmitted to canvassing centers;

Worse, the transparency servers so crucial to establishing the integrity of vote count conked out for seven hours, followed by a sudden jump of displayed votes safely out of scrutiny. That the Commission on Elections decreed a smaller party under Duterte coalition as “minority party” only added to the secrecy.

There was widespread fraud and corruption, and abuse of authority in the entire elections season and even before the official start of the campaign season. There is no mandate. Certainly, not for the main goals of the regime.

In fact, over the last three years, Filipinos have been very clear about repudiating its key policies.

Filipinos have demanded a halt to extra-judicial killings that have orphaned tens of thousands of children. They have told the state to stop abuses linked to its doubtful drug war.

Filipinos have sent word to government that they do not want the Philippines acting like a vassal of China.

And overwhelmingly, they have made their stand against charter change clear.

The Duterte regime blanketed the elections with corruption and illegal use of force to ensure that a tame, servile Senate marches to its dictates.

It will discover just how weak its “mandate” is with a sea of protests against electoral fraud. It will see how mistaken it is about this “mandate” when Filipinos rise up against a constitutional change that would allow the theft of our lands and waters and the snuffing out of civil rights.

P.S.

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<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/philippines-election-dirtiest-decades>