

Noynoy Aquino wins Philippine presidency

Joseph Santolan
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With the automated vote counting nearly completed, Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III is projected to win the Philippine election by a landslide. The one-term senator and scion of the Cojuangco dynasty will enter office facing a 4.358 trillion peso national debt (\$US96.8 billion).

Fears of “election failure,” a nebulous and loosely defined term, had dominated political discussions for months. The ruling elites longed for, and were organically incapable of ensuring, a stable transition that gave the stamp of legitimacy to the winner. With the clear victory of Aquino and the swift electronic transmission of election results, they heaved a collective sigh of relief. The Philippine stock market rebounded and the peso regained lost ground against the US dollar.

Election day was swelteringly hot. Voters stood in the sun in line for up to five hours in order to vote. Each precinct had a limited number of the newly installed ballot scanners. The ballots themselves were unwieldy and poorly designed.

What kept voters in line? The outgoing Arroyo administration is possibly the most hated in Philippine history. A vote in the elections was seen as a vote ousting Arroyo. For ordinary Filipinos, the term “election failure” meant the continuation of the despised current presidency.

The automation of elections dramatically reduced the opportunities for corrupt local politicians to engage in their usual practices of electoral fraud through ballot box stuffing or theft. Election violence and vote buying increased as a result. Gun battles occurred on the southern island of Mindanao. There were 82 instances of recorded election violence this election, with 27 people killed. This figure excludes the 57 who were killed in the Maguindanao massacre last November. Local politicians routinely purchased votes throughout the Philippines. Several hundred pesos on average would be offered to an

individual in exchange for their vote, or to place indelible ink on their forefinger—the mark of having already voted—thus ensuring that they could not vote for a rival.

Throughout the campaign period, the race for president was seen as a competition between Aquino and Manny Villar, real estate billionaire and long-time senator. Ousted former President Joseph Estrada pulled off an upset by dramatically gaining a large portion of the lower class vote and coming in second with nearly twice the vote that Villar received. Estrada’s populism continues to have a mass appeal, while Villar’s attempts to depict himself as one of the poor, and as champion of their cause, wore thin over the course of his campaign. By election day, he was seen for the corrupt politician and land-grabbing elite that he is.

The president and vice-president are elected separately in the Philippines, though they run on the same ticket. In a last minute surge, Estrada’s running mate Jejomar Binay surged ahead of Aquino’s VP, Mar Roxas. It appears that he will win the vice presidency. Binay is the former mayor of Makati, the main business district of the Philippines. His surge came after receiving the backing of Chiz Escudero, a charismatic senator who is relatively new in Philippine politics but whose family has been a political dynasty for generations.

Members of the Marcos family won each of the races they joined. Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, son of the former dictator, won a seat in the Philippine senate. His sister, Imee, defeated her first cousin to become a governor, and Imelda Marcos, decrepit but as avaricious as ever, won a congressional seat.

The 12 available senate seats all went to *trapos*, which is Tagalog for “dirty rag” and short for traditional politician. Their names are names that have circulated in Philippine politics for generations: Estrada, Revilla, Marcos, Enrile. The oligarchs have bought themselves yet

another term in office. Neither Satur Ocampo nor Lisa Maza, members of the Maoist front organization Bayan Muna, came close to winning a seat in the senate.

Outgoing president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo won a congressional seat from her home province of Pampanga. She ran against an unknown candidate and won the seat easily. Her entering congress is seen as the prelude to a bid for speaker of the house. Votes are still being tallied but her party stands to do well in congressional elections and should it obtain a majority of the house would elect her the next speaker.

Arroyo's run for congress was widely seen as an attempt to avoid prosecution by the incoming administration for corruption, the rigging of government contracts, electoral fraud in the 2004 elections, and the use of military violence to silence opponents.

Noynoy Aquino was politically unknown prior up to last year. He is a member of the wealthy landed Cojuangco dynasty. His family owns the massive estate, Hacienda Luisita, a sugar plantation built upon the horrific exploitation of agricultural wage workers. The failure to reform the family's sugar holdings has plagued Aquino's political life. Aquino was an economics graduate from the elite Philippine university Ateneo de Manila.

Aquino served three forgettable terms as a congressman from Tarlac, from 1998 to 2007. During that time he filed 21 bills, none of which became law. Unable to run again for congress because of term limits, he ran for the senate in 2007. He was faring poorly until his mother, former President Corazon Aquino, launched a TV ad upon his behalf. She announced that if he engaged in corruption, "lagot siya sa nanay niya," a patronizing colloquial expression meaning that he, like a little child, would get in trouble with his mom. He surged in the ratings upon her endorsement and placed sixth out of twelve in the senatorial elections.

He had served less than half his term as senator when he was drafted by Liberal Party, upon the back of the mass outpouring of grief over the death of Cory Aquino, to be their candidate for president. He had accomplished as little as a senator as he had as a congressman.

Aquino ran his presidential campaign as a fight against corruption, under the slogan "If there were no corrupt,

there would be no poor." This was an attempt by Noynoy to identify with the perceived legacies of his parents, Ninoy and Cory Aquino. There is more to this campaign slogan however.

As Aquino enters office, the Philippines has a national debt of more than 4 billion pesos. The demands of international finance capital are already being declared. The International Monetary Fund is calling on Aquino to raise the Value Added Tax from 12 to 15 percent and cut corporate income tax from 30 to 21 percent. The financial elite is also demanding the slashing of any remaining government social spending. Aquino's platform of fighting corruption will easily be transformed into a program of cutting education and health spending from the budget entirely. Aquino has already proposed a program of vouchers to replace public education spending.

Under the Aquino administration, the Filipino worker should expect to see an increase in taxes, as the government attempts to meet its debt obligations to international finance capital through increased exploitation of the working class, and an assault on what little social spending survived the Arroyo presidency. Aquino's response to protests and resistance by working people will be just as ruthless as that of Arroyo and previous presidents, including his mother.



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