

The Impact of Automation on Elections

Case Study of the May 2010 Philippine Presidential Contests

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ABSTRACT

The unprecedented synchronized automated elections of May 2010 in the Philippines saw how results of presidential elections could be obtained nearly overnight. Such nation-wide occurrences dramatically altered the mode in which Philippine elections had always been propagated: Typified by arduous and oftentimes onerous delays in the publication of results stretching all the way to several months after the day of the elections. This inquiry explores the implications of this change to prevailing theories and practices of election reforms. More importantly, it critiques the premise that the automation of elections curbs corruption and that it generates authentic political competition. Using data obtained from last May 2010 synchronized automated elections, this inquiry proposes several analytical models in understanding the interplay of election reforms and corruption in determining electoral outcomes.

Keywords: electoral fraud, automated elections, corruption, Philippines, patron-client

Scholars and practitioners of Philippine anti-corruption have often cited the automation of elections as an effective means to curb corruption (Angeles, 1999; Johnston, 2010). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Philippine government in its governance assessment reports have advocated for election reforms, a vital component of which was automation (Asian Development Bank, 2005; National Economic Development Authority, 2009). The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in its 2009 Philippine Electoral Reform stated that “automation is seen by many in the Philippines as a cure-all for the election woes of the country and its failure would have wide-reaching consequences” (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2009, p. 15) underscoring the vital importance of this reform initiative. The same IFES report indicated that part of the reform project was geared towards exposing key

election stakeholders to best practices of “Free and Fair” elections. The Asia Foundation also identified that one of its key development programs is countering corruption and one of the specific strategies it pursues is helping establish “Free and Fair elections” (The Asia Foundation, 2011, p. 1). These international and multilateral agencies pursuing anti-corruption efforts in the Philippines have built their reform agenda on the pillars of ensuring that elections are free (defined as voters having “the opportunity to participate in the election without coercion or restriction of any kind”) and fair (“a level playing ground for all candidates”) (Elklit & Svensson, 1997, p. 35). Using data obtained from the last May 2010 synchronized automated election, this exploratory inquiry critiques the premise that automation of elections in the Philippines promotes the conduct of electoral exercises that are free (voters are not restricted or coerced by corrupt means) and fair (a situation where candidates face a level playing field allowing for political competition). The article contends that normative notions of free and fair elections may be inadequate in capturing the nuances of the Philippine context. This exploratory inquiry proposes several analytical models in understanding the interplay of elections and reforms within a context of systemic corruption.¹

Philippine Elections: Historical Context

Three months before obtaining independence from the United States, the first ever elections for the positions of President, Vice-President, the members of the Senate, Members of the House of Representatives and Local Officials in the Philippine archipelago were successfully accomplished on April 23, 1946, by virtue of Commonwealth Act No. 72 (Commission on Elections Law Department, 2010). During that historic electoral exercise, the President-elect was Manuel Roxas from the Liberal wing of the *Nacionalista* Party² who garnered almost 55 percent of the votes cast. The Vice-President-elect during the 1946 election was Elpidio Quirino – Roxas’s running mate and also from the Liberal wing of the *Nacionalista* Party – who garnered 52 percent of the votes cast (Commission on Elections, 2010).

More than 50 years later in present day Philippines, specifically on May 10, 2010, history seemed to have been repeated: a synchronized election for the positions of President, Vice-President, Members of the Senate, House of Representatives, and Local Officials was completed once again. The President-elect, Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino, III – the 15th President of the Republic of the Philippines is a member of the Liberal

Table 1.
Final Results for the Position of President, May 2010 Philippine Elections

Candidate	Party affiliation	Votes	%
AQUINO, Benigno Simeon III C.	Dominant Minority (Liberal Party)	15,208,678	42.08
ESTRADA EJERCITO, Joseph M.	Accredited Party (<i>Partido ng Masang Pilipino</i> -PMP)	9,487,837	26.25
VILLAR, Manuel Jr B.	Accredited Party (<i>Nacionalista Party</i> -NP)	5,573,835	15.42
TEODORO, Gilberto Jr C.	Dominant Majority (LAKAS-KAMPI)	4,095,839	11.33
VILLANUEVA, Eduardo C.	Others (<i>Bangon Pilipinas Party</i>)	1,125,878	3.12
GORDON, Richard J.	Others (<i>Bagumbayan</i>)	501,727	1.39
PERLAS, Jesus Nicanor P.	Independent	54,575	0.15
MADRIGAL, Jamby A.	Independent	46,489	0.13
DE LOS AUTHOR, John Carlos G.	Others (<i>Ang Kapatiran</i>)	44,244	0.12
ACOSTA, Vetellano S.	Accredited Party (<i>Kilusang Bagong Lipunan</i> -KBL)	181,985	0.50

Source: Philippine Commission on Elections (2010).

Party. Similar to the first President of the Republic, PNoy³ – as he prefers to be called – also garnered an overwhelming share of the votes cast. But this is where the similarities end. The elections held on April 23, 1946, was manual and consisted of a registered voting population of roughly 2.9 million with three candidates running for President and Vice-President, respectively. The May 10, 2010, election was automated⁴ and consisted of a registered voting population of about 51 million with nine candidates⁵ running for President and Vice-President, respectively. Table 1 provides a summary of the voting performance of candidates in the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines.

Another stark difference between the first elections held in the Philippines after independence and the most recent May 2010 automated elections has to do with the presence of what has been considered as one of the greatest malaise of contemporary Philippine society: corruption. Indeed, in a society that suffers acute resource limitations, widespread corruption mediates the implementation of key policies of the nation. Recognizing how debilitating corruption can be in pursuing the democratic exercise of elections, reforms have been promulgated and implemented to try to address this malaise.

This inquiry addresses the issues and challenges that have arisen as a result of nationwide electoral change in the form of synchronized automated elections in a Philippine context described as suffering from

systemic corruption. Lauded as a success, the May 2010 synchronized automated elections purportedly heralded a watershed in electoral processes and practices for one of the most vibrant Asian democracies. Almost unexpectedly, results of local (congressional) and national (senatorial, vice-president and presidential) elections could be obtained nearly overnight. Such nation wide occurrences during the May 2010 automated elections dramatically altered the mode in which Philippine elections had always been propagated: Philippine electoral exercises have been typified by arduous and oftentimes onerous delays in the publication of results stretching all the way to several months after the polling day.

This article explores the implications of automation to prevailing theories and practices of election reforms. This analysis takes into careful consideration the ubiquitous trait of corruption in the Philippines and how this phenomenon influences electoral contests that are dominated by various types of political networks. The key questions to reflect on as regards success of reforms in Philippine elections would be the following: (a) How has automation of elections impacted the conduct of fair elections? Specifically, what kinds of cheating were prevented or minimized by election automation? (b) How has automation of elections impacted the conduct of free elections? Specifically, did automation of elections contribute in fostering greater political competition?

Focusing on the Philippine's NCR as the area of inquiry⁶ and identifying number of votes as the outcome variable, this exploratory inquiry sheds light on critical predictors that determine electoral contests for the position of Philippine president. Media influence, expenses spent in terms of advertisements, allegations of corruption, and complex political networks (that is, party affiliation and regional membership) were some of the key predictors tested to determine their possible relationship with electoral votes. Automation of elections was introduced as a control variable to see whether this reform initiative mediates between the outcome and predictor variables. Possible explanations to the puzzle of candidates garnering a lion's share of votes notwithstanding proven convictions or serious allegations of corruption are explored in this inquiry.

May 2010: Watershed in Philippine Elections?

How successful indeed was the first ever synchronized automated elections⁷ in the Philippines? The speed of the counting of votes, their transmission and the rapidness of canvassing election results were unheard of in the

history of elections in the Philippines. Incredibly, the general populace was already able to determine who the election winners were only after one or two days. The previous experiences of long, drawn out manual counting of election returns and allegations of *dagdag-bawas*⁸ or “vote padding” and “vote shaving” irregularities had virtually disappeared. External observers commented that the Philippine election exercise was acceptable (Mogato, 2010). Moreover, some observers even clearly identified the probable reasons for the seeming success of the election exercise: “Philippine elections a success, people should be declared the heroes” (Aning, Cabrera, & Ruiz, 2010). Undoubtedly with the automation of elections, opportunities for cheating and irregularities on the day of elections⁹ itself and the succeeding days leading to the official proclamation of winners were dramatically reduced. In this sense, the automation of elections “succeeded” in ensuring that votes cast by the electorate were protected and thus free. However, the other promise held out by automation of elections about the possibility of providing a level playing field for political competition or free elections provides a different story.

Interestingly, prominent figures clearly aligned with the corrupt Marcos regime have successfully established a remarkable comeback during the recent May 10 national and local elections: Ferdinand Marcos, Jr, was elected a first-time member of the Philippine senate; Ms Imee Marcos, the eldest daughter of the late Marcos strongman, was elected as Governor of the Province of Ilocos Norte; and last but certainly not the least, Madame Imelda Marcos, who to date has not been convicted of any of the 910 corruption cases filed against her, was elected as member of the Philippine congress representing Ilocos Norte (Gomez, 2009). But perhaps the most stunning development in the recent May 10 elections was the uncanny performance of ex-President Joseph Estrada who was convicted of plunder and subsequently pardoned coming in second in the Presidential derby garnering 26 percent of the registered votes (Torres, 2007). In a 2004 Transparency International Report, the Philippines acquired the dubious distinction of having two of its ex-Presidents: Ferdinand Marcos and Joseph Ejercito Estrada as members of the elite 10 most corrupt leaders (Hodess, Inowlocki, Rodriguez, & Wolfe, 2004). It should come as no surprise therefore that in the Philippine context, allegations of corruption do not seem to inhibit candidates from contemplating and even emerging as victors in electoral contests. Sadly, as a run-up to the May 2010 elections, one of the most bloody incidents of election-related violence occurred in the southern tip of the Philippines,

specifically *Maguindanao*, where 57 people including women and children were massacred as they accompanied individuals who were on their way to file certificates of candidacy (Carlos Conde, 2009). Were the May 2010 elections successful? This article purports that like most electoral exercises in the Philippines, it has been a paradoxical experience.

Philippine Political Paradox: Corruption, Distortions, and Culture

Expatriate businessmen in Asia perceive the Philippines as the most corrupt country in the region according to a survey conducted by the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy group. (C. Conde, 2010)

In an attempt to make sense of the paradox of Philippine elections where continuous attempts at reform seem to be producing unpredictable outcomes, this inquiry asserts that recognizing the ubiquitous impact of corruption provides analytical illumination (Reyes, 2007). This inquiry draws on the corruption typology of Heidenheimer: Public-office centered definitions of corruption are about neglecting accepted public norms for private benefits, market-centered definitions deal with the maximization of gains by public officials using market supply and demand, and public-interest centered definitions highlight how particularistic interests are exchanged for public common good (Heidenheimer, 1970). These classifications may be applied to the widespread phenomenon of corruption characterizing the Philippine electoral system. Rose-Ackerman speaks about the inefficiencies and unfairness, as first- and second-order effects, respectively, that result from corruption that occurs in various settings (Rose-Ackerman, 1996). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines corruption as “the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit – through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement” (UNDP Executive Committee, 1998, p. 7) encompassing both corrupt practices in the public and private sectors straddling Philippine elections that serves as an apt starting point for defining corruption. An alternate viewpoint on corruption is summarized in Cariño’s analytical critique on the “revisionist” school which “posited that corruption has many positive consequences on the development of new states” (Cariño, 1986). Cariño interrogates corruption not only from its mainstream feature of being “toxic” but explores how revisionists have purported it to be a “tonic” or a necessary ingredient for progress particularly for new developing states.

Electoral Distortion

In an asymmetrical relationship, the variable affecting change is the electoral distortion characterized by the Filipino behaviour of patrimonialism as exemplified by patron–client relationship, personalism, money politics, *pakikisama* (*camaraderie*) system and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) that transforms the government into a weak state of an equilibrium of corrupt rent seeking motives as the consequent variable. (Villanueva, 2002, p. 62)

In a situation where asymmetrical relationships seem to determine distortions in Philippine elections, much needed change particularly in curbing corruption becomes absolutely vital: Given the high-stakes nature of electoral spoils, “reformers need to reclaim the original justification of electoral reform: not as a guarantor of structured democratic deliberation before the election, but as an effort to assure that certain powerful groups do not exercise undue influence on its outcome” (Pasquale, 2008, p. 601). It has been argued that in Philippine politics, the elites or entrenched political clans perpetuate their stranglehold on power through elections (Teehankee, 2007); thus electoral reform needs to address these distortions and must be designed in a way that offers a level playing field that does not favor any particular powerful group.

Reforming the electoral system as well as reviewing the highly centralized unitary state and presidential form of government and the prevailing party system become imperatives in achieving much-needed political transformation in the Philippines (Teehankee, 2002). Moreover, these critical areas of election reform have long been recognized by local scholars, area studies specialists and practitioners as fundamental in overhauling Philippine politics. Two powerful deterrents to much-needed wholesale reform – particularly in the area of election distortion – persist as daunting obstacles: the monopoly of elites and the high cost of popular participation.

The current electoral system particularly for the national elected office of member of the house of senate (Senate) and the locally elected office of member of the house of representatives (Congress) restrict current legislators to “‘three consecutive rather than three terms in a lifetime’ allowing ‘entrenched political families’ to be able to manipulate and cycle their way ‘between national and local offices’” (Eaton, 2003, p. 482). Thus, the elections for legislators become almost like a merry-go-round, allowing political dynasties to grow, be fostered, and to be continually resurrected. Several attempts have been made to address these weaknesses.

Examples of these would be the introduction of party-list elections which would have allowed greater popular participation and representation and a move away from favoring entrenched elites. However, the staunch and stubborn resistance of members of congress aligned with elites led to the unfortunate debacle of “the 1998 party-list elections manifesting the great extent to which legislators sabotaged reform efforts” (Eaton, 2003). The cycle of election distortion specifically for positions in the Senate and Congress is perpetuated in the Philippines where “the high cost of getting elected serves as a disincentive for popular participation and an incentive for corruption” (Teehankee, 2002, p. 195).

However, for the highly-coveted national post of President, the reform experience has pursued a slightly different path: “The Philippines is the only presidential democracy in the world using a plurality-rule electoral system to select its chief executive that has experienced a dramatic change in that system” (Choi, 2001, p. 488). One of the aftermaths of the 1986 EDSA Revolution in Philippine elections¹⁰ and as a harsh reaction to the two-decade reign of Marcos punctuated by a disputed re-election and a declaration of martial law was the institutionalization of term limitations (one-term) for the position of President as enshrined in the 1986 Philippine constitution. This particular piece of electoral reform complemented with the plurality-rule system has engendered a unique variant of individualistic patron–client relations:

First, the single-term limitation increases the effective number of candidates in plurality, rule-based elections because none of the individuals running has the incumbency advantage. Such a limitation significantly lowers the cost of loss since a loser in one election is granted another opportunity to run soon. Third, it shortens the cycle of elite circulation as a greater number of persons will have served as president in a given period. Fourth, the time horizon of the players in presidential contests shortens, making it more difficult to coordinate candidacies. In general, shortsighted players find it harder to cooperate with one another or create strong comradeship. Under plurality rule with a single-term limitation, prospective presidential candidates have a strong incentive to campaign independently instead of joining forces with other candidates. (Choi, 2001, p. 499)

Electoral reforms designed to dismantle the monopoly of the elites and lessen the costs of popular participation have achieved mixed results. The elites still operate and lord it over the presidential derby. But there is an increase in the number of presidential candidates who do not necessarily come most of the time from the elites. This increase in the number of candidates

for President cannot be solely attributed to the lowering of costs for popular participation but is “more likely to be related to a failure of national level elites to coordinate with one another” (Choi, 2001, p. 497).

Philippine Elections and Political Corruption

The Philippines' plurality-rule electoral system and the consequent characteristics of political parties differ from the “two-ballot majority system” that produces relatively secure multiparty alliances (Duverger, 2003, p. 70). Unlike most electoral systems in the developed Western world which have historically rich, institutionalized systems with clear party lines or even “bipolar multipartism” as envisioned by Duverger (2003, p. 83), the Philippines typifies fragmentation and unstable party coalitions. The fragmented Philippine electoral system continues to be a paradox since most of its features such as individual ballot structure (personal vote); pre-determined and low district magnitudes particularly for Congress and a reformed electoral formula represented by term limitations designed to limit incumbency advantage are key ingredients of electoral systems that are effective in deterring corruption (Persson, Tabellini, & Trebbi, 2003). Yet despite the presence of these components, Philippine elections and its party system are still inherently fragmented, unstable and prone to corruption. Quimpo even argues that “elections serve as the means for the relatively peaceful alternation in power among rival elite factions” (Quimpo, 2005, p. 239). Contrary to a modernist viewpoint that suggests that Philippine elections is at a period of transition moving towards a more consolidated democratic form, this inquiry argues that greater analytical illumination would be achieved by interrogating this phenomenon as it is: unpredictable and paradoxical and very much a product of its unique context.

The literature on elections and campaign finance reform is replete with various accounts of the impact of corruption on the vote. Taking note of the unique Philippine presidential electoral system and the nationally elected Senators and members of Congress, one clearly sees the fulfilment of Kunicova and Rose-Ackerman's prediction: “proportional representation systems together with presidentialism are associated with higher levels of corrupt political rent-seeking” (Kunicova & Rose-Ackerman, 2005, p. 583). Furthermore, the unpredictability of the Philippine party systems favor electoral uncertainty which consequently “encourages politicians to corruption activities under electoral systems that are dominated by the personal vote” (Chang, 2005, p. 719). The systemic nature of corruption

that permeates the Philippine context and the nature and operating system of voting are factors that contribute to the persistence of electoral distortions. Reflecting on the recent May 2010 Philippine elections that saw stunning victories of relatives of the late-President Marcos, judged by history as a corrupt and autocratic despot, and the second-place finish of ex-President Estrada, convicted of corruption and plunder (and subsequently granted a Presidential pardon) – one sees how political corruption is inimitably intertwined in Philippine elections. Scholars and practitioners have argued that one powerful reason for the presence of such a phenomenon is that “political corruption becomes a necessary evil” as a result of “fierce competition for campaign funds” (Chang, 2005, p. 716). But is the necessary evil so compelling as to prevent voters from penalizing corrupt candidates and rewarding honest and hardworking ones? The return to power of the Marcoses and the encouraging electoral performance of Estrada seem to indicate that corrupt candidates – in a Philippine context – are rewarded and not penalized. Or could the victories of candidates convicted of corruption be due to voter ignorance and misperception; or perhaps the voters were benefiting from patron–client relations consistent with implicit trading theories or it may just be that they were not venal voters and that electoral retribution was not high in their agenda (Peters & Welch, 1980)? Given the Philippine context where corruption is systemic and that electoral exercises are distorted, it can be argued that the voting choice is a complex process:

Alleged corruption is, in fact, only one of many factors that voters consider when casting their ballot. The “trading” argument... is able to explain why so many allegedly corrupt candidates do win, contrary to the hopes and expectations of ancient and modern theorists of democracy, yet it does not assume that all or most voters are venally looking after their own interests. Instead, it argues that a charge of corruption is only one factor that a rational voter will take into account; if the allegedly corrupt act was minor and the candidate has other, overriding virtues in the voters’ eyes, such as appropriate stands on the issues and the right party affiliation, then the act will be ignored or rationalized away. (Peters & Welch, 1980, p. 706)

Philippine Political Culture and Critique of Dominant Paradigms

The extent of the losses that the nation incurs due to corruption approximates scandalous proportions. It goes without saying that

corruption becomes not only very relevant to contemporary Philippine society, it becomes extremely urgent as well. Varela pointed out that the culture of graft and corruption “has historical roots and antecedents, particularly during Spanish colonialism. The Spanish philosophy regarding public office as derived from the theory that the colonies were the king’s personal kingdoms, and therefore he could dispose of anything in it through any means that he desired” (Varela, 1996, p. 309). Such an analysis continues the reduction of Philippine politics into a dominant “patron–client” paradigm. Lemarchand and Legg extended the analysis of paired relationships according to Lande’s dyadic analysis by highlighting more expansive alliances into clientage networks. Such a network “involves an aggregate of role sets, serially linked in such a way that a patron also stands in the position of a client toward his superior” (Lemarchand & Legg, 1972, p. 153). Anderson fuelled the debate by describing the “cacique democracies” – essentially patron–client based – in the Philippines underlining colonial influences and resulting in a condition where the “civilian machinery of state remained weak and divided” (Anderson, 1988, p. 11).

Kerkvliet and Mojares provide a picture “of a diverse society of ill-joined political actors rather than pyramids of patrons and clients, and in some areas, of political monopolies built on command and coercion rather than benign alliances glued together by negotiation or reciprocity” (Kerkvliet & Mojares, 1991, p. 10). Sidel develops the idea of command and coercion and brings up the point of ‘bossism’ as an essential element of Philippine politics. The phenomenon of local and national bosses in the country led him to conclude that “unlike accounts that depict Philippine politics in terms of clientelist networks and portray violence as the symptoms of the breakdown of patron–client ties,” he shows that “coercion has persistently and systematically intruded upon electoral competition, economic exploitation, and social relations” (Sidel, 1999, p. 145). Given the economic conditions of society, the phenomenon of “bosses” driven by coercion and force emerged and became entrenched (Sidel, 2002, p. 131).

Ileto underscores the almost ubiquitous influence of what he describes as a “flawed concept of development” that by itself is “trapped in a modernist discourse” (Ileto, 1997, p. 98). Critiquing the overriding scope of patron–client language on political culture, he laments how “Lande’s 1965 classic continues to haunt subsequent texts, including those that seek to debunk it.” He challenges present scholarship and proposes opening up a “new path in Philippine political studies” (Ileto, 2002, p. 155).

Complex Linkages

This article critiques patron–client and clientage networks as dominant theoretical foundations that explain the nature of corruption and how this exacerbates election distortions. The argument of Khan embodies this: “Developing country states typically operate through patron–client relationships with key” sectors of society. State leaderships operate through these networks to “*implement* their economic and political strategies and to *negotiate* change in rights” (Khan, 1996, p. 692). Patron–client relations as a dominant theory is complemented by the paradigm of local chieftains or Sidel’s bossism and its close kin espousing a symbiosis of systemic criminal activities vis-à-vis politics not merely on a local but on a national level (Kreuzer, 2009).

This inquiry posits that a more nuanced appreciation and understanding of the nexus of corruption and election reform can be derived by viewing the phenomenon from a wider lens that accommodates dominant paradigms as well as localized contestations of democracy. In the Philippine context, ubiquitous corruption and electoral exercises can be understood better by describing various conditions of electoral reform. These conditions are what this inquiry posits as the site of complex linkages (Reyes, 2009). This framework would be utilized as the analytical lens in explaining the nexus of corruption and election reform.

May 2010 Automated Elections: An Exploratory Case Study

This inquiry analyzes the first ever synchronized national automated elections held on May 2010 described as “successful in contributing to enhanced public confidence in the electoral process” (Asian Network for Free Elections [ANFREL], 2010a, p. 2). The analysis undertakes cross-tabulations of electoral votes, as the outcome variable, as this is tested against several predictor variables: category of advertising expenditures spent by the candidates, news report coverage by top media channels, level of trust among potential voters, membership in a political dynasty and allegations of corruption. The automation of elections is treated as a control variable. The exploratory case study attempts to determine whether automation of elections can be treated as an intervening variable between the outcome and the predictor variables.

Data Analysis and Variables Used

For purposes of this case study, the main geographical research area is the Philippine's National Capital Region (NCR). NCR is the smallest of the nation's administrative regions, the most populous and serves as the seat of the national government making it the focal concentration point of economic, social, and political activities in the Philippines. The population of NCR is around 10.7 million and it is classified as a 100 percent urban region (De la Paz & Colson, 2008).

The outcome variable for the subsequent analyses is the electoral votes (Votes) won by candidates categorized into three levels. These figures have been compiled from the official election returns available from the COMELEC (Commission on Elections, 2010). The categorical predictor variables are classified into two types: ordinal and dichotomous (dummy) variables. The ordinal variables are as follows: The amount of ad expenditures (AdExp) of the candidates during the campaign period which were compiled for this research (De los Reyes, 2010; Landingin, 2010); the level of news report (NewsReport) coverage by mainstream media over a limited time period during the campaign of the candidates were similarly compiled for this inquiry (CMFR, 2010); and the level of trust (TrustRating) of potential candidates collected over a limited time frame during the campaign collated from an independent think tank (PulseAsia, 2010). The dichotomous (dummy) variables are as follows: Allegations of corruption (CorrCharge) compiled from the official records of the Philippines' House of Representatives and the Senate of the Philippines (House of Representatives, 2010; Senate of the Philippines, 2010); whether the candidates were running for re-election (Re-election) compiled from official records of the Philippines' House of Representatives (House of Representatives, 2010); whether the candidates belonged to Political Dynasties (Dynasties) as culled from various sources (Coronel, 2007; Dal Bo, Dal Bo, & Snyder, 2007; Rivera, 1994); and whether the Presidential candidates expressed explicit support for automation of elections (Automation) (CODE NGO, 2010).

Cross-tabulations: Analyzing Categorical Data for Presidential Vote (NCR)

In the subsequent cross-tabulations for the Presidential vote in the NCR, the columns are treated as the predictor variables and the row is seen

as the outcome variable. The universal hypothesis tested in the cross-tabulations is that both variables are independent and have no relation with each other. Moreover, these subsequent analyses interrogate “measures of association” – describing the strength of dependence between two variables. In cross-tabulations, one of the most powerful ways of interpreting measures of association is through the Proportional Reduction of Error (PRE): quantifying the extent to which the predictor variable helps in quantifying the outcome variable (Kvitz, 2009). Essentially the analyses establish “correlation” among variables and therefore no attempt is made to make definitive causal relationships. The control variable (Automation) is used as a process of elaboration on the hypothesized relationships between the outcome and predictor variables.

The next set of tables represent cross-tabulations made on the outcome variable against the different predictor variables. It must be pointed out that in the analysis undertaken for this inquiry, the dichotomous (dummy variables) of Allegations of Corruption and Candidates Running for Re-election did not register statistically significant relationships with the outcome variable. These non-significant results reveal that allegations of corruption and re-election are predictor variables that have no relationship with the number of votes that a candidate wins during elections.

The cross-tabulations produced statistically significant results (approx. sig. is $p < 0.05$). An examination of the absolute value of Gamma, γ (0.90) means that there was a 90 percent reduction in error in predicting the outcome variable when the predictor variable was taken into account (Liebetrau, 1993). In other words, the statistically significant relationship between the outcome and the predictor variable is very strong. An interpretation of this could be that information about the level of trust among potential voters greatly helps in improving the prediction of the outcomes of “Votes” (“100,000 votes and below”; “101,000 to 500,000” or “501,000 and above”) by about 90 percent. Table 2 indicates that a “high level of trust” does not automatically translate to a higher category of votes won by candidates. Scepticism, distrust and lack of confidence in a dysfunctional bureaucracy – represented by the COMELEC and the prevailing distorted election system – could be a plausible explanation for this trend. When a control variable is introduced (Automated) in order to elaborate on the relationship between the outcome and predictor variable, the resulting cross tabulations reveal no statistical significance. Automation of elections does not improve nor diminish the prediction of the outcomes from the predictor variable.

Table 2.
Votes Won by Candidate and Level of Trust among Potential Voters

Votes won by candidate	Level of trust among potential voters			Total
	15 and below (Low)	16 to 35 (Medium)	36 and above (High)	
100,000 votes and below	33.3	0	0	33.3
101,000 to 500,000 votes	11.1	22.2	11.1	44.4
501,000 votes and above	0	11.1	11.1	22.2
Total	44.4	33.3	22.2	100

$\gamma = 0.900; p = 0.000$

Cross-tabulations showed statistically significant results (approx. sig. is $p < 0.05$) with γ (0.84) signify an 84 percent reduction in error in predicting the outcome variable when the predictor variable was taken into account. The statistically significant relationship between the outcome and the predictor variable is strong. One can interpret this to mean that information about the candidates' political dynasty membership greatly helps in improving the prediction of the outcomes of "Votes" ("100,000 votes and below"; "101,000 to 500,000" or "501,000 and above") by about 84 percent. Table 3 indicates that membership in a political dynasty translates to greater share of votes won. These findings provide evidence of the persistence of entrenched and powerful political dynasties in the Philippine election system. Introducing the control variable (Automated) in order to elaborate on the relationship between the outcome and predictor variables produced very strong statistically significant results ($\gamma = 1.0, p < 0.05$). The cross tabulations for the partial tables reveal very similar overall row and column percentages with that of the zero-order

Table 3.
Votes Won by Candidate and Political Dynasty

Votes won by candidate	Political dynasty: Is the candidate a member of a political dynasty?		Total
	No	Yes	
100,000 votes and below	22.2	11.1	33.3
101,000 to 500,000 votes	11.1	22.2	44.4
501,000 votes and above	0	22.2	22.2
Total	33.3	66.7	100

$\gamma = 0.846; p = 0.038$

Table 3. There is evidence to support the claim that the predictor variable and the control variable jointly affect the outcome variable.

The cross-tabulations reported statistically significant results (approx. sig. is $p < 0.05$) with γ (0.70) meaning there was a 70 percent error reduction in predicting the outcome variable when the predictor variable was taken into account. The statistically significant relationship between the outcome and the predictor variable is strong. It can be posited that information about the Category of Ad Expenditures greatly helps in improving the prediction of the outcomes of “Votes” (“100,000 votes and below”; “101,000 to 500,000” or “501,000 and above”) by about 70 percent. More importantly, a nuanced review of Table 4 reveals that candidates who spent the most in advertisements did not capture a greater number of votes. Results of Table 4, posited with the fact that in the May 2010 elections only a handful of individuals funded most of the Presidential candidates (Landingin, 2010), provide some basis in arguing that elite capture remains a persistent reality in Philippine electoral contests. Creating partial tables to examine this original relationship with the introduction of the control variable (Automated) produced strong statistically significant results (approx. sig. is $p < 0.05$) with γ (0.70). There is sufficient evidence to argue that the control variable interacts with the predictor and outcome variable. The interaction can be best understood by comparing the elaborated tables with the zero-order Table 4. The partial tables reveal an increase in the overall row percentage for one of the sub-levels of the outcome variable (100,000 and below = 40 percent) and a decrease in the remaining sub-levels (101,000 to 500,000 = 40 percent and 501,000 and above = 20 percent).

Table 4.
Votes Won by Candidate and Category of Ad Expenditures

Votes won by candidate	Category of ad expenditures			Total
	10 million pesos and below	11 to 50 million pesos	51 million pesos and above	
100,000 votes and below	22.2	11.1	0	33.3
101,000 to 500,000 votes	0	11.1	33.3	44.4
501,000 votes and above	0	11.1	11.1	22.2
Total	22.2	33.3	44.4	100

$\gamma = 0.700$; $p = 0.025$

Cross-tabulations revealed statistically significant results (approx. sig. for γ is $p < 0.05$). Absolute value of γ (0.75) signifies that there was a 75 percent reduction in error in predicting the outcome variable when the predictor variable was taken into account. The statistically significant relationship between the outcome and the predictor variable is strong. One can contend that information about the degree of news report coverage greatly helps in improving the prediction of the outcomes of “Votes” (“100,000 votes and below”; “101,000 to 500,000”; or “501,000 and above”) by about 75 percent. Taking into consideration that those with greater resources have a tendency to corner more news report coverage, Table 5 indicates that candidates who received Medium and High News Report Coverage performed rather similarly for the Presidential elections. Media seems to provide evidence of its growing role as a stakeholder in Philippine elections.¹¹ Undertaking elaboration of this relationship by introducing a control variable (Automated) indicated strong statistically significant results (approx. sig. is $p < 0.05$) with γ (0.857). Comparing the partial tables with zero-order Table 5 reveals an increase in the overall row percentage for one of the sub-levels of the outcome variable (100,00 and below = 40 percent) and a decrease in the remaining sub-levels (101,000 to 500,000 = 40 percent and 501,000 and above = 20 percent). There is sufficient evidence to make a claim that the control variable interacts with the predictor and outcome variable.

Discussion

This inquiry explored the impact of automation as reform initiative identified by the Philippine government and international multilateral agencies as a vehicle to ensure free and fair elections. Specifically, automation

Table 5.
Votes Won by Candidate and News Report Coverage

Votes won by candidate	News report coverage (exclusive news reports)			Total
	25 and below (Low)	26 to 45 (Medium)	46 and above (High)	
100,000 votes and below	11.1	22.2	0	33.3
101,000 to 500,000 votes	0	22.2	22.2	44.4
501,000 votes and above	0	11.1	11.1	22.2
Total	11.1	55.6	33.3	100

$\gamma = 0.750$; $p = 0.034$

of elections was viewed as a panacea that was seen to allow people to vote freely without the threat of disenfranchisement brought about by corruption. Election automation was also viewed as a modernization platform that could champion political competition without giving undue advantage to certain sectors of society. Has this reform disentangled Philippine election distortions particularly the double-headed hydra of continued elite monopoly and barriers to popular participation usually accompanied by violence? Evidence from this exploratory inquiry indicates that through the unprecedented automated elections, opportunities for fraud diminished and flashpoints for violence were greatly reduced. Automated elections also seem to be a factor that mediates the relationship of votes garnered and several variables such as the candidates' media exposure, amount of money spent on campaign ads and political dynasty membership. Using complex linkages as conditions where electoral reforms can be located as analytical lens revealed a tapestry of defective political mechanisms, deeply entrenched political dynasties, elite capture as well as emerging networks of genuine political competition.

Defective Political Competition within a Dysfunctional Bureaucracy

Cross-tabulations for the Presidential vote indicate that high level of trust does not automatically guarantee a proportional higher category of votes. One can argue that voters' trust towards candidates in a dysfunctional system yields complex results. Distortions in the election system merely highlight the prevalence of dysfunctional bureaucratic processes epitomized by the COMELEC. A number of COMELEC laws and statutes prove ineffectual and "are so stringent that they are considered as 'dead-letter' provisions that have proven unrealistic or difficult to enforce" (Teehankee, 2002, p. 188). Moreover, these dysfunctions have led to debilitating ambiguity where election laws appear grey and untested (De los Reyes & Ilagan, 2010b). Within the interstices of these dysfunctions, election actors use whatever means necessary also referred to as creative compliance in achieving their electoral goals (De los Reyes & Ilagan, 2010a). The introduction of a control variable revealed that this has no statistically significant relationship with the outcome variable. This reinforces that notion that trust is independent of reform initiatives (that is, automation of elections) that emanate from a dysfunctional bureaucracy.

Entrenched Political Dynasties

Cross tabulations revealed the unmistakable presence of political dynasties; more importantly these are strong predictors for high vote performance. Presidential candidates who ran for the May 2010 elections were supported by the usual few patrons who have been in the Philippine political landscape for centuries (Landingin, 2010). Furthermore, the May 2010 automated elections, similar to previous electoral reform efforts, have been consistently hijacked by powerful patron elites guaranteeing a narrow set of interests dominating policy-making processes and ensuring “that the legislature remains a preserve of the political-economic elite” (Eaton, 2003, p. 491). Cross-tabulations also revealed that candidates who spent a lot more in ad expenditures correlated with high votes. In a distorted election system with high barriers to popular participation, victory is measured in huge capital outlays funded by entrenched political dynasties. Automation of elections as a control variable was introduced to see how this could mediate the impact of political dynasty membership to votes. The very strong statistically significant results indicate that automation of elections and political dynasty membership jointly affect votes.

Elite Capture

The impact of entrenched elites represented by individual candidates with very loose political party affiliations has been documented in this inquiry. Election reforms are compromised by the presence of elites capturing high-stakes spoils through these linkages. There is a strong statistically significant relationship between advertisement expenditures (funded by a small group of elites) and number of votes. Introducing automation of elections as a control variable reveals that this has an interaction effect with the predictor and outcome variables. Scholars and practitioners affirmed that “unfortunately, political parties in the Philippines are loose coalitions of personalities and political clans organized around clientelistic machines that are oriented toward one sole objective – to gain power” (Teehankee, 2006, p. 195). It may be argued that as long as elite capture persists, electoral reform would be very difficult to implement especially in a context where “legislators in the Philippines are largely free agents operating independently of the party leaders who, in other democracies with stronger parties, might compel the rank-and-file to

support political reforms” (Eaton, 2003, p. 491). This remains one of the lingering paradoxes of Philippine politics: “despite the long tradition of institutionalized democratic practices and history of popular struggles” what persists is “an elitist and clientelistic democracy embedded in an underdeveloped economy” (Teehankee, 2006, p. 215).

Stakeholdership Networks: Roots of Genuine Political Competition

Cross-tabulations indicate that medium and high exposure to media coverage produced similar results for votes garnered by the candidates. Introducing automation as a control variable indicates that this has an interaction effect with the predictor and outcome variables. The findings reveal that even candidates who received the least amount of media exposure still managed to report the highest number of votes in the low category (100,000 and below). The inquiry posits that the promise of election reform that goes beyond mere automation seems to hinge on the increasing presence of stakeholdership networks. Widespread examples of volunteerism and citizen participation reported in the May 2010 elections bode well for the sustenance of these positive networks. In fact, the May 2010 electoral exercise has been regarded as the highest non-partisan elections monitoring since 1980s, a pioneer in elections observation activities in the world (Asian Network for Free Elections [ANFREL], 2010b). The recent elections showed the powerful presence of civil society. These elections saw how “political parties, the Catholic Church, its affiliates and various advocacy groups – had election observers in the room for the entire day to watch the process; a very robust process” (Sweeney, 2010, p. 1). These networks should not be confused as ad hoc movements that come and go with every election exercise. Some of them have become successful in bringing “non-traditional parties that bring different sectors together”; an example of this would be “Institute for Popular Democracy, a Manila-based NGO that has devoted its considerable talents to strengthening the political party” (Eaton, 2003, p. 492). These stakeholdership networks are an expression of “contested democracy,” a welcome paradigmatic alternative in Philippine politics highlighting “the element of agency, apart from contestation” that not only places emphasis on entrenched patron–client and clientelist models but also an “opportunity for subordinate classes and communities to push for popular empowerment” (Quimpo, 2005, p. 248).

The May 2010 electoral reform arguably brought about changes in the way Philippine elections have been conducted. Ease of counting, ease

of votes and a limited amount of fraud prevention (that is, opportunity for ballot box snatching and exchanging have almost disappeared) are welcome changes that have been ushered by the reform. The analysis in this inquiry proves that corruption, measured as allegations against candidates, had no impact on the amount of votes won. One can argue then that automation as an anti-corruption mechanism only addresses one aspect: fraud prevention post-election process of vote-taking and the publication of results. Moreover, the two main elements of electoral distortion: (a) the monopoly of elites and (b) the high cost of popular participation still persist. This is also counterbalanced by an increase in the role of stakeholders (that is, media and emboldened civil society groups) seen in the recent elections. What is certain is that the May 2010 electoral reforms have brought about a degree of transformation and have ushered in a shift in Philippine electoral democratic contests.

Admittedly, this exploratory study faced a limitation by focusing solely on the NCR which is hardly representative of the Philippines as the site of this inquiry. Thus, no generalization is made as to the applicability of this inquiry's findings into other parts of the nation. An area for future exploration could be to test whether arguments put forth in this article based on findings established solely from the NCR can be replicated, validated, or repudiated in other parts of the Philippines.

Nonetheless, this inquiry proposes that in exploring electoral reform using the yardstick of free and fair elections may be inadequate. Instead, viewing the resulting shifts created by election reforms from conditions of complex and contested linkages may provide a more nuanced analytical illumination. Moreover, complex linkages may provide a lens in envisioning various conditions of an evolving democracy and its various contestations in a Philippine context.

NOTES

1. This original research article is based on a book chapter which was published in V. Reyes (2012), "Can public funding overcome corruption: A view from the Philippines." In J. Mendilow (Ed.), *Money, corruption, and political competition in established and emerging democracies* (pp. 145–168). Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books.
2. The Liberal wing of the *Nacionalista* Party eventually became the present day Liberal Party.
3. PNoy (pronounced as pēñōy) is an acronym for President Noy. The word pinoy is also an informal demonym referring to Filipino people.

4. The implementation of automated elections in a nationwide scale is unprecedented. However, electronic voting (the very first in Philippine history) was already implemented during the August 11, 2008 elections in Mindanao, Philippines.
5. A ninth candidate for President – Mr Vetellano Acosta – was declared a nuisance candidate. Nevertheless, his name was still included in the official election ballots.
6. Data for votes during the May 2010 elections was only available for the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines as of the time of writing this manuscript. This limitation undoubtedly prevents greater generalization of the questions and findings explored in this exploratory inquiry.
7. The Commission on Elections (COMELEC) completed the first, nationwide fully automated elections – from counting of votes to transmission and canvassing of election returns (for more information, see Commission on Elections, 2010).
8. This literally means “to add and to subtract.” Such malpractice was alleged to have occurred during the 1995 senatorial elections (for more information, see Ocampo, 2007).
9. The processes of the automation of elections could only guarantee the protection of the votes on the day of the elections itself and the succeeding days after. The time period before that is where opportunities for coercion and restrictions on the right to vote could have possibly occurred.
10. EDSA stands for Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the major arterial road in Metro Manila that was the site of the peaceful 1986 revolt that effectively forced out the late President Ferdinand Marcos from power and towards his exile in Hawaii.
11. Allegations of corruption as a categorical dummy variable for cross-tabulations in the National vote did not report significant results.

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