

# The Electoral Paradox: Colonial History, Duterte, and the Return of the Marcoses in the Philippines

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**Abstract:** *In understanding the authoritarian character of Rodrigo Duterte’s rule followed by the return of the Marcoses to power, it is important to situate both within the context of ‘electoral dystopias’ in the Philippines: the colonial and postcolonial history of democratic institutions deployed by rulers to produce undemocratic social effects. Elections thus look two ways: they seek to mobilise popular expectations for change even as they become instruments for reproducing hierarchy and reinforcing the power of elites. It is within this paradoxical conjunction of popular desires for radical change and elite attempts at containing and channelling those desires for conservative ends that we can see the rise of authoritarian figures such as Duterte. This essay is based on the first chapter of the author’s *The Sovereign Trickster: Death ad Laughter in the Age of Duterte*, published by Duke University Press in 2022.*

**Keywords:** *Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, Ferdinand Marcos, Elections, Colonial History*



**Figure 1: Campaign closure speech by Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos, Jr. Photo by [patrickroque01](#) (Creative Commons).**

It is not uncommon for the Philippines to attract global attention during times of natural catastrophes or manmade disasters. One such cataclysm arguably was the recent electoral victory of Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos, Jr., the son of the infamous dictator who ruled the Philippines from 1965 to 1986, and his running mate, Sara Duterte-Carpio, the daughter of the authoritarian president Rodrigo Duterte (in office from 2016 to 2022).

While much of the world was shocked by their election, people in the Philippines were not entirely surprised. The country has been swept by the recent storms of authoritarianism blowing across the world for the past decade. In 2016, it brought them Rodrigo Duterte as part of this global trend. Thanks to his tough-guy talk, unapologetic misogyny, hostility to

human rights, and most of all, his unremitting war on drugs, Duterte has become a global sensation. But it was also under Duterte's regime that the rehabilitation of the Marcos family, which had begun as early as 1991, intensified. Beginning with the controversial burial of Marcos, Sr.'s mummified corpse in the *Libingan ng mga Bayani*, or Hero's Cemetery, it culminated in the landslide victory of Marcos, Jr.

There are many other reasons for the Marcos-Duterte victory, from widespread cheating to the extensive deployment of social media to whitewash Marcos's brutal history, to the use of plundered billions to buy votes and the support of local officials. Rather than rehearse these reasons, I would like instead to situate recent electoral events in the context of the long history of colonialism in the Philippines under Spain and the United States, as well as the postcolonial Republic that continues to be under the spell of the United States.

### The Colonial Roots of Elections

In most liberal democracies, elections tend to be Janus faced. On the one hand, they are essential to the ongoing democratisation of society insofar as they are expressions of popular sovereignty. The act of voting is an indispensable ritual, performed privately, yet counted publicly: a solitary act with collective consequences meant to ensure the peaceful and legitimate transfer of power and the legislation of social change. On the other hand, by mobilising people, elections set them against one another into a state of civil strife. Not for nothing are electoral contests, like wars, called 'campaigns'. Unleashing long-held social antagonisms, elections also act to contain them. Just as they drive one to become political, elections also set about domesticating politics, draining it of its potential insurgency. Voting rechannels the boisterous energies let loose by the street and arena campaigns into

the orderly halls of Congress presided by political professionals. In this way, elections tend to turn movements into moments managed by elected representatives (Anderson 1998).

This dual character of elections can also be seen in formerly colonised countries, but with important variations. In a place like the Philippines where liberal democracy came by way of the most illiberal means such as wars of conquest and colonisation, the history of elections traces a different path. Voting was a colonial practice introduced by the Spaniards in the later seventeenth to the eighteenth century. The lowest ranks of the colonial bureaucracy had been opened to native and mestizo elites to aid in the administration of the colony. Members of the local elites and their surrogates could choose among themselves who would fill the positions of *cabezas de barangay*, or village headman, and *gobernadorcillo*, or municipal governor. They sent the names of their top three choices to the Governor General who made the final choice. These highly localised electoral exercises were strictly controlled by Spanish friar who had veto power over any of the winners. The franchise as one might imagine was extremely limited: only current and former officials and the male members of their families could vote. In some provinces, surrogates of elite families rather than elites themselves ran for office. (Abinales and Amoroso 2017; Fradera 1999; Llobet 2011; Robles 1969; Copurz 1957; May 1987) Elections then were instruments for regularising elite collaboration. They reproduced the colonial hierarchy by preserving the social positions and privileges of local leaders—especially their exemption from tribute and forced labour—and thereby secured the power of Spanish rulers.

In the wake of the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, Spanish colonial rule entered into a period of liberalisation after 1812. Representation to the Spanish parliament, or Cortez, was extended to the colonies to keep

them within the Empire. While briefly granted representation, such a right was eventually withheld from *las islas Filipinas*—the only colony to be wholly without representation in the parliament. Such was due mainly to the fact that Spaniards regarded the Filipinos as too racially mixed and therefore inferior (Mojares 2006; Fradera 1999; Llobet 2011; Simbulan 2005). Filipino exclusion from political representation on racial grounds was resented especially by the Hispanised Filipino elites who, given their education and wealth, regarded themselves as more Spaniard than the average Spaniard. It became a major bone of contention in the emergent nationalist movement starting the 1860s triggered by the racist exclusion of highly competent Filipino priests from being assigned to parishes. Separatist sentiments gradually emerged from this experience of electoral exclusion and other acts of Spanish injustice, boiling over into the Revolution in 1896.

Initial successes against Spain led to the formation of the Filipino Revolutionary Government in March of 1897. Elections were held to determine its leadership. Participants were drawn mainly from a small number of male revolutionary leaders, many of them hailing from the ranks of the provincial elites who had earlier served in the colonial bureaucracy. Plagued by rumours, ad hominem attacks, and voter fraud, the very first presidential election was won by the Chinese mestizo military General Emilio Aguinaldo over the so-called ‘father’ of the Revolution, Andres Bonifacio. Denouncing the results, Bonifacio and his supporters decided to plot a coup. Hearing of this plot, Aguinaldo ordered the arrest and execution of Bonifacio. Held in a state of revolutionary emergency, the first Filipino election was marked by fraud, contested results, aggrieved candidates, coup attempts, and the violent arrest and execution of political rivals. This pattern of intra-elite factional rivalries exploding into violence would figure prominently the history of succeeding

elections (Agoncillo 1956; Agoncillo 1960).

We can see this pattern in the second Filipino elections in 1898. As Filipino revolutionary forces proved victorious over Spain, and as they sought to deal with the growing presence of American troops in the archipelago, they retreated to the town of Malolos in Bulacan north of Manila. There, they crafted a constitution and formed the First Republic by calling for elections. The franchise was limited to the wealthiest and most educated men, who unapologetically referred to themselves as the ‘brains of the nation’ and an ‘oligarchy of the intellect’. The conservative make-up of Congress was such that it retained much of the Spanish laws and restored the hated poll taxes and forced labour to support the new government. The First Republic eventually proved so unpopular among many in the lower classes, and resistance to its authority emerged. The masses had expected not merely regime change but a real social revolution that would restore true *kalayaan*, or freedom, understood as a moral society of mutual caring and compassion. But before such class tensions could escalate into a civil war, the US invasion plunged the country into an extended and brutal guerrilla war between 1899 and 1902 (Mabini 2007; Agoncillo 1960; Iletto 1979; Guerrero 2015).

The US invasion eventually overwhelmed the Filipino Republic after a long, protracted battle. However, insurgencies continued to break out all throughout US colonial occupation till the 1930s. Anxious to end the fighting, the United States set up elections as a counterinsurgent measure. Elections were seen as a means to coopt local elites, many of whom were leaders of the Filipino forces, and ensure their local basis of power. Local elections were held in places deemed ‘pacified’ by the US military between 1901 and 1903, followed by national elections for representatives to the First Filipino colonial assembly in 1907. The franchise, not surprisingly, was limited to those

who were wealthy, educated, and male. Only about 1.7 per cent of the population was qualified to vote in 1907—educated male property owners with a degree of fluency in Spanish or English—a number that would rise gradually through the period of American rule (May 1980; Corpuz 1957; Stanley 1974; Cullinane 2005; Kramer 2006).

### **Electoral Counterinsurgency**

Intended to be a counterinsurgent measure, elections not surprisingly produced largely conservative results. As in the Spanish colonial era, elections under US rule were meant to organize and regularise collaboration. They also had the effect of reproducing and protecting class and gender hierarchy in the face of an ongoing insurgency and the popular demand for social revolution. However, elections by themselves could not accomplish these twin goals and thus was joined to an ensemble of other measures. These included setting up a network of public schools, parks, a public health system, and new communication and transportation infrastructures designed to ‘pacify’ and ‘reconcile’ the population while suturing class divisions (May 1980; Cullinane 2005; Foster and Go 2006; McCoy 2009; McKenna 2017; Abinales and Amoroso 2017).

Colonial biopower, however, was sustainable only if the colonial state could assert its unwavering sovereignty and quell challenges to its rule. This entailed setting up paramilitary forces such as the Philippine Scouts and police forces to replace the departing American troops. Harking back to the colonial militias established by the Spanish regime, such native colonial forces were then assigned to provinces and attached to local elites who supported them in exchange for their services. Such services included intimidating rival elites, especially during elections, putting down dissident peasants and workers, and so on. In short, elections by the first half of the twentieth

century were part of an ensemble of governing practices designed to regulate political participation in ways that would ensure colonial order while preserving social inequality essential to that order. Once again, democratic institutions were calculated to produce undemocratic ends. Key to this colonial paradox was the use of violence not just by agents of the state, but also by loose, informally organised militias acting often as paramilitary forces and private bodyguards to politicians. The relative strength of such local forces was further highlighted by the weak central apparatus of the colonial state and, as in the case of the United States, the absence of a professional colonial civil service to carry out federal mandates (Kramer 2006; McCoy 2009; Abinales and Amoroso 2017).

The nature of colonial electoralism—that is, elections as a form of counterinsurgency productive of social hierarchy the maintenance of which depended on highly localised paramilitary violence—continued in the wake of independence in 1946. However, it went through some important mutations. Chief among these changes was the expansion of the franchise. Such an expansion had been going on since the 1930s when literacy and property qualifications were modified and when women were given the vote in 1938. With independence, near universal voting rights were established, with the goal of democratising society. Of course, things did not quite work out as planned. Expanding the franchise gave the vote to the majority, many of whom were poor people. Politically empowered, they remained socially marginalised and economically impoverished. Ruling elites, many of whom had collaborated with both the United States and, during the Pacific War, with Japan, had to find novel ways to persuade and coerce this new electorate to vote for them under changed conditions (Kramer 2006; McCoy 2009; Abinales and Amoroso 2017). They did so in three ways.



First, they changed the style of campaigning. In the past, presidential candidates campaigned mostly from their homes, making limited appearances and rarely mixing with crowds. The presidential campaign of Ramon Magsaysay in 1953 changed all that. Directed by the legendary CIA-operative and former advertising executive, Edward Landsdale, Magsaysay turned campaigning into a series of public spectacles. A political upstart who banked on his close ties with the American military forces and his reputation as an anti-communist populist, Magsaysay toured the country, engaging in highly theatricalised campaigns, often photographed eating with his hands. Future candidates would follow his example, projecting themselves as ‘men of the people’ by posing with farmers planting rice, barnstorming across the archipelago and dazzling audiences with bombastic rhetoric and the singing and dancing of popular movie stars (Kerkvliet 2002).

The second thing candidates did in the face of an expanded electorate was to resort to massive vote buying. Earlier, they could rely on provincial ties of patronage to compel clients to vote for them. Now, they were faced with anonymous voters. In the absence of personal connections built over long histories of exchanging favours, candidates resorted to giving cash to gain their vote. This, in turn, made it imperative for candidates to raise huge sums of money to buy their way into office. Old-money oligarchs could rely on their inheritances and earnings from their lands and other businesses. However, newer politicians, such as Ferdinand Marcos, and local warlords who were outside the established oligarchy had to find ways to raise money quickly and massively. Aside from plundering state coffers, politicians supplemented their incomes by turning to a variety of criminal activities, such as smuggling, gambling, especially *jueteng*, or illegal numbers game, a variety of protection rackets, and more recently, drug dealing, especially crystal meth called *shabu*. Today, the

cost of elections has become so steep that one would have to be many times a millionaire, or enjoy the patronage of one or several, to run even for local offices, much less the presidency (Mojares 1986; McCoy 2009; Hedman and Sidel 2000; Abinales and Amoroso 2017; Rafael 2000).

Finally, the third way that ruling elites dealt with the expansion of the franchise was to intensify the use of violence, intimidating and often assassinating their rivals. For this, they relied on their bodyguards and private armies recruited from former guerrillas who fought the Japanese, local police forces, lumpen proletariats, criminal gang members, former communist fighters, and other assorted thugs.

Postwar elections were thus characterised by the widespread use of ‘guns, goons and gold’. Rather than peaceful transitions to power, elections increasingly unleashed as much money as blood. And winners were invariably tainted with charges of corruption as they assumed office even as they would turn around and accuse their opponents of being similarly corrupt. Corruption was normalised both as a means to win elections and as a major electoral issue to hurl at one’s opponents. Once again, the irony: candidates railed against corruption even as they relied on corrupt practices to win.

### **From Martial Law to Elite Democracy**

Ferdinand Marcos came into office precisely by promising to do away with corruption. At the same time, he proved to be the most corrupt politician to win the election of 1965 and win reelection in 1969. Allied with certain elements of the Stalinist Communist Party, Marcos sought to ‘revolutionise’ Philippine society (Scalice 2017). He did so principally by declaring Martial Law in 1972 and proceeded to steal the country blind in order to maintain his power. Along the way, he rewrote the constitution to his liking, ruled largely by

executive order, abolished Congress, installed a rubberstamp Parliament and Supreme Court. At the same time, he ordered the disarming of an array of private armies to neutralise his elite rivals on his right even as he unleashed the Armed Forces of the Philippines against student activists, workers, peasants, and communists on his left. In a bid to monopolise the use of violence, Marcos turned the Philippine military and the Constabulary into his own private army to do his bidding (Wurfel 1988; Mojares 2017; McCoy 2009; Hedman and Sidel 2000; Abinales and Amoroso 2017).



**Figure 2: Ferdinand Marcos pauses to wave to the people waiting to welcome him as he arrives for a visit to Washington DC, 1983.**

Source: [The US National Archives](#).

After two decades in power, Marcos was finally overthrown by a nonviolent uprising called ‘People Power’ in Manila. This civilian-led uprising came on the heels of a failed military coup. It was initially provoked, however, by Marcos’s rash decision to hold snap elections that he declared on American TV in order to prove to his Washington critics that he was still popular. But he vastly underestimated the necrological aura that surrounded Cory Aquino, widowed after her husband and chief challenger of Marcos, Ninoy Aquino, was

assassinated on the airport tarmac as he returned from exile in Boston in August of 1983. Marcos did what he had always done: he tried to steal the election by rigging the computer tabulation of the results. The public exposure of manual and electronic ballot stuffing by disheartened computer tabulators and by the media further contributed to triggering the uprising that overthrew Marcos. Just as rigging elections allowed him to seize power, so did its exposure bring him down (Thompson 1995).

With the end of Martial Law, electoral practices in the post-Marcos era resumed much of their pre-Marcosian patterns. Such was not surprising since the end of Marcos marked not a revolution but a restoration of the old oligarchy side by side with the new rich presiding over a divided society where over a third of the population lived below the poverty line. Elections continued to be marked by fraud and violence. Yet, there was also something different (David 2013; McCoy 2009; Kerkvliet and Mojares 1992; Anderson 1988). Aside from their rampant brutality and mindboggling thievery, the Marcos years left behind three related legacies.

One was the spectacular growth of the Maoist Communist Party and their armed wing, the New People’s Army led by former English professor and teacher of Rodrigo Duterte, Jose Maria Sison. The communists offered the best, and often, the only organised resistance movement during the dark days of Martial Law, and Marcos was often referred to as their single best recruiter. At the same time, the Stalinist leadership of the Party had long worked to hasten the coming of Martial Law in order to intensify oppression and thereby drive people to join the Party. Indeed, towards the end of Martial Law, the communists had managed to control over 20 per cent of the countryside and had extensive networks of allies above ground organised into an urban coalition called the National Democratic Front.

Holding fast, against all odds, to their strategy of ‘protracted people’s war’ (PPW) designed to take the cities by surrounding the countryside, the Maoist insurgency continues to operate on a smaller scale with far less support in several areas of the country, especially in Northern Mindanao (Abinales and Amoroso 2017; Scalice 2017; Quimpo 2012).

The second legacy was the spread of organised Muslim separatist movements led by Nur Misuari, who founded the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1972 in the wake of the infamous and controversial Jabidah Massacre whereby Muslim military recruits were allegedly killed by their military trainers for reasons that remain vague to this day. This massacre came on the heels of centuries-long tensions between Muslim peoples and Christian settlers in Mindanao, whereby the latter were largely seen to be favoured by the Christian government in Manila while the former woefully neglected and marginalised. Since Marcos, the government response has alternated between diplomacy and scorched-earth policy. The latest attempt to pass a Bangsa Moro Law that would grant greater political, economic, and religious autonomy to the predominantly Muslim areas has come with relentless military attacks in areas like Marawi in Western Mindanao where Islamic State-inspired groups have sought to take control. Albeit splintered into several factions, the separatist movement thus continues to this day. Younger members aided by a few foreign fighters are daily radicalised by both global jihadist movements and the continuing conditions of violence and poverty widely blamed on both local Muslim elites and the Manila government. To counter these so-called terrorist activities, Duterte has declared Martial Law in Mindanao (appropriately while on a visit to Putin’s Russia) with the approval of both the Congress and the Supreme Court. In Mindanao, the history of electoral politics has gone full circle, returning to the authoritarianism of the Marcos years (Lara

2014; Hutchcroft 2016).

The third legacy of the Marcos years was the fracturing of the military. Racked by corruption and favouritism, the officer corps was split between Marcos’ cronies who benefitted from his wealth and power, and disillusioned and highly professional soldiers who held the latter in contempt and had sought to overthrow Marcos. Divided, demoralised, and politicised, the military found itself fighting a two-front war: the communists and the Muslim separatist rebellion in the south. To remedy their weakness, they began to rely on paramilitary groups and volunteer militias that they armed and paid for. Let loose on the population, such undisciplined forces terrorised towns and preyed upon their residents, quickly devolving into death squads and vigilantes. In addition, the faction in the military who called themselves the Reformed Armed Forces Movement (RAM) had triggered the coup attempt against Marcos that led to the People Power uprising. In the wake of the Marcos dictatorship, they would launch a series of coups seeking to topple Aquino’s government between 1987 to 1989.



**Figure 3: A photo from the People Power uprising in 1986. Source: Gov.ph via [Rappler](#).**

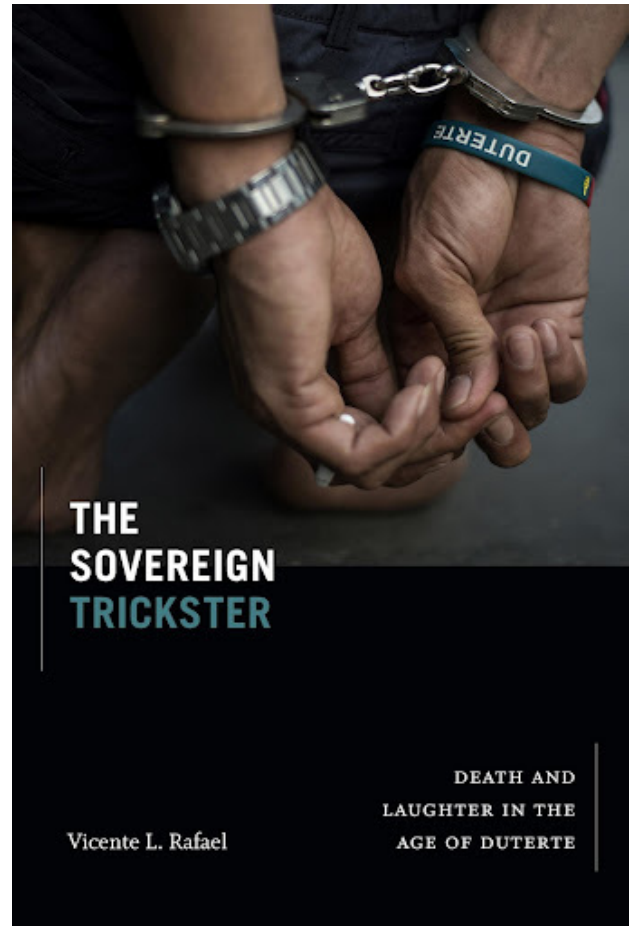


Under Cory Aquino (1986–92), there was an initial attempt to get rid of these armed groups and negotiate with the Communist Party. However, beset by coup attempts from a military hostile to the left, peace talks eventually broke down, and fighting resumed. Supplementing an emboldened military, Cory tolerated the formation of rightwing civilian volunteers, many of whom were drawn from overlapping social groups: lumpens, former rebels, and gang members. They were formed and funded with the aid and protection of local police and the military. Anti-communist death squads proliferated in areas where the communists were strongest and the rate of extrajudicial killings rivalled those of Marcos’s time (Coronel 1993; Abinales and Amoroso 2017).

Thus can we see the intertwined histories of elections, money, and violence in the post-war Philippines. Rooted in colonial and postcolonial history, all three are essential elements in the formation of the state and the making of civil society. During the transition from Marcos to Aquino, that is, from the end of authoritarian rule to the restoration of elite democracy, the post-Martial Law oligarchy turned to civilian volunteers, organised and sponsored by the police and the military, as anti-communist vigilantes. Such death squads were the other side, the dark side if you will, of People Power.

Originally directed against Marcos, populist violence was now aimed at the communists and assorted criminal gangs. Under succeeding presidents, the police and their volunteers were tacitly empowered to carry out summary executions of suspected communist leaders, while local elites subcontracted death squads to deal with labour leaders, journalists, and rival elites. Gruesome displays of violence—severed heads and mutilated corpses displayed on roadways—was the signature of vigilante groups like Alsa Masa in places like

Davao where the mayor then was none other than Rodrigo Duterte (Coronel 1993).



**Figure 4: Cover of Vicente L. Rafael’s *The Sovereign Trickster: Death and Laughter in the Age of Duterte*, published by Duke University Press in 2022.**

President Duterte made his reputation as the tough-talking mayor of Davao by negotiating with both vigilantes and communists, absorbing elements of both into his regime. According to various reports, he, or at least those around him, recruited former NPAs and other lumpen types to serve as paramilitary forces in dealing with a new enemy: drug lords and drug users. After having served as prosecutor, he became



vice-mayor of Davao. Duterte's mother had been a strident opponent of Marcos (even as his father served in his cabinet). He subsequently ran for mayor and has won every election since then, including a brief stint in Congress. Coming from the ranks of provincial elites, Duterte's father, Vicente, was also the governor of Davao province and was a prominent cabinet member of Marcos's government. While he was President, Rodrigo's daughter, Sarah, served as the mayor of Davao (she is now vice president), his youngest son Sebastian as vice-mayor (he is now mayor), and his eldest son, Paolo, served in Congress. Such family ties, always crucial in Philippine politics, clearly situates Duterte as part of a political dynasty—and thus part of the very oligarchy that he is given to condemning in his speeches. His reputation as 'the Punisher' emerged at the crossroads of democratic transition and counterinsurgency, when 'People Power' was taken to mean that ordinary people would be empowered to act on behalf of the state and kill its designated enemies. In a way, death squads have become the perverse doubles of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), since both share a parallel history in the outsourcing state functions (Paddock 2017; Heyderian 2018; Curato, ed. 2017).

Spanish and American colonialism followed by the postcolonial Republic thus established the historical conditions for Philippine elections. By intensifying the circulation of money, elections have called for, as much as they have enabled, the mass mobilisation of voters. But they also intensify the proliferation of armed vigilantes and death squads to coerce political rivals and run rackets for the accumulation of money. Regarded in the late 1980s as a much-needed supplement to the military's counterinsurgency war, they have now morphed into the death squads serving as essential supplements to the police in Duterte's war against drugs. Accompanying electoral contests, especially after World War II, death squads, vigilantes, paramilitary volunteers of all sorts have long

been an integral, though disavowed, feature of the state.

### Politics by Way of Necropower

As with other modern states, the Philippine state has pursued what seems like a contradictory course: it has simultaneously sought to monopolise the use of violence even as it outsources it, using uncivil means to secure civil society. The legal and the illegal constantly blur into one other, as the language of the President, both during and after the elections, often sounds like the rhetoric of a gangster. The police often double as vigilantes when they are not moonlighting as racketeers, working both within and outside the cover of law. Extrajudicial killings, sold to the public as a remedy to the inefficient and corrupt legal system, normalise mass murder, especially of the poor, even as it foregrounds fear as a primary technique of governing. Public resources are used to forge private armies—a kind of public-private-partnership for the efficient delivery of justice in the way of assassinations. Exercising a kind of biopower, the state seeks to secure the life of its citizens. But it does so by way of a necropower, whereby the state designates accursed others as social enemies destined for abjection and disposal.

To conclude, I want to return to the idea I began with—that of elections as Janus-faced especially visible in countries like the Philippines that bear the deep traces of a history of colonialism. Taking place amid conditions of socioeconomic inequality, a culture of impunity and deeply entrenched practices of political patronage and routine fraud, elections unsurprisingly produce conservative results. At the same time, elections are also moments of intense popular mobilisations that stimulate expectations. Such expectations vary. From the perspective of the ordinary people who are often regarded as passive objects to be exploited and set aside

rather than active participants in the political process, elections arouse the possibility that things may be different.

Such expectations arguably swept Rodrigo Duterte into the presidency in 2016 by an impressive plurality of votes by an electorate who saw him as a strongman who could address their fears of criminality amid conditions of precarity. As he prepared to step down, his approval rating remained high—as much as 85 per cent in some of the last polls before the end of his presidency—despite his failure to deliver on many of his promises, especially ridding the country of drugs. In the recent elections, the opposition made up of Leni Robredo and Francisco Pangilinan put up a valiant fight propelled by enthusiastic bands of volunteers to restore liberal democracy. But they fared badly against the Marcos-Duterte tandem who were widely perceived as continuing Duterte’s authoritarian legacy. The cross-class popularity of Bongbong and Sara suggests that Filipino political culture, deeply entrenched in centuries of colonial history, skews towards reproducing social hierarchy, shoring up an ideology of inequality that allows for patronage and strongman rule, and a pronounced preference for security and policing over deliberative democracy and broad-based accountability. The electoral system as it is currently structured lends itself to replicating this deeply conservative and reactionary political culture even as it is capable of periodically mobilising mass resistance and radical hope. Offering possibilities for change by momentarily gathering new imagined communities of hospitality and generosity, elections nonetheless tend to return us to variations of the colonial-authoritarian nightmare from which at the moment there seems to be no escape.

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