

Philippines Presidential Campaign: Biggest threat to democracy is using fear of a Duterte win to justify stealing elections

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The tough-talking Davao mayor and survey front-runner has sparked fears of a dictatorial ruler, but in the view of intellectual leader and Senate candidate Walden Bello, the biggest threat to democracy - more than the prospect of Duterte winning fairly - is a subliminal campaign to use fear of a Duterte presidency to justify stealing the elections. True democracy includes allowing people to make mistakes, he asserts.

Like many advocates of human rights, I am very troubled by the prospect of a Duterte presidency, and I have expressed a number of times my strong disapproval of Mayor Rodrigo Duterte's stands on due process, labor, women, and foreign policy.

But at this point, I am more troubled by the increasingly expressed opinion that the democratic process has run out of control, that it may bring to power someone who does not share values deemed to be universal.

There are increasing references to the fact that Hitler came to power via elections in 1933. There are more and more comparisons of the Duterte for President movement to fascist movements in the past. This may well be the case, but, hey, these are the risks of being a democracy.

Probably for the first time ever in our country, vast numbers of people are planning to use the ballot box as a mechanism of protest.

It is clear that they have had enough of the hypocrisy and double standards of Daang Matuwid, and this is one of the reasons they are going for Duterte.

I broke with the Aquino government and resigned from Congress in March 2015 because I felt that the administration's double standards in dealing with corruption were eroding not only the credibility of Daang Matuwid but deepening people's distrust of politics. Moralism and hypocrisy are always a deadly combination. When administrative ineptitude is added into the mix, it becomes a veritable witches' brew that poisons the political process.

I knew that many shared my concerns, but I thought they had turned to cynicism, expecting that the elite democratic process would produce more of the same hopeless mess. Now someone has catalyzed all that cynicism, anger, and disgust that was just below the surface and converted it into an electoral insurgency. What Duterte actually stands for is drowned out by what people wish him to be: the bearer of their fears and hopes and the sword that will bring about the radical measures they

feel are necessary to contain the rot of the system. The pro-Duterte voters may be mistaken in their choice of a champion, but democracy is all about allowing people to make their choice, even if this is mistaken.

Is Duterte the greatest threat to our democracy at this point? He poses a threat, but the biggest threat we face at this juncture is that, playing on the fears of many people of a Duterte presidency, the Liberal Party machinery, which is universally acknowledged to be the most formidable in the country, is gearing up to try to steal the elections. The prospect of a Duterte victory is being used to persuade people to countenance subversion of the electoral process.

Is this being paranoid? Hardly. Already, LP operatives have admitted, Secretary Butch Abad has been going around distributing “*bala*” or government largesse to local officials to ensure a Roxas victory. Here in the province where I am campaigning, non-partisan sources have expressed dismay that mayors are being handed P5,000 each of government money and thousands more via late releases of “Bottom-Up-Budgeting” (BUB) funds to ensure that their voters go for Roxas. In Pampanga, LP bankroller Gov. Lilia Pineda in Pampanga, also known as the *jueteng* queen, has disbursed massive amounts to wavering local officials to ensure a straight LP ticket. Aquino, Abad, Pineda and the whole Daang Matuwid gang would all face prosecution should the administration candidate lose to any of the rival candidates, so they have their own sordid reasons to try to subvert the will of the people.

That is something that must not be allowed to happen. An effort to install Roxas as president at all costs will not only severely damage democracy. It will be deeply destabilizing, producing a government with very little legitimacy. Moreover, as one political figure told me, “You risk breaking up the country, with Mindanao most likely going its own way.”

A Duterte presidency may be a great threat to our values, but let us reject those who spread the suggestion that subversion of the democratic process might be needed to save democracy.

Democracy may not always yield the best results. It may not even yield good results. But thwarting the people’s will by hijacking the elections will certainly produce the worst results.

I do not agree with Mayor Duterte’s approach to problems. I fear the threat that a Duterte presidency may pose to values I hold dear. But let us cross that bridge when we come to it. At this juncture, let us focus on the more immediate threat to our democracy: its subversion by a powerful machinery bent on holding on to power at all costs.

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P.S.

* InterAksyon.com. The online news portal of TV5. May 3, 2016 9:58 AM:
<http://interaksyon.com/article/127232/op-ed-biggest-threat-to-democracy-is-using-fear-of-a-duterte-win-to-justify-stealing-elections>

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