



REVIEWS

Jennifer Conroy Franco. *Campaigning for democracy: Grassroots citizenship movements, less-than-democratic elections, and regime transition in the Philippines*. Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000. 429pp.

It is a widespread assumption that elections and democratization always go together. Electoral exercises have been the ultimate barometer of democratic development as espoused by academic and policy circles. To some extent, the quality of a democratic regime is ultimately judged by how free and fair it conducts its polls. Nevertheless, to what extent have there been attempts to probe into their actual linkages? In this book, the democratizing role of elections is subjected to empirical scrutiny using the Philippines as a case study.

Franco places elections under a political microscope in order to deduce its actual contribution to the process of democratization in the Philippines. This book brings into focus the fact that despite an atmosphere of exclusion and constraint, they still have the ability to contribute to the democracy project. It refutes the widely accepted argument that elections needed to be situated within purely democratic settings in order to arrive at favorable outcomes. By analyzing the elections held during the Marcos regime, it claims that regardless of their restricted nature, they were still able to influence the growth of a viable democratic opposition that would be crucial in the transition to democratic rule. Franco clearly criticizes the efficacy of the legitimizing effect that elections provide to authoritarian rule in the end.

Moreover, the analysis extends to the first elections held after the February 1986 “People Power Revolt” in order to demonstrate the fact that highly repressive conditions and practices are carried over in the post-transition regime, even though democracy was deemed officially restored. This is where Franco introduces the argument that there is a limitation in not looking beyond the formalities of a transition from authoritarian rule since the state of affairs does not quickly change at the local level. Through an in-depth study of electoral dynamics in two rural districts, the author showed that elections remain highly constrained political events as shown in the continued dominance of local elites, the pervasiveness of political coercion and violence, and the fragmentation of the local opposition.

The book has eight chapters but could be thematically divided into three sections. The first section is a literature review on democratization and the role of elections. It is in this exercise that Franco clearly locates her niche in the discourse by identifying the contending schools on the subject matter and their apparent weaknesses. A significant insight drawn from this section is the error in adopting the “assumption of homogeneity” across a democratizing regime. Thus, the establishment of national competitive elections does not necessarily result in democratic outcomes system-wide as authoritarian enclaves in the provinces could exist, as well as “gray areas” between dictatorships and full-blown democracy.

The second section spans five chapters and gives a comprehensive presentation of Philippine political history from the period of colonial rule until the collapse of authoritarianism. By employing a historical approach, it traces how the land-based ruling elite entrenched their political dominance with the approbation of colonial authorities. It is therefore not difficult to arrive at an understanding about the nature of the democracy that was consequently established given the prevalence of patronage under a constructed clientelist regime. Franco stresses the point that elections merely serve as mechanisms to give elite rule a semblance of popular consent. Although this maybe the case, the author also concurs with Kerkvliet’s (1997) hypothesis that even if the practice of elections leaves much to be desired, there is still the pervading belief among the electorate that it is still the most accepted means of political succession.

This section also features an extensive discussion of the imposition of authoritarian rule in 1972 and the efforts of Marcos to centralize the flow of patronage as seen in his agrarian reform agenda and abolition

of the legislature. Using the typology developed in the first part of the book, Franco argued that this period shifted the country from its classification as a clientelist electoral regime to an electoral authoritarian one. Franco laid bare the dynamics behind the various elections that were held in order to bestow legitimacy to the regime that alienated much of the traditional elite. The overall objective was “to reinforce his political monopoly” and in turn maintain the support and goodwill of the international community, particularly the United States government. However, it was not the goal of the book to analyze the various exercises of the ballot through prevailing paradigms in Philippine politics such as the patrimonial or elite and the neocolonial or dependency frameworks.

An extensive documentation of the efforts of various movements from basic sectors such as labor, urban poor, and the rural peasantry was shown in order to form a broad democratic opposition that mobilized their ranks to challenge Marcos. This blow-by-blow account complements the study made by Thompson (1995) on the role of elite opposition in the country’s transition to democracy since the book’s emphasis was on grassroots organization and campaigning in the countryside. Another contribution of the book is its knowledge on the politics of the Philippine Left, the dynamics that occurred within its various blocs, and the ensuing negotiations with the traditional elite in the anti-dictatorship struggle.

The third section examines the Aquino transition regime in general but focuses on two provincial districts wherein progressive candidates attempted to curb the power of local elites. Franco props up the assessment of some analysts that the post-Marcos order reflected to a great extent a restoration of pre-martial law elite dominance. The book’s specific indicator was the lack of political will on the part of Aquino to use her tremendous powers to embark on a revolutionary land reform program, in which she herself was a vital stakeholder, and the inability of the reform-oriented groups to influence the national debate on this issue to favor the Filipino peasantry. This leaves most of them to shift to an electoral strategy by contesting political power at the local level.

It is in this part of the book that Franco was able to present the data that she gathered from intensive fieldwork. It is here that the book’s analytical framework was used in explaining the success (or failure) of the electoral challenge by progressive candidates. The factors that are useful in assessing whether they could achieve favorable outcomes are

the changing local elite dynamics, democratic opposition unity, and the existence of adequate political resources. The discussion showed that the two cases had divergent outcomes because of certain differences in the three factors. A successful challenge to traditional elite rule was warranted by a reduction in the power of traditional elite, a unified opposition, and the existence of networks across the locality.

It is worth noting that the author employs several concepts in social movements theory such as political opportunity structures in this study. Franco's main argument is anchored on her treatment of elections as political opportunities to challenge authoritarian and exclusionary political practices and thus improve the genuine access to democratic processes. The book, however, should have also applied other concepts such as repertoires of convention, mobilizing structures, and collective action frames (Tarrow 1994). This would have blended well in her explanation of the success or failure of the progressive challenge to elite dominance in the cases studies.

Another strong point of the book is due consideration of structure and agency in order to arrive at a balanced analysis. By using a process-oriented and actor-driven approach, Franco stresses the importance of grassroots mobilization and popular support in contending political power. In her narratives on the efforts of the democratic opposition at both the national and local levels, Franco brings home the significant point that democratization is a struggle among individuals, whether elites, groups, or even the masses. However, the book is also sensitive to the institutional environment in which such a contentious process is embedded. As such, Franco also takes into account the role of political institutions such as the legislature and local governments. It must be noted however that electoral institutions such as political parties and election authorities were not that emphasized.

Franco's effort to probe into the linkages between electoral exercises and Philippine democratization is a welcome addition to literature on the subject matter. There is no doubt that its central claims remain relevant given prevailing norms and practices surrounding the conduct of elections. Uneven democratization continues to pervade across the country with elections maintaining some of its authoritarian and exclusionary features. In the recently concluded 2004 elections alone, anecdotal evidence of electoral fraud and violence makes this book a compelling read to analysts, observers, and students of Philippine politics. As such, those in search of a framework to use in examining the dynamics and outcomes of the recently

concluded 2004 elections, especially at the local level, may find Franco's study a possible analytic tool. —**ARIES A. ARUGAY**, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES DILIMAN.

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Melinda Quintos de Jesus and Luis V. Teodoro, eds. *Citizen's media monitor: A report on the campaign and elections coverage in the Philippines 2004*. Quezon City: Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, 2004. 199 pp .

The book is the product of an unprecedented exercise where the public takes the role of monitoring the media coverage of the 2004 Philippine national elections. Initiated by the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), the project pooled together resources from various nongovernment organizations (NGOs), the academe, and the general public to assess the performance of the Philippine free press vis-à-vis fairness, accuracy and balance in its reporting and commentary. Focusing on print and broadcast media, the methodology used was primarily content analysis of front page headlines for newspapers and television news and public affairs programs. Time-keeping analysis was also undertaken for broadcast media.

The monitoring covers two of the giant broadcast media companies (GMA 7 and ABS-CBN 2) and three Metro Manila-based broadsheets (*Manila Bulletin*, the *Philippine Star* and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*) for the campaign coverage. For television, focus is placed particularly on news programs (*Saksi* [Witness] and *Front Page/24 Oras* of GMA 7; *TV Patrol* and *Insider* of ABS-CBN 2; *The World Tonight* of the ABS-CBN News Channel [24-hour cable news channel]; and, *News Central* of Studio 23) and public affairs programs (*Dong Puno Live* of ABS-CBN 2 and *I-Witness*