

TALK *of the* TOWN

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Editor Juan V. Sarmiento Jr.

Get ready for the May 14 polls

Positions at stake

Senator 12	Member, House of Representatives 212	53
	District	Party-list
Governor 79	Vice Governor 79	Member 758
		Sangguniang Panlalawigan
City Mayor 117	City Vice Mayor 117	Member 1,276
		Sangguniang Panlungsod
Town Mayor 1,506	Town Vice Mayor 1,506	Member 12,016
		Sangguniang Bayan

* 2004 FIGURES ** BASED ON NSCB FIGURES AS OF SEPT. 2006

In the 2004 elections, 48 persons ran for senator; 649 for representative; 284 for governor, 227 for vice governor, 2,107 for provincial board member, 4,256 for mayor, 4,306 for vice mayor and 38,274 for councilor.

Spending limits

THE GOVERNMENT has imposed certain limitations on candidates to ensure equal campaign opportunities.

The spending limit for someone running in the 2007 elections is P3 for each voter registered in the constituency where he or she filed a certificate of candidacy. Political parties and independent candidates can spend P5 for every such voter.

In the case of presidential elections, those running for president or vice president can spend P10 per voter.

As of April 2006, there were 43,522,634 registered voters in the country. This means that someone running for senator (who is affiliated with a political party) can spend as much as P130,567,902 for his or her campaign. An independent senatorial candidate can shell out at most P217,613,170.

Election calendar

DATE / PERIOD	ACTIVITIES
Jan. 14 to June 13	● Election period
Jan. 15 to Feb. 12	● Filing of certificates of candidacy for senator; filing of manifestations of intent to participate in the party-list election
Jan. 15 to March 29	● Filing of candidacies for local positions, including seats in the House of Representatives
Feb. 13	● Posting of the certified list of voters
Feb. 13 to May 12	● Campaign period for aspiring senators and party-list groups
March 30	● Deadline for submission of names of party-list nominees
March 30 to April 14	● Inspection, verification and sealing of precinct book of voters
March 30 to May 12	● Campaign period for aspiring members of the House of Representatives and for those seeking provincial, city and municipal posts
April 14 (host country time) to May 14 (Philippine time)	● Casting of votes for overseas absentee voters
April 28 to April 30	● Casting of votes for local absentee voters
May 14 (7 a.m. to 3 p.m.)	● Casting of votes
May 15 to June 13	● Filing of sworn statements of election contributions and expenditures

Prohibited acts

DATE / PERIOD	ACT
Jan. 14 to June 13	● Bearing of firearms or other deadly weapons in public places and private vehicles, unless authorized by the Commission on Elections ● Use of security personnel by candidates, unless assigned by Comelec ● Organization or maintenance of civilian security forces ● Suspension of elective local officials ● Transfer of civil service officers and employees ● Alteration of precinct territory or establishment of a new precinct ● Issuance, suspension or cancellation of franchise or permit to operate a radio or television station ● Local shooting competitions
Feb. 13 to May 14	● Giving donations or gifts in cash or kind ● Use of armored land, water or air craft
March 30 to May 14	● Constructing public infrastructure and issuing treasury warrants or similar devices for future undertaking chargeable against public funds ● Hiring of new employees, creation of new positions, promotion, and giving of salary increase or privileges
April 5 to April 6	● Campaigning (Maundy Thursday and Good Friday)
May 13 to May 14	● Campaigning ● Selling, offering or taking intoxicating liquor ● Giving or accepting free transportation, food, drinks and things of value
May 14	● Soliciting votes or undertaking any propaganda for or against any candidate or party within 30 meters of polling places ● Holding of fairs, cockfights, horse races or similar sports ● Opening of stalls selling merchandise or refreshments within a radius of 30 meters from polling places

SYNCHRONIZED NATIONAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS FOR MORE THAN 17,000 positions are scheduled for the second Monday of May. Half the seats in the Senate and all the seats in the House of Representatives are at stake.

That the elections are to be conducted is a victory for people who opposed efforts by Malacañang and its allies to amend the Constitution to pave the way for a shift to a parliamentary form of government.

Had the signature campaign for Charter change or moves in the House to convene itself into a constituent assembly succeeded, the midterm elections would have been scrapped, and the Senate abolished.

Supporters of President Macapagal-Arroyo favor a shift to a parliamentary form of government because, among other reasons, this would remove the opposition's threat of impeaching her under the present bicameral presidential system.

The elections can be seen either as a vote of confidence for Ms Arroyo, who has survived attempts at impeaching her over the past two years, or a vote of confidence for those who oppose her.

Like in past electoral exercises, the votes cast on May 14 will be counted manually and slowly because the Commission on Elections has neither the time nor the money to automate the polls.

Party-list

Starting 1998, Filipino voters have elected into Congress representatives of national, regional and sectoral parties under the party-list system.

The system, established by Republic Act No. 7941 (the Party-List System Act of 1995), enables Filipinos belonging to marginalized sectors to take part in legislation.

Party-list representatives should constitute 20 percent of the total number of members of the House of Representatives. The number of seats given to each winning party depends on the number of votes cast for it. Each party is entitled to not more than three seats.

Absentee voting

Philippine elections saw a first in 2004, when qualified Filipino citizens abroad were able to vote for president, vice president, senators and party-list representatives, by virtue of Republic Act No. 9189 or the Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003.

However, only some four percent or 300,000 of the 7.5 million Filipinos abroad enlisted during the two-month registration period.

The absentee voting option is also available for members of the armed forces, police and government service, who have been assigned temporarily to places where they are not registered voters to perform election duties. However, they are allowed to vote only for president, vice president, senators and party-list representatives.

Automation

The Commission on Elections has tried but failed to have elections automated. The Supreme Court scrapped in 2002 the P6.6-billion contract for computerization of the voters' registration list, which was awarded to the Photokina group in 2000. Congress earlier reserved only P1 billion for the project.

In 2004, the high court voided the P1.3-billion contract that the Comelec had awarded to Mega Pacific eSolutions Inc. for the automation of the counting and canvassing of ballots. The Supreme Court found the company's counting machines vulnerable to "election fraud on a massive scale by means of just a few key strokes."

Forms of cheating

- Vote padding and shaving
- Bribery
- Intimidation
- Illegal use of indelible ink
- Assuming the identity of another voter and voting in his or her name
- Snatching of ballot boxes and election paraphernalia
- Marking ballots so these would be considered "spoiled"
- Spreading false reports about withdrawals or disqualifications of candidates
- De-listing voters identified with a rival party
- Changing location of precincts

Violence

During the 2004 elections, almost 150 election-related deaths were recorded by the Philippine National Police. Twenty-nine of the fatalities were politicians. In 2001, about 110 were killed, 31 of whom were politicians.

Political clans

Despite the 1987 Constitution's prohibition against political dynasties, government seats are still being passed among family members. According to the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism's "The Rule Makers: How the Wealthy and Well-born Dominate Congress (2004)," 40 percent of the representatives in post-Marcos congresses are relatives of previous legislators.

Cyril L. Bonabente, Inquirer Research

Voter turnout, precincts, counting machines

43.5 million

Registered voters
(as of 2004)

77% | 295,552

Voter turnout
(May 2004)Total number of precincts
(2004)

300,000

Registered absentee voters abroad
(as of 2004)

P1.3 billion

Mega Pacific automation deal
junked by the Supreme Court three years ago

1,600

Number of unused Mega Pacific counting machines

Powers of the Comelec

THE CONDUCT of polls is supervised by the Commission on Elections, an independent body created in 1940 by an amendment to the 1935 Constitution. The current Constitution has given Comelec jurisdiction over electoral contests and the power to depurify, with the President's concurrence, law enforcement agencies including the Armed Forces of the Philippines to ensure peaceful and honest elections.

Ads, posters, streamers

The Fair Election Act of 2001 (Republic Act No. 9006) specifies the size and duration of lawful election propaganda:

ELECTION PROPAGANDA	MAXIMUM SIZE/DURATION
Printed materials (pamphlets, cards, stickers...)	8.5 in. wide and 14 in. long
Posters	2 ft by 3 ft
Streamers announcing a public meeting*	3 ft by 8 ft
Print advertisements	● Broadsheet: one-fourth of a page ● Tabloid: half a page (may appear at most thrice a week)
TV ads	● National candidate/political party: 120 min ● Local candidate/party: 60 min
Radio ads	● National candidate/party: 180 min ● Local candidate/party: 90 min
Common poster areas for parties	12 ft by 16 ft in no more than 10 public places
Common poster areas for independent aspirants	4 ft by 6 ft in no more than 10 public places

* may be displayed five days before the event, and should be removed within 24 hours after the event. The law also requires media personalities running for office or campaigning for a candidate or party to resign or take a leave of absence from work during the campaign period. Airing of movies or documentaries portraying the life of a candidate or storming a candidate is likewise banned.