Toward an ‘Ecosystemic’ Approach to Voters’ Education

Francis Isaac
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About the Author

Francis Isaac is the Research and Knowledge Specialist of G-Watch, specializing in citizen action and social movements. He holds a master’s degree in international studies from De La Salle University (Manila) and a bachelor’s degree in political science from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. When he is not reading or writing behind his desk, he is most likely on his bicycle enjoying the outdoors.

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G-Watch Contact Information

28-A Matapat Street, Pinyahan, Diliman, Quezon City 1100
government_watch@yahoo.com | +63-917-186-0298 | +632-7796-9922
Website: www.g-watch.org
Facebook: @gwatch_ph
Twitter: @gwatch_ph
In early September 2021, the Archdiocese of Manila launched a new voters’ education initiative called “1Godly Vote.” Speaking virtually via Zoom, convenor Fr. Jerome Secillano said that the campaign aims to inform voters on the stand of candidates on various issues and will use different media platforms to accomplish this task.

While meant “to achieve a renewed kind of politics” that focuses on “the concerns and needs of the weak” (Lopez 2021), such efforts are hardly uncommon in the Philippines. In fact, separate voters’ education activities are often conducted by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and by various citizens’ groups months before the actual polls.

Ironically, despite these numerous initiatives, the Philippines continues to suffer from widespread poverty and from a highly dysfunctional political system. This study seeks to untangle this dilemma by examining previous voters’ education campaigns and by looking at the approaches that they had adopted. It will also reflect on a possible alternative approach that could better empower Filipino voters and advance accountability.

But first, a bit of background is in order.

**Philippine Elections**

One of the earliest attempts at voters’ education occurred during the early 1950s, following the formation of the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL). Established through an unlikely alliance of business executives and World War II veterans, NAMFREL emerged after the bitterly contested presidential elections of 1949, which was reportedly characterized...
by “rampant electoral manipulation and blatant voter intimidation” (Hedman 2006: 44).

Hoping to “protect the ballot and save the nation,” the newly established election watchdog mobilized more than 5,000 volunteers in more than 500 cities and municipalities to organize various fraud-prevention activities, including “civic consciousness caucuses” (ibid.: 47). NAMFREL’s election poll watching efforts eventually helped frustrate Elpidio Quirino’s re-election bid and enabled Ramon Magsaysay to win the presidency in 1953.

Yet, in spite of ongoing voters’ education, a self-confessed murderer was still elected to the presidency in 2016, and Philippine politics remain dominated by a small circle of political dynasties that largely rely on patronage and violence to remain in power. This problem was highlighted in October 2015 when Duterte—during an interview with Rappler’s Maria Ressa—admitted that he had killed at least three people in the previous three months. When asked in the same interview to confirm if he had executed 700 people in cold blood, Duterte replied in Tagalog, “I killed 700? They underestimated the figures...It’s around 1,700” (Rappler.com 2016).

According to Nathan Quimpo, adjunct professor of political science at the University of Tsukuba, Duterte’s tough and impudent approach reflects his “perverse view of law and order” and his own brand of boss rule1 (2017: 147). Quimpo, however, points out that while Duterte claims to be a man of the people, he actually relies on the same system of patronage “to maintain a huge majority for the administration in both houses of Congress” (2020). Because of the President’s inability to abate the “systemic plunder of government resources,” the Philippines can still be considered as a predatory regime and under the control of a rapacious oligarchic elite (Quimpo 2009: 335).

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The extent of their dominance can be seen in the successive composition of the Philippine Congress which has been dominated by some 160 families for more than a century. These dynasties, according to De La Salle University’s Julio Teehankee, “have had two or more members who have served in congress, and they account for nearly 20 percent or 424 of the 2,407 men and women who have been elected to the national legislature since 1907” (2012: 188).

Voters, therefore, encounter a pattern of repeating surnames, as the same political families vie for the same position every election time. And though electoral battles are formally decided by the electorate, political dynasties view the positions that they hold as part of the family heirloom that have to be passed on to the next generation. Teehankee pointed this out in an earlier essay that he wrote for the Institute for Popular Democracy. Based largely on his doctoral dissertation, Teehankee argued that “like social status or economic resources, political offices are turned into assets that can be passed on to the next kin. Following the Filipino concept of pamana, political power is bequeathed to the heirs of dominant politicians as ipinamanang kapangyarihan” (1999: 14).

Dante Simbulan had also reached a similar conclusion after noticing that “the elite's hold on power is practically hereditary as it is transferred from grandfather to son or daughter and then to the wife or husband, brothers or sisters and on to their grandchildren and so on” (2006: xix). In the “Preface” of his now-classic book The Modern Principalia, Simbulan insisted that, “there is indeed a striking continuity of leadership recruitment from a tiny minority of elite families and, in spite of ‘democratic’ elections, members of these families (or the candidates they select to stand in for them) get ‘elected’ again and again” (ibid.: xviii-xix).

At first glance, it seems that even after seven decades of voters’ education, Filipinos keep on electing the same set of politicians who are largely responsible for their continuing social misery.

Unsurprisingly, the resilience of political dynasties has elicited considerable disdain from middle-class voters who portray the Filipino electorate, particularly the poor, as stupid or bobotante. Columnist Domini Torrevillas believed that this attitude stems from a shared sense of dismay by liberal-minded urbanites “at the way by which many voters do not seem to take their choice of public servants seriously” (2017).

Anna Bueno, however, argues differently, claiming that any attempt to denigrate voters as naive or dimwitted is not only

2 Bobotante is a portmanteau of the Filipino words bobo (stupid) and botante (voter).
“inherently flawed” but also “insensitively cruel” (2019). Writing for CNN Philippines, Bueno unpacked the inherent class bias in the term *bobotante*. Generally equated with low-income voters, they are often blamed for the sordid situation of the country due to their supposed tendency to “select ‘unqualified’ candidates for office” (ibid.). Yet, at the same time, the middle class is hardly criticized for its choices and is left to “rest comfortably in the privilege afforded to them by a system” that they themselves have failed to overturn (ibid.).

Osaka University’s Carmina Untalan further warns that the use of the term “*bobotante*” as a rhetorical device is dangerously anti-democratic, since it “forcefully diminishes the political space that relies on the principle of equality among un-equals” (2016). By attaching this “nebulous and abusive label” against those that one disagrees with, dialogue breaks down, and as a result, “the Filipino electorate, instead of being the beneficiary of elections, ironically becomes its main target” (ibid.).

Instead of faulting voters for the outcome of elections, a more fruitful approach is to have a deeper understanding of Philippine electoral politics. By doing so, reformers can identify the root cause of the problem and determine, later on, the most appropriate strategy for voters’ education.

**Voters’ Education in the Philippines**

If there is an agency of the government that is expected to conduct voters’ education, it is none other than the COMELEC. Though that task is not formally stipulated in the Constitution, the country’s official poll body occasionally conducts voters’
education seminars, often in partnership with civil society groups and the private sector. It also distributes posters and other printed paraphernalia to provide the public with basic poll-related information, such as the date and time of the elections, changes in the assignment of clustered precincts, and how ballot papers should be properly filled up.

Alongside these efforts by the COMELEC, lawyers’ group Libertas had also issued a pamphlet in 2009 “to inform the readers of the basics of the right to vote and the dynamics of the registration process” (2009: i). Titled A Quick Guide on Your Right to Vote, the brochure defined the meaning of suffrage, the voting qualifications in the Philippines, and provided a detailed walk-through into the registration process.

That same year, a group of Evangelical Christians called VoteNet Philippines launched its own voters’ education campaign to help the public “choose the kind of leaders that will help turn our nation around” (2009a).3 Inspired by their prophetic reading of the Scriptures, the group claims that “God created the Filipino nation for a purpose” and that the country is “destined to light the world” (2009b). In the materials that they prepared, VoteNet Philippines explained the qualifications needed to become a voter, the basic structure of the Philippine government, the function of its three branches, and the difference between manual and automated elections. The network also provided a set of standards called RIGHT, which voters can use in selecting candidates. The criteria stand for:

- Righteous governance – which refers to a candidate’s commitment to eradicate graft and corruption.
- Integrity – or a candidate’s willingness to take responsibility for his/her decisions.
- Giftedness – or a candidate’s innate capability to serve in a particular office.
- Heart – which is a candidate’s heart for God, for people and for our nation.
- Track record – which pertains to a candidate’s pattern of righteous governance, integrity, giftedness and heart.

While faith had been a key theme in the efforts of VoteNet Philippines, the Institute

3 On its website, VoteNet Philippines describes itself as a “network of Evangelical Christian organizations involved in non-partisan activities to educate voters and ensure the integrity of elections.” Its member-organizations include the Philippine Council for Evangelical Churches (PCEC), Christian Convergence for Good Governance (CCGG), Philippine Bible Society, Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), Philippine Campus Crusade for Christ (PCCC), and One Vote Movement.
for Political and Electoral Reform (IPER), on the other hand, adopted a more secular approach to voters’ education. A year before the country’s first automated elections in 2010, IPER released a module for “citizen-voters’ education” which emphasized that voters—as citizens—partake of sovereignty, and “can therefore make decisions that are binding on all...including the selection of leaders who will run the government” (2009: 3). It framed voting not only as a political process, but also as an essential human right guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in the 1987 Constitution. The module also discussed the history of elections in the Philippines and how the voting franchise was initially limited to “male, educated, and landed voters,” but was gradually expanded to cover the entire adult population through a sustained campaign by the peasantry and the early women’s movement (ibid.: 5). It then presented the specific features of the automated voting system, and provided a concise, yet step-by-step guide to this new manner of ballot-casting.

In addition to these efforts, the Catholic-affiliated Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) issued a voters’ guide in preparation for the 2013 midterm elections. Their presentation included a quote from the former president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), Archbishop Leonardo Legaspi, which reminded the electorate that, “it is through our votes that God wants to choose those who will exercise God-given powers over us” (PPCRV 2012). It also enumerated the 18,053 elective seats that had to be filled (from senator down to municipal councilor); and called on voters to help ensure a CHAMP elections (clean, honest, accurate, meaningful, and peaceful elections).

Three years later, PPCRV developed an enhanced module called One Good Vote, which urged voters to shun vote-buying because it “has derailed our growth as a nation” (2016: 18). This practice, they further argued, has also produced a highly cynical citizenry with a “notably low level of trust with the major institutions and primary political leaders” (ibid.: 17). Believing that “everything rises and falls with leadership” (ibid.: 18), the organization also encouraged the electorate to choose candidates using the KKK criteria: karakter (character), kakayanan (capability), and katapatan (honesty).

On its own, the First Time Voters Network (FTV) had also developed several voters’ education materials which provide some of the most incisive analyses of Philippine political culture.

\[4\] This writer headed the team that developed IPER’s citizen-voters’ education module.
politics. For this youth group, voting is an essential element of democracy since it enables ordinary citizens to: (1) choose progressive candidates; (2) hold officials accountable; and (3) contribute to nation-building (FTV 2019). They argue, however, that Philippine democracy is now being undermined by Duterte’s populist politics and his relentless assault on the country’s accountability institutions.

This gradual deterioration of our democracy is further reflected in the bastardization of the party-list system, which was originally intended to provide marginalized sectors adequate representation in Congress. But as FTV points out, the party-list system has already been infiltrated by wealthy businessmen such as Mikee Romero of 1PACMAN, who has a net worth of PhP7.8 billion (US$156 million) as of December 2018. The group also warned that the country’s political dynasties have also began using the party-list system as a backdoor entrance into the House of Representatives. It cites the examples of Buhay congressman Lito Atienza (who was the former mayor of Manila and patriarch of the Atienza clan), Mikey Arroyo of Ang Galing Pinoy (who also happens to be the son of former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo), and Tingog Sinirangan’s Yedda Romualdez (wife of House Majority Floor Leader Martin Romualdez).

To address all these flaws, FTV calls on the public to vote for candidates with 3Ps: Pro-people platforms, Proven track record, and Principle and integrity against corruption. At the same time, the youth network cautions the electorate to refrain from choosing those with the ABCDEs: Anti-human rights, Bastos (rude), Corrupt, Dynastic Candidate, and Epal (attention grabber).

Approaches to Voters’ Education

Though these initiatives all seek to educate Filipino voters, they do so by using

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5 For purposes of comparison, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority indicate that in 2018, Filipino families had an average annual income of PhP313,000 (US$6,260) while their average annual expenditure was PhP239,000 (US$4,780).
different perspectives or approaches. These approaches can be classified into three general categories: the **procedural approach**, the **moralistic approach**, and the **liberal approach**. To fully understand these perspectives, each of these approaches will be examined in greater detail in the following sub-sections.

**Procedural Approach**

The first approach is procedural in character since it merely provides basic information on the electoral process and the manner of voting. Groups, such as COMELEC and Libertas, that utilize this approach are able to instruct voters on how to vote; but they refrain from providing the electorate with any criteria that could guide them in choosing the best possible candidates. It also assumes that voters can exercise their right without any political or social constraints since this approach does not discuss the flaws of the electoral system and the power asymmetry being enjoyed by the country’s ruling families.

**Moralistic Approach**

Although the procedural method is still commonly used, other voters’ education efforts have already adopted a highly moralistic approach which categorize candidates as either “good” or “bad.” These initiatives are largely influenced by Christian values, which view elections as a moral crusade to vanquish evil. Framed in this way, they conclude that the voters’ main duty is to elect “good” candidates. Anyone who does otherwise is not only an irresponsible voter, but also a bad Christian. This is evident in the language used by PPCRV and VoteNet Philippines, and in their repeated call to pray and to vote according to one’s conscience.

A common feature of this approach is its strong condemnation of vote-buying, which is believed to be a common practice among “bad” politicians. One of the most vocal opponents of this electoral malpractice is the CBCP, which has repeatedly denounced vote-buying politicians who, “in their cynical exploiting of the people’s poverty and deep, if misguided, sense of utang na loob (has) deprived a great many of any real freedom of choice” (Josol 1991a: 268). In 1986, the country’s Catholic bishops even issued a joint pastoral exhortation 12 days ahead of the snap presidential election, reminding the faithful that vote-buying “violate in a serious manner the dignity of the human person” and those that engage in such acts are “unworthy of the Body of the Lord” (ibid.: 264).

Unsurprisingly, PPCRV has adopted a
similar view. This was underscored by its former chairperson, Henrietta de Villa, who once described vote-buying as an indication of the “erosion of moral values and the lack of political will of the country’s enforcers” (Macairan 2015).

NAMFREL also seems to share this perspective, so much so that in the lead up to the May 2001 elections, the poll watchdog launched a massive ad campaign “on the evils of vote-buying” (Schaffer 2005: 5). One of the visuals that was used was a newspaper ad that showed a ballot paper that was partially concealed underneath an open wallet. On the top portion of the poster are big bold letters that state, “Ang iyong boto ay mahalaga. Hindi may halaga” (Your vote is valuable. It has no price). Written on the lower right corner, on the other hand, are the words, “Ang sukat ng iyong pagkatao’y hindi matutumbasan ng kuwarta. Kaya ngayong halalan, ‘wag ibenta ang iyong pagkatao. ‘Wag ibenta ang iyong boto” (Your dignity cannot be measured in money. That’s why this election, don’t sell your dignity. Don’t sell your vote). In another ad, voters were asked, “Mahal mo ba ang bayan o bayad?” (Do you love your country, or do you love getting paid?)

Believing that the poor “hold undue influence in determining electoral outcomes” (Schaffer 2002: 9), NAMFREL targeted low-income voters who supposedly see their votes as “simple commodities” which they readily “exchange for money, without any moral or political reflection” (ibid.: 21-22). The aim of the ad campaign, therefore, was to “teach poor voters that selling votes should not been seen as an economic transaction devoid of moral content or political consequence” (ibid.: 22).
While the moralistic framework may seem reasonable and appealing, recent research indicates that this kind of approach to voters’ education has actually caused greater harm than good. In a series of studies that began in 2002, Frederic Charles Schaffer describes most anti-vote-buying campaigns as “embarrassingly self-righteous” since they tend to “reproduce middle- and upper-class stereotypes of the poor” who allow themselves to be “herded, feed, and paid” (2002 and 2005). By conducting 139 random sample interviews in an urban poor neighborhood in Quezon City, the University of Massachusetts Amherst professor discovered that a significant number of low-income voters found the moralistic approach “hurtful” and “insulting” since it seems to imply that they “can be bought for pocket change” (2002: 27). Schaffer further observed that though the aim of the moralistic approach is to “clean up dirty electoral practices,” it instead ended up alienating poor voters from the electoral process, especially those who have never been involved in the selling of votes (2005: 3). Because the poor have reacted “in ways unanticipated by reformers” (ibid.: 20), Schaffer suggests that these civic education campaigns “have not only failed, but in some ways made things worse” (ibid.: 8). Borrowing a term that was first used in the medical sciences, Schaffer argues that the moralistic approach has “iatrogenic effects,” since the patient (in this case, the Philippines) is now suffering from an ailment that was induced by a previous treatment.

**Liberal Approach**

Other groups have avoided the dilemma of the moralistic approach by adopting a

8 This is a medical condition wherein a patient suffers from an illness caused by a previous treatment. It comes from the Greek words *iastros* (doctor) and *genos* (offspring).

9 This does not mean, however, that there is nothing inherently wrong with vote-buying. As Jonathan Fox points out, while vote buying is “often not backed by perceived threats of coercion,” it still carries with it “perceived threats of reprisals for noncompliance” which, on its own, “is sufficient to count as a violation of basic democratic rights” (2012: 193).
more secular framework which invokes liberal values and norms. IPER, for example, was able to do so through a simple message that focused on “exercising the right to vote” (2009: 26). FTV used a similar, though slightly more assertive strategy, enjoining voters to use its 3Ps criteria in selecting the country’s leaders. In both cases, civic educators offered largely analogous recommendations, encouraging the public to choose candidates and party-list groups that promote democratic and human rights principles.

By framing elections either as a campaign for democracy (as reflected in the approach of FTV) or as an assertion of civil rights (which has been the strategy of IPER), the liberal model is able to provide the electorate with a prescribed pattern of behavior wherein voters are expected to opt for leaders who best embody liberal democratic values. It, therefore, shares the highly normative character of the moralistic approach, although the principles being fostered by the liberal framework are completely secular in orientation.

Though the liberal approach has succeeded in addressing the limitations of the two other paradigms, it is also not immune from at least two fundamental flaws. First, this approach has no clear or definite notion of accountability, wherein elected officials are compelled to follow certain standards and norms of conduct. Instead, it strongly emphasizes democracy and human rights and encourages voters to choose candidates who abide by these standards.

While these concepts are undoubtedly interrelated, they are also distinct from one another. This has been pointed out by American political scientist Jonathan Fox, who asserts that “accountability and democracy do not refer to the same processes and outcomes” (2007: 8). He also argues that accountability cannot simply be reduced to rights assertion since there is a “big difference between the widely resonant notion of the ‘right to have rights’ and the actual winning of those rights” (2005: 176).

For this reason, Fox frames accountability as a specific concept that pertains to “the process of holding actors responsible for their actions” (2007: 28). This goes hand-in-hand with ‘answerability,’ whereby the actions of public officials are “held up to specific standards of behavior or performance” (ibid.: 28). It also involves the threat and actual imposition of sanctions in order to “both punish and deter transgressors” (ibid.: 28).

Since its overall aim is to compel power-holders “to explain justify, or just admit their actions,” Fox argues that the term ‘accountability’ should only refer to public accountability (which is concerned with the “power relations between those charged with the public trust and the citizenry”), and should not be confused with personal accountability, wherein the state “hold
people to account for their behavior as private individuals” and not as power-holders (ibid.: 28).

This is akin to Andreas Schedler’s notion of accountability as a technique for “subjecting power to the threat of sanctions; obliging it to be exercised in transparent ways; and forcing it to justify its acts” (1999: 14). He further maintained that, ultimately, the aim of accountability is to “control political power,” and “to make power predictable by limiting its arbitrariness” (ibid.: 18-19).

Similarly, Richard Mulgan pointed out that “accountability implies more than the interchange of questioning and answering and the pursuit of transparency” (2003: 9). Instead, he offers a more expansive understanding of this concept, which involves an element of redistributive justice in making the guilty pay for their wrongdoing” (ibid.: 9).

Of course, the concept of accountability is already implicit in the liberal approach, with proponents asserting that “we can hold officials accountable” (FTV 2019) and that voters should “practice continued vigilance and participate in governance” (IPER 2009: 28). But as Fox points out, no significant reform can be achieved unless there are corresponding attempts aimed at enhancing the capacity of citizens “to organize in defense of their own interests and identities” (1994: 152).

Second, the liberal approach does not have an ecosystemic perspective, which views elections as part of an array of actions that citizens undertake to achieve democratic gains. This perspective is based on Brendan Halloran’s concept of accountability ecosystem, which can be defined as “the relationship between multiple levels of government, citizen collective action, civil society advocacy, and institutions, wrapped together by a web of social, political, and cultural factors in a given country context” (Chemonics 2019: 1).

For Halloran, an accountability ecosystem “encompasses the diversity of formal and informal paths toward and influences on real accountability” (2015: 7). It also involves “formal state processes that are vertical, for example between citizens and their representatives via periodic elections, and horizontal through state checks and balances, such as legislative oversight of executive power and official state accountability institutions” (ibid.: 7).

Understood in this way, an ecosystemic perspective, therefore, seeks to capture “the complexity of accountability processes,” recognizing that there are various actors working across different scales of decision-making (Halloran 2016: 3). Since the liberal approach does not have this perspective, it can only encourage voters to choose progressive candidates, but it is not able to offer any proposed set of actions in-between elections.
Unfortunately, as Halloran suggests, “accountability strategies that are based on a single specific tool and isolated from other efforts, within short timelines, are fundamentally flawed and inadequate” (2015: 12). But efforts that adopt a “strategic combination of multiple tactics (and) informed by political analysis and experience (are) most likely to be effective” (ibid.: 12).

**What Is to Be Done?**

Despite decades of voters’ education, political dynasties continue to dominate Philippine elections. The failure of these efforts to significantly shape the outcome of previous polls highlights the sheer strength and resiliency of the country’s ruling families.

Because these dynasties are politically entrenched and socially embedded, their power cannot be undermined through voters’ education alone. Instead, this type of action should be integrated into a larger repertoire of strategies that citizens can deploy in varying combinations at a given time and context. For this reason, this paper proposes an *ecosystemic approach*, wherein voters’ education is viewed as an integral part in a variety of options and tactics that can be utilized to promote accountability. Such an approach also places elections within a wider “accountability continuum,” which includes both social accountability efforts and state-based institutional mechanisms.

By adopting this approach, the 2022 polls can then be framed as an opportunity for citizens to better organize themselves so that they can hold public officials to account during and once the elections are over. As part of this effort, voters’ education must be redesigned in a way that would enhance the capacity of citizens for accountability work.

To do so, voters should be equipped with the needed conceptual tools that would allow them to establish *accountability relations* with as many candidates as possible. An accountability relation is a form of interaction involving citizens on one hand, and candidates on the other. In this type of relationship, voters articulate their demands that power-holders must address; while candidates, for their part, present the agenda that they want to pursue if elected into office. By forging

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10 The term ‘accountability continuum’ was coined by Government Watch (G-Watch) to illustrate how the different accountability mechanisms are linked to one another. Often mentioned during G-Watch training sessions, the phrase also frames elections as an accountability instrument that is intimately linked to both pre- and post-electoral good governance efforts.
such relations, accountability groups can better persuade winning politicians to agree to a social contract with their constituents once their terms begin.

To establish viable accountability relations, this study suggests adopting a citizens’ education initiative which shall have three major interrelated activities. This effort will begin with a multisectoral citizens’ assembly, where stakeholders and community leaders gather together to identify the most pressing issues in their locality and how these can be addressed by elected officials.

The result of this meeting will then serve as the basis for the next set of activities: fact-checking. Its aim is to provide the public with verifiable information on the candidates’ program, track record, and position on the various issues that have been identified in the multisectoral citizens’ assembly.

The findings will also help frame the questions that will be raised in the candidates’ forum—a public event where election hopefuls will be invited to discuss their respective programs, as well as their respective positions on the most important issues.

In addition, broader and wider citizenship education sessions can also be done in schools, at the barangay level, and online. Apart from the technical aspect of the elections, this effort will further identify the issues that are at stake in the upcoming polls and study the position of the candidates on these issues and the agenda that they will champion if elected to office. But unlike conventional voters’ education campaigns, this new initiative shall have a comprehensive discussion on the means and mechanisms available to citizens in holding winning candidates accountable.
One critical aspect of the ecosystemic approach to voters’ education is engaging citizens on the issue of access to information. This is important in exacting accountability. Citizens must be able to access correct, factual and truthful information that they can use to engage elections, make the right choices and decisions, and hold politicians to account. In today’s world where fake news and disinformation in social media have become ubiquitous, it is crucial for citizens to be engaged in determining, using, and sharing only correct, factual and truthful information.

Of course, we should not expect any immediate improvement after 2022. Instead, a new ecosystemic approach to citizenship education should be viewed as the opening salvo in a sustained attempt to radically alter the power dynamics in the Philippines. After all, if politicians are vigorous in their attempt to claim and maintain power, then citizens should be equally determined to hold them accountable.

Final Words

Since the 1950s, various advocacy groups have been conducting voters’ education to foster citizen vigilance and ensure the integrity of elections. Yet, in spite of these efforts for the past seven decades, the Philippines is still dominated by political dynasties and feudal-like warlords. This situation highlights a common gap in the existing approaches to voters’ education. The procedural approach merely offers basic information on the electoral process and the actual manner of voting. On the other hand, both the moralistic and liberal models share a highly normative approach to voters’ education that provide the electorate with varying sets of value-laden criteria for selecting candidates. Despite their differences, all three approaches have not adequately addressed the deep and institutional flaws of the electoral system.

Because of their shared limitations, there is an urgent need to design a citizenship education initiative that can offer a comprehensive strategy to address the systemic and deep-seated problems of Philippine politics. To deal with this gap, this study has proposed an ecosystemic approach to voters’ education, which views engagement in the polls as part of a larger repertoire of strategies, which are all aimed at holding public officials to account. This means incorporating the concept of accountability in future learning materials, as well as the means and mechanisms available to all citizens that could compel government leaders to answer for their decisions.

If all these are done, then Filipino voters can begin to appreciate elections for what it should be—as a way to allow even the most ordinary of citizens to speak truth to power.
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