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## Reformism vs. Populism in the Philippines

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### Abstract

The Philippines' first automated elections in May 2010 were generally honest and orderly, surprising pessimistic Filipino and foreigner observers alike. "Noynoy" Aquino easily won the presidential race by focusing on his "reformist" credentials, a strategy that his mother (her death in August 2009 led him to launch his candidacy) had adopted against Marcos in 1986. Reformism involves direct media appeals and the claim "I will not steal from you." Two other leading presidential candidates took a more "populist" stance, which also relies more on the media than on clientelism but with the message "I will help you." Interestingly, Aquino's running mate was defeated in the (separate) vice-presidential race by a "populist" candidate, showing this narrative also remains strong. Regardless of whether government grows substantially cleaner under Aquino, most Filipinos will long remain impoverished. This may lead to a pattern of electoral cycling in which greater efficiency and greater equality alternate as the major promises in elections.

# REFORMISM VS. POPULISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

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On 10 May 2010, Philippine voters went to the polls to elect not only a new president but also a vice-president, members of the national legislature, and numerous local officials—in all about 85,000 candidates competed for some 17,000 offices. Senator Benigno Simeon “Noynoy” Cojuangco Aquino III of the Liberal Party emerged as the winner of the presidential race with slightly more than 42 percent in a nine-candidate field, the largest plurality since the overthrow of dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. But perhaps the biggest story coming out of the voting was the electoral process itself. Despite worries about a fumbled or even a “failed” election, the Philippines’ first-ever automated polls were conducted in a generally honest and orderly manner, surprising pessimistic Filipino and foreigner observers alike. Fears of election-related violence—stoked by a horrific November 2009 incident in which 57 people (including several relatives of a gubernatorial candidate plus 32 journalists) were murdered on the southern island of Mindanao—proved exaggerated. On the whole, the 2010 campaign and balloting period proved significantly more peaceful than had its predecessor in 2004.<sup>1</sup>

In a major upset, Jejomar “Jojo” Cabatauanan Binay narrowly defeated Aquino’s running mate Manuel “Mar” Araneta Roxas II for the vice-presidency (long elected separately in the Philippines). Of the twelve of 24 senators up for election, only three of the victors came from Aquino’s Liberal Party (with one independent linked to their camp). Other winning senatorial bets included prominent action-movie star Ramon “Bong” Revilla, Jr., and the sons of two former presidents, Ferdinand

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