

## Suffrage: The People's Power

By Julie Narciso

Political campaign advertisements, jingles, candidate posters, candidates' merchandises, political discourses—they are currently everywhere, signifying that we are closing into the May 2022 National and Local Elections.

Over the years, it is not new that those who are vying for a position in the government are preparing for the elections through their campaigns. But this time, voters are also leveling up their preparation through various voter's education, political discourse, fact-checking relevant information, conducting background check on the candidates, and keeping track of news in hopes of putting an end to the six-year reign of terror, killings, and borderline fascist government.

In solidarity, a HUMSS class from St. Scholastica's Academy Pampanga, 11-St. Frances, organized a webinar entitled "**Boto Ko, Kinabukasan Ko**" (My Vote, My Future) in accordance with their Philippine Politics and Governance class on December 2, 2021, from 2:30 to 3:30 PM. This is for the students of SSA Pampanga, mainly composed of eligible and incoming voters.

The webinar, hosted by Razel Bacani and Alena Bartolome from 11-St. Frances, featured Mr. Mario Maranas, the Research Director of San Sebastian College Recoletos, Manila, Double Blind Peer Reviewer of Enderun Colleges, Edition-in-Chief of Literas Academia, and an author with a degree of Bachelor of Laws in University of the East/Philippine Law School and doctoral in Public Administration in Polytechnic University of the Philippines. The speaker highlighted the importance of voter's education by emphasizing the power of a vote, discussing roles of the branches of the government and the positions, and giving an overview of the state of Filipinos at present.

The Philippines is wailing in its current state. Filipinos are forced to deal with hunger, poverty, unemployment, rotten justice, education, and healthcare systems, corruption, economic recession, numerous violations of human rights, rampant red-tagging, and incompetent and negligent government officials on top of the pandemic. Our debts have piled up to trillion pesos for pandemic response yet there is little progress with the government's course of action. The democratic state of the country has been wavering under the regime of President Rodrigo Duterte. More than 400 political prisoners have been arrested, 61 lawyers, prosecutors and judges have been killed—higher than all the recorded deadly attacks on lawyers in the last 50 years, and ABS-CBN was shutdown, a major attack on press freedom which left a dent on the country's democracy during his rule. It is not an understatement to say that these are all rooted on the militaristic, oppressive, and dictatorial nature of the current administration for these enabled cruel acts of both their allies and some citizens. The power that is granted to these government officials by the people

has been abused and used against Filipinos, whom they should be serving and leading instead. It made them feel that they are the ones in power.

This May 2022, we have the chance again to reclaim the power that has always been ours and put an end to an era that is hell for the majority, especially for the marginalized sector by electing public servants—leaders—who will genuinely prioritize the interest and welfare of the people. Moreover, this election dictates the fate of the next six years of our lives and beyond. This is about our future, as mentioned by Ms. Lucilyn Magbag, SSA-P's SHS Coordination and English teacher, in her welcome remarks. According to her, it is only right that we exercise our right properly and fulfill our responsibility wisely to work, act, and pray in ways that would secure our country's democracy and sovereignty.

As socially-oriented scholasticans who are part of the youth that make up the 32.7 million out of the 62 million registered voters, we should be critical and cautious with the information we are consuming. We should actively engage in political activities that shed light on societal and political issues, look deeper on the candidates' intentions and principles, and do research on the responsibilities of every government position so we can hold the next leaders accountable, should they do something unjust or violate a law in the future. We should learn from the decisions our ancestors and fellow citizens made. As stated by Mr. Maranas, "*Salamin ng ating ngayon ang desisyon ng ating nakaraan at ang ating bukas ay salamin ng desisyon ng ating kasalukuyan.*" (The present we have today reflects the decision we made in the past and the future we will have reflects our decision today). We should not fall prey from the empty promises anymore and let their records, educational attainment, concrete plans, and experiences speak for them. We should acknowledge our privilege and put a good use to it by becoming a responsible voter. We should persist until the end.

A single vote is powerful enough to change the tides and our collective vote can free us from suffering from life-long societal issues and bad governance.

The next six years of our lives may either be a life in comfort and prosperity or a life in hell. The key is within our hands and it is up to us now which door we will open.

Remember, we are the ones in power and we shall make use of it properly and wisely. Stand firm and vote better.

Let me end this with a mantra I am trying to live by, and hopefully, everyone bears this in their mind and heart:

*Ang boto ko ay mapagpalaya.* (My vote sets all of us free.)

### **References:**

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